

Excavating a Secret History: Mary Butts and the Return of the Nativist

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I

She reminded herself of the pleasure it would be to show a stranger their land, as they knew it, equivocal, exquisite. From what she had observed of Americans, almost certain to be new. [...]

“God! What a beautiful place”, [Dudley Carston] said. When ‘beautiful’ is said, exactly and honestly, there is contact, or there should be. Then, “This is the England we think of. Hardy’s country, isn’t it?”

(Mary Butts, *Armed with Madness* 11)

In her most strongly experimental novel *Armed with Madness* (1928), Mary Butts describes the American visitor Dudley Carston’s enthralled perception of “Hardy’s country,” the austere beauty of whose chalk uplands, cliffs and imperilled prehistoric residues has achieved “totemic status in the national imagination” (Wright, *Village* xii). That Carston is designated as “a stranger” in this scene is, I will argue, highly significant in Butts’s non-historical fiction. The trespassing “outsider” (AWM 115), against whom her female protagonists must activate and marshal south Dorset’s animistic undercurrents, functions as a crucial element in Butts’s dialectic of modernity. Her fictional priestess becomes “a dynastic defender” (Armstrong 70): the force and figure that not only taps the primal, perennial energies of “Hardy’s country,” but also expunges would-be foreign interlopers, thus returning “England” to its rightful, indigenous, patrician inheritors.

Though Lawrence Rainey acclaims *Armed with Madness* as “a masterpiece of Modernist prose” (“Good Things” 14), Butts remains a neglected author who has “slipped through the net of literary histo-

ries of the period" (Blondel xv).¹ That her novels were formally challenging for the reading public at large, printed in relatively modest runs and lacked a high profile champion does not fully explain why Butts's stylistic contribution to British interwar fiction has been overlooked by academic criticism.² As will become clear, there is imbuing Butts's novels a punitive political agenda whose "intolerance" towards strangers would, according to her friend Bryher [Winifred Ellermann] in 1937, make "easy fame impossible" (160). Alongside this "intolerance," however, and what deserves more measured scrutiny, is a feeling for space and place in which "[s]trictly contemporary experience is lit by an antique [...] light; life an 'infernal saga' [...] coming up to date" (Bilsing, "Rosalba" 61). Butts strives to reclaim, consolidate, and enshrine her birthplace as a locus of memory and revelatory vigour, evoking a carefully historicised English past to offset moribund metropolitan values.

Born in a house overlooking Poole Harbour in Dorset in 1890, Butts eventually settled in England's most westerly-inhabited village Sennen Cove, Cornwall, where she lived from 1930 until her untimely death in 1937 (Wright, *Old Country* 94-95). Like her more renowned literary precursor Thomas Hardy, Butts considered herself an "imaginative archaeologist" positioned at a cultural crossroads: keenly responsive to the dislocating complexities of modernity, yet driven by a historical responsibility to recall and reanimate ancient traditions. Indeed, her detailed evocation of her unspoilt environment is symbolic of an infinitely stratified sense of place. She occupied one of the most precious tracts of archaeological terrain in Western Europe, replete with the tangible remnants of Celtic, Roman, Saxon, and Norman occupation.³ Butts's literary enterprise is devoted to making Wessex "novel" again, but without replicating what she judged the aestheticised southern landscape marketed through Hardy's fiction, aimed primarily at a suburbanised bourgeois "nature cult" (Butts, *Warning to Hikers* 283).

As Patrick Wright notes, Butts's imaginative enterprise overlaps with the "return to a rural England" that imbues much British writing

of the 1920s and 1930s (Hilaire Belloc, John Buchan, E. M. Forster, the Powys Brothers, Rolf Gardiner, A. E. Housman, and the Sussex Kipling), as well as the “established popular culture” of the interwar years more generally (Wright, *Old Country* 104). And the ‘England’ of Stanley Baldwin’s Conservative government was firmly supported by Arthur Bryant, the ‘anti-materialist’ Tory who campaigned strenuously for the safeguarding of national landmarks and who affirmed “the spirit of the past” as that “sweet and lovely breath of Conservatism” (Bryant, *Spirit of Conservatism* 75).⁴ What makes Butts’s project idiosyncratic is her literary refashioning of her birthplace as “sacred geography” (Garrity, “Queer Urban Life” 234), an anthropological “stage,” set with “all the properties of tragic mystery” (Butts, *Ashe of Rings* 185), upon which to test a mystical formulation of femininity. Butts is aggressively opposed to the pastoral concepts of nature which have filtered into, and become automatically falsified by, the mass public consciousness of those “whose life has been passed in towns” (Butts, *Traps for Unbelievers* 283). According to Frank Baker, Butts construed these intruders as

[P]eople unable to live in the rhythm of the natural forces they seek to bring to submission by unnatural means: the television set, the transistor, the yap-yap of the news announcer, the advertisement hoarding—all those ephemeral products of the mass mind which ignore the timeless heritage forever expanding the seemingly short span of a man’s life. (116)

Against the whimsical pastoralism of mere retinal sensation, which the American Dudley Carston embodies in *Armed with Madness*, Butts posits a visceral alternative version of “Hardy’s country.” The embattled bucolic enclaves in her fiction resonate with contested conceptions of Englishness, a rapt rediscovery of stable location triggered by what Butts interpreted as a pernicious modern moment whose dynamism of progressive enlightenment had induced a split between the self and the environment. Her more “equivocal” England “off the regulation road” (*AWM* 11-12) stubbornly resists the town-bred interloper’s endeavours to enframe Wessex as if it were a painting of landscaped tranquillity for mass edification.

II

In her posthumously published autobiography *The Crystal Cabinet: My Childhood at Salterns* (1937), Butts remarks that residing in south Dorset was like living in a region “with all its bones showing, whose fabric and whole essence is stone, which is dominated and crowned by stones; standing stones on the moors, cairn and castle [...] each field fixed by a phallus” (CC 12). According to Butts, this Wessex “country” which “no man, not Hardy even, has found full words for” (CC 63), engenders “a fresh ‘spiritual’ adventure [...] a re-statement & a development of our old experience in the field which gave us our religions” (*Journals* 341). In the first full-length critical study of Mary Butts’s oeuvre, Roslyn Reso Foy explicates this “fresh ‘spiritual’ adventure” as one anchored in a commitment to “the beauty and wonder of nature” (xi), overseen by a venturesome “feminine archetype” who calls up “a heritage that offers a universe at once organic, sacred and whole” (99). However, Butts’s conception of Wessex and the “very human Earth goddess” (Foy 65) synonymous with it are far more problematic than Foy’s monograph suggests. Foy underestimates to what degree Butts radically re-imagines Hardy’s literary topography to revile and punish those deracinated “foreign” figures whose hypnotic reverence for machinery subverts the delicate “balance of an old rural constituency” (CC 245). The “sacred nature” that Foy locates in Butts’s scrupulous mapping of her natal home—demarcating boundaries, territorial possessions and geographical landmarks—is not as winsomely idyllic, inclusive or “open” as it initially appears (Foy 29). Indeed, the cardinal duty of Butts’s “priestess” heroine (*AR* 129) is to police with tireless vigilance “the keltic border” of an imagined genetic “nation” (*Journals* 127).

In her 1932 preservationist pamphlet *Warning to Hikers*, Butts unwittingly reproduces and compounds the clichés of urban sentimentalism that are such a frequent target for her ire:

[t]here must be one profound difference between the men of the country and the town, that the most ragged village child who ever went egg-smashing in

spring, sleeping in the dirtiest cottage, has not had his sight and smell and touch and hearing corrupted from without. For unless he was born already with a life in his imagination, there is next to nothing in a town for a growing animal to do, if it is to grow according to human animal capacity. A training in "movies" [...] is no substitute for the various experiences in growth and pleasure and hardihood and danger the hillside gives, the shore, the tree and the stream and the weather, handled by a country child and by which he is handled. (*WH* 272)

The "ragged village child" in this extract implies that the vital sources of animistic energy are heedless of caste, and favours a romanticised conception of the unvarnished country-dweller. However, what emerges from her writing is not a lush, beneficent Wessex available to all. Rather Butts renders a jealously guarded region subject to stringent rules of possession and maintenance by a patrician elite whose members "have never left" the Dorset "countryside" (*Traps for Unbelievers* 278). This ostensibly principled and enduring hierarchy must show unflagging wariness in repelling the incursions of an upwardly mobile urban population. Implicit in this venture is an unsettling eugenic perception: only the *English* child of landed aristocracy can administer a circumscribed corner of Wessex that Hardy saw undergoing severe social and economic upheaval at the end of the nineteenth century. As Patrick Wright remarks, Hardy's novels "strain to describe a landscape [...] abstracted by an increasingly mechanised and capitalised agriculture," while in Butts's fiction "there is no longer any closely experienced country life to recount" (*Old Country* 107).

III

In an impassioned 1931 tribute to her friend, the artist Christopher Wood, Butts reflected:

We both came from the same part of England, the short turf & chalk hills which are like nothing else on earth. They sprawl across counties, & our history & the history of man written on them in flint & bronze & leaf & grey stone. Written on very short grass full of small black & white snail-shells. A

dry country of immense earth-works & monstrous pictures done on the chalk stripped of its grass. From Avebury [Wiltshire] to Stone Cliff [Sussex] it is the same, sprawled across a kingdom, the history of England open. Also its secret history in letters too large to read. (*Journals* 360)

She portrays her birthplace as a seemingly measureless geographical palimpsest, in which myriad generations have inscribed their aesthetic impressions and religious intuitions for posterity. Perhaps the most arresting feature of Butts's fond recollection of growing up surrounded by "short turf" and "chalk hills" is her sense of a Wessex that contains a history that is both "open"—"immense earth-works" and other visible survivals of ancient occupation—alongside an esoteric and encrypted narrative illegible to naïve outsiders such as the American Dudley Carston in *Armed with Madness*: a "secret" script whose meanings can only be deciphered by the privileged few. Palpable vestiges cut out of "chalk," "flint" and "bronze" are her fictional memorials to a vibrantly imagined locality that both awaits completion yet is also precariously perched on the edge of "extinction" (Wright, *Old Country* 96).

In *Cultural Geography*, Mike Crang argues that the "quest for authentic national cultural identity often results in efforts to reconstruct a lost national ethos as though it were some secret inheritance or that cultural identity were a matter of recovering some forgotten or 'hidden music'" (166). On a cursory reading the "secret history" that Butts valorises may seem to laud the native imagination: a sincere pride in a heritage of homely things that fosters ardent regional affiliation, local responsibility and community service.⁵ However, it is apparent that the feeling of umbilical attachment to southern English "turf" which Butts affirms in her allegorical fables of encroachment cannot be divorced from a more elitist and exclusionary sensibility, a fierce *nativism* that demonises the foreigner because of a perceived geographical, racial, class or sexual "inferiority"; Englishness is by no means a convertible ethnic currency in this unforgiving imaginative scheme. Butts's first published novel *Ashe of Rings* adumbrates this perspective by denoting how cultural roots are bolstered by geneti-

cally based ancestral memories: “blood is the life. Mix it and you mix souls” (AR 151).

As Jane Garrity contends in her pioneering analysis of the racial politics informing interwar British women’s fiction, Butts’s cultural fantasy of Englishness is founded upon a deeply insular definition of “cultural homogeneity” (*Step-Daughters* 191). Butts positions herself as a votary with unswerving loyalties to the spirit of place. Yet she cannot divulge “secret” mysteries of the soil to the boorish, uprooted subjectivities of urban sprawl: “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” (“Ghosties” 349). In her *Journals* she recounts “the horrors done to Salisbury Plain [...] Hoardings & vile villas & petrol-stations, & that most beastly sight, the rotting bodies of cars” (*Journals* 451).

Hardy, in some of his most celebrated novels, as Butts was almost certainly aware, charts how a native countryman’s romantic and professional aspirations are tragically derailed by the incursion of a parasitic “foreign” interloper: Sergeant Frank Troy in *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), the Scot Donald Farfrae in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), and Edred Fitzpiers in *The Woodlanders* (1887) are all memorable examples of the “stranger” who infiltrates a bucolic hinterland and threatens a primitive fertility figure, such as Gabriel Oak, Michael Henchard and Giles Winterborne, whose powers of guaranteeing organic plenitude for the community are no longer operant. In *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891), the eponymous protagonist’s encounter with the outsider Angel Clare seems to augur the collapse of an entire province once rich in folklore. Butts records re-reading Hardy’s *Tess* in her journal of August 16, 1921 and it is this narrative of irremediable dissolution that Butts seeks to correct in her trilogy of “Wessex Novels.” Vanna in *Ashe of Rings* (1925), Scylla in *Armed with Madness* (1928), and Felicity in *Death of Felicity Taverner* (1932) all become hierophants and agents of redemptive grace for their beleaguered districts.

Butts's conception of a questing mythical femininity both absorbs and interrogates the seminal research of the Cambridge Ritualists of the early twentieth century,⁶ especially that of Jane Ellen Harrison (1850-1928), who was one of the first women to distinguish herself in the history of British Classical scholarship. Harrison's erudite attempt to excavate a forgotten legacy, the myth of matriarchal origins, left an indelible imprint on Butts's oeuvre (CC 41-42). Butts construes Harrison's anthropological endeavour as consistent with her own—to transmute the “primitive” from an irretrievable developmental phase in the history of civilisation to a more rewarding mode of being, capable of emulation in the contemporary political arena. Butts's *Journals* make repeated references to Harrison's special ability to render the Hellenic past as a vibrant, ever-accessible present ready to serve contemporary personal and cultural imperatives. Harrison's theories about concrete language creating piercingly vivid ideas rather than exemplifying preconceived ones; her eloquent insistence on the importance of desire as a motivating force behind art, marking a decisive shift from personal to collective emotion, resonate through all Butts's published writings. In her opinion, Harrison stripped away the seemingly antiquarian and hidebound discourses of Hellenism to establish dissident configurations of gender and sexuality. In 1916 Butts wrote: “There is no such thing as man and woman—but there is sex—a varying quantity” (qtd. in Garrity, “Mary Butts,” *Encyclopedia* 38). Her abiding fascination with salvaging classical and mythical structures adumbrates alternatives to heterosexuality and erodes dichotomised notions about gender roles. However, Butts's fiction ultimately withdraws from the dynamic disturbance of traditional hierarchies epitomised by this “varying quantity” to laud instead a reactionary and inflexible politics of caste and “racial purity” (Garrity, “Queer Urban Life” 234).

By 1913 Butts was already familiar with Harrison's *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (1903) and *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (1912). She read them when they were first pub-

lished and returned to them repeatedly throughout her life. Butts declares in the fourth chapter of *Warning to Hikers* that

Contact with nature is very much what a man has when he participates in any rite or sacrament. Rites and sacraments are a kind of drama, a ritual play taken from universal natural events. They are about the health and ill-health of the soul, about marriage and birth and death. Things which happen. I think it was J. E. Harrison who said that the point of their efficacy, writing of the ancient world, at least, was that a man took out of them in proportion to what he put in. (WH 290)

By 1919 Butts noted: “[t]o remember Greek life is not to adventure into a delicious ideal but to go home to something so familiar that it can bore me” (qtd. in Blondel 22). Butts focuses on the key phrase of Harrison’s *Themis* which proposes that “the Great Mother is prior to the masculine divinities,” repudiating the rationalist-hierarchical thinking exalted by Harrison’s colleague Sir James Frazer as a perspective that subjugates spiritual mysticism and demeans pre-intellectual religious apprehensions. Butts utilizes Harrison’s theories of “the Great Mother” to achieve the bold placement of woman’s agency as fundamental to the project of cultural regeneration. As Anthony Ashe asks of his young bride in *Ashe of Rings*, “Do you not understand the link between yourself and a great goddess—the type of all things which a woman is or may become?” (AR 14).

The sophisticated scepticism and radical ambivalence that inform Hardy’s narratives of strife between vulnerable native and a more resourceful intruder contrasts sharply with Butts’s increasingly strident portrayal of an elemental struggle in which the safeguarding of bloodlines and a sacred topography against a contaminating “foreign” presence becomes paramount. In *Armed with Madness* it emerges that the pollutant is Clarence, a black war-veteran suffering from what we would now call “post-traumatic stress disorder.” “Undecided sexually” (Foy 63) and lacking any profound sense of correspondence with historically embedded Englishness, Clarence is prone to bouts of “sadistic” fury (Foy 69) due to factors which the text implies are inextricably related to his ethnic and sexual makeup (AWM 126). He can-

not obey Scylla Taverner's exhortation to "have faith" (AWM 70) because faith requires the worship of a fecund female principle and a sumptuous ancestral legacy that ultimately marginalizes those who seek to disrupt the heterosexual alliance upon which communal coherence depends.

In *Ashe of Rings* Butts elaborates an allegorical clash between those who venerate their prehistoric Wessex landscape—an occult secret society who view themselves as the "Eumolpidae" (AR 20), rightful inheritors of the Eleusinian Mysteries—and those cynical interlopers who interfere with or betray a locus whose inmost ring may be of "neolithic origins, used by the Romans; a refuge for Celt and then for Saxon, a place of legend" (AR 6). Butts deepens this confrontation motif in *Death of Felicity Taverner*: Felicity approximates to Robert Graves's "The White Goddess" (Graves 10; 44-54), and her threatened estate is a plot of "flawless, clean and blessed, mana and tabu earth" (DFT 258-59), urgently requiring the expulsion of foreign toxins like the Russian Bolshevik Jew Nicholas Kralin, who "would sell" for a pittance "the body" of this "land to the Jews" (DFT 346). Felicity is not so much a highborn young woman as a beguiling distillation of the endangered countryside itself: "the hills were her body laid-down, and 'Felicity' was said, over and over again, in each bud and leaf" (DFT 191). Kralin's racial indeterminacy conflicts with Butts's key notion of "mana": "the non-moral, beautiful, subtle energy in man and in everything else, on which the virtue of everything depends" (*Traps for Unbelievers* 328). Her definition of "mana" as "non-moral" camouflages a vexed component of this revitalising, untrammelled entity in her oeuvre: its disturbing association with the "whiteness" of racial supremacy that indicates an indissoluble link between the initiated daughter's "Saxon sturdiness of blood" (CC 199) and her stratified geographical heritage.

The son of a Tolstoyan proletarian-idealist who fled pre-Revolutionary Russia,⁷ Kralin, according to Butts's fictional scheme, personifies both the furtive movements of capital and the mechanistic science that facilitates its chaotic industrial advance. *Death of Felicity*

Taverner clearly reflects the growth of interwar British anti-Semitism and its investment in the “myth of the Jewish-Bolshevik menace” (Patterson, “The Plan” 130). The iconography of anti-Semitism and anti-Bolshevism is apparent across many literary genres in the 1930s, from detective fiction to John Buchan’s imperial romances, to Virginia Woolf’s writings (who like Butts had a Jewish husband). In Dorothy Richardson’s *Pilgrimage*, Miriam dismisses the “Jew” Bernard Mendizabal as “another of those foreigners who care for nothing in England” (*Pilgrimage* 2: 343)—a reaction which implies that the racial and cultural integrity of her “homeland” is being sullied by the “infiltration” of sinister trespassers (Linett 135). Jane Garrity argues that Butts’s portrayal of Kralin “should be read within the context of the early twentieth-century scientific discourse of racial anti-Semitism, which attributed the Jew’s difference not to religious practice but to eternal and immutable hereditary characteristics” (*Step-Daughters* 226). As the member of an “untraditional part of humanity” who has emerged from the ranks of “crooks, cranks” and “criminals” (*DFT* 314), Kralin is determined to foist his own grotesque private vision onto the verdant surface of the Taverner estate by commercialising it: building suburban villas, cinemas, car parks and shops which will clutter the “Sacred Wood” (*DFT* 359) with “greasy papers” (*DFT* 343).⁸ When *Death of Felicity Taverner* asks “What was Kralin?” (*DFT* 259) it appears that this Jewish “master in his vileness” (*DFT* 281), “of no fixed caste” (*DFT* 314) is a harbinger of “a new agony let loose in the world” (*DFT* 245), with which the priestly heroines must grapple to “keep” an “exquisite part of the earth in the hands of people who will never let it be spoiled” (*DFT* 258).

In a *Journal* entry for November 19, 1917, Butts claimed to “understand anti-Semitism”:

I have seen him again, not a lover, but a race, a people. They come from Asia, creeping across the world into Europe, long tentative fingers. They banked up against our castle walls like the waters before a dam. Now they run free and the blood of our noblest is mixed with theirs. Before them our forms of civilisation may not perish, but may be terribly assimilated. They are right. Where they breed, we decay.

It is rather pitiful to me—they do not love soil or care how things should grow—sentiment is outraged, & the rising sap in my body.

But I understand anti-Semitism.

We are above our races—we crystallise and I say that man's will can prevail over chaos [...] But where the East & the West have met we have Egypt & Babylon & Greece. (*Journals* 93)

It is unclear whether the man participating in this debate about racial politics is Butts's soon-to-be spouse John Rodker (Jewish) or the actor Edwin Greenwood. Nor is it obvious whether the unsettling metaphors "long fingers" and "creeping" are her preferred terms or a derisive mimicry of the hysterical and hectoring tabloid slogans that inflame popular prejudice. Is her sentiment "outraged" by callous xenophobic rhetoric itself or by the Jewish intruders who cannot "love" her English "soil" and who dishonour the "blood" of "our" noblest stock? Although the final paragraph asserts "we are above our races" and Butts freely acknowledges that the finest civilisations derive from a thorough cross-fertilisation of "East" and "West," this does not resolve the issue of her reductive scape-goating of Kralin, whose Jewishness is expressed through his chicanery and debased passions, comprising an injurious "grey web" (*DFT* 226).⁹ He personifies a "usurious" attenuation of the culturally prized to grossly economic factors, a feature which is adumbrated by *Ashe of Rings*: Serge Sarantchoff, the Russian exile, becomes embroiled in a bid to retrieve stolen property (papyrus fragments, Egyptian beads, and other trinkets of mystical, as opposed to mere cash value) which is eventually traced to the dwelling of a "Jew dealer" (*AR* 59).

IV

Since in Butts's opinion, "Christianity [...] had taken away from women their priestesshood" (*Journals* 422), her typical heroine becomes an adept whose passional intensity flows from a primordial pact of blood with animistic Wessex soil, which has crowned her its custodian. And such a priestess can translate the "secret history"

inscribed upon the pagan earth. This recalls Hardy's comments about Tess Durbeyfield as belonging to a cluster of women "whose chief companions are the forms and forces of outdoor Nature" and so "retain in their souls far more of the Pagan fantasy of their remote forefathers than of the systematized religion taught their race at a later date" (*Tess* 109). Hardy tends to portray the acutely sensitive "readers" of Wessex topography as belonging to a disenfranchised rural proletariat, such as Marty South and Giles Winterborne in *The Woodlanders*:

The casual glimpses which the ordinary population bestowed upon that wondrous world of sap and leaves called the Hintock woods had been with these two, Giles and Marty, a clear gaze. They [...] had been able to read its hieroglyphs as ordinary writing; to them the sights and sounds of night [...] amid those dense boughs [...] were simple occurrences whose origin, continuance, and laws they foreknew [...] they had, with the run of the years, mentally collected those remoter signs and symbols which seen in few were of runic obscurity, but all together made an alphabet. (248-49)

In *Ashe of Rings*, Vanna's habit of "communicating with the chill fingers of the trees" (*AR* 137) using a subliminal "language" that outsiders can never voice, let alone decode, recalls Giles Winterborne's "gentle conjuror's touch in spreading the roots of each little tree, resulting in a sort of caress, under which the delicate fibres all laid themselves out in their proper directions for growth" (*Woodlanders* 50). His caress, quite spontaneous and unconscious, is intended to nurture the young trees. Foreshadowing her cousin Felicity Taverner, Scylla is entwined with, even an articulation of, her luxuriant milieu, "translating" the natural domain "into herself: into sea: into sky. Sky back again into wood, flesh and sea" (*AWM* 67-68). However, Butts fashions heroines whose ultimate allegiance is to an indigenous landed elite, resembling her reconstruction of Cleopatra as a "priestess [...] a woman of the ruling caste in a lost civilisation: an athlete: trained in certain lost rites" (*Journals* 272). Vanna Ashe, Scylla, and Felicity all become "impregnated with a life that is not the *common run* of the blood" (*Cleopatra* 220; my emphasis) and they each reject the

encroaching amorphism of “socialist democracy” in post-war Europe, advocating instead the replenishing irrationality of a nobler “supernatural order” (“Bloomsbury” 321).

The priestess that Butts validates is typified by a readiness freely to “enter” the “mythological world” (*Journals* 181) through genetics, to a wellspring of patrician splendour alien to the “new barbarians” inured to the “vibrating roar” of towns (*Warning to Hikers* 279). Butts addresses the mythical daughter’s savage sense of entrapment within, and desire to elude, an interwar “nightmare” of bourgeois philistinism, fostered in part by the liberal consensus of mass democracy (*Journals* 219). Butts signifies that Vanna Ashe, Scylla, and Felicity Taverner, through their metonymic connection to, and heroic stewardship of a Dorset hinterland, not only have instinctive “rights of inheritance” to the English countryside, but that the spiritual well-being of the nation is clinched through their decisive female cultural intervention (*Garrity, Step-Daughters* 191). These heroines act as proud cultivators of indigenous customs, cherishing also the “[n]ecessity for a new experience of reality after the failure of religion” (*Journals* 242). So the protagonist’s journey entails conjuring up a copious but artificial springtime milieu, lavishly endowed with the forgotten fragments of prehistoric peoples. Butts’s topography of the mind has little obvious link to modern agriculture; it is untouched by what she judges as the fabrications of a barren modern sensibility that knows only how to consume, rather than commune.

V

Butts’s ineffable perception of regional wisdom, founded upon concepts of genetic stock, feudally situated forebears, and passionately remembered legacies, is figured as utterly beyond the grasp of the suburban hordes who desecrate nature’s sanctuaries in her preservationist pamphlets of the 1930s. In the *Journals*, she enumerates the “sufferings” of her post-war generation, especially the tragedy of the

“aristocrat who knows only the aristoi are worth having, & yet seeing the people it was his business to help coming to destroy him” (*Journals* 412). Her dream of emptying the south Dorset landscape of impostors such as Kralin is shadowed by the Gothic conception of a “democratic enemy” (*Warning to Hikers* 270) unable to apprehend “the tricky, intricate, sure and unsure, slow and dangerous and delightful mechanism of the earth, which cannot be hurried or learned quickly” (*Traps* 280). In the final 1929 issue of the *Little Review*, Butts proposed that through the dissemination of mass democracy, “the worst is coming to the worst with our civilisation” (“Confessions and Interview” 21-22).

In her memoir *The Crystal Cabinet* Butts recounts how her idyllic upbringing in an “only slightly sub-aristocratic home,” is cut short through betrayal by a bungling, uncaring mother, whose crass mismanagement of the estate’s finances results in the eventual sale of the sacred property and the dispersal of its ‘pricelessly authentic’ treasures (Wright, *Old Country* 104); flight is the only option left for the child, separated from this enclosure and its “magic of person and place” (“The Magic of Person and Place” 141-43). This theme is explored in *Ashe of Rings*, where Vanna finds herself disinherited from her homeland of Rings (based on Butts’s own Badbury Rings, a set of prehistoric concentric earthworks near Salterns, surrounding an ancient pine-wood).¹⁰ At the opening Anthony Ashe, the ageing patriarch of Rings, seeks a young wife to produce an heir. But his “outsider” bride Melitta has scant respect for the mysterious and pagan aspects of the grounds: “because of the woman he [Anthony Ashe] has married, Rings cannot happen properly which is the life of our race. And our race has become impure. And I, who am true Ashe, am hungry and lonely and thwarted” (*AR* 109). This pointed reference to impurity indicates how the structured hierarchy of an aristocratic clan is tipped into turmoil and dissension through an exogamous alliance.

Butts’s narrative focus on a severely neglected daughter who seeks to reclaim her rightful inheritance affords a complex echo of Hardy’s *Tess*, but with a notable difference. Tess Durbeyfield is forever ex-

cluded from the power, patronage and privilege that her remote patrician forebears took for granted; Butts's heroines are serenely confident within their own conviction of dignified and hieratic descent. The aristocratic daughter's mystical feeling for "secret history" is expressed through ancestral memories of genesis, racial purity, a zealous commitment to auratic objects and eternal rhythms:

[s]ome time after the Religious Wars we left Norfolk, where we had lived since King John's time, and never seriously settled anywhere else. An eighteenth-century great-uncle had been Bishop of Ely, but from our ancestors we had inherited [...] possessions and the love of them [...] A rather small, slow-breeding race, red-haired, with excellent bodies and trigger-set nerves. Persistent stock, touched with imagination, not too patient of convention, and very angry with fools [...] profoundly sure of ourselves, for reasons we ourselves know best.

For reasons of a secret common to the blood. A secret concerned with time and very little with death, with what perhaps medieval philosophers called *aevum*, the link between time and eternity. (CC 15)

Again the stress falls on a "secret common to the blood." Rather than forging relationship across the impediments of caste and formal education that segregate her from others, Butts cherishes and verifies the ineluctability of difference, conserving the safety of the "hidden" (Wright, *Old Country* 97). The retrospectively sanctified site of Butts's birthplace is an anthropological "survival" preserving aesthetic and ethical imperatives long since discarded by the mainstream majority. In Butts's fiction this viewpoint operates both as a scathing cultural critique of a desiccated contemporary actuality and as a defiant affirmation of the blessed few who struggle to find refuge from town-bred invaders and the formally democratic rationality of the liberal marketplace. Jane Harrison averred in 1913 that the "country is always conservative, the natural stronghold of a landed aristocracy, with fixed traditions; the city with its closer contacts and consequent swifter changes and, above all, with its acquired, not inherited, wealth, tends towards democracy" (qtd. in *Old Country* 107). *The Crystal Cabinet* forcefully illustrates how a yearning for a racially distinct bucolic motherland underpins Butts's imaginative re-

invention of "Hardy's country" as a realm of enchanted, irreplaceable specificity. Her female protagonists achieve what Hardy's failing fertility figures such as Henchard and Winterborne cannot: the expulsion of foreign contaminants from "pure" Wessex territory.

However particularised questions of secret history might be in *The Crystal Cabinet*, Butts repeatedly signifies how her plight mirrors that of an entire dislocated generation burying its dead, reeling from a loss of "station"; whose hallowed political traditions are engulfed by what Butts thinks of as the corrosive cant of the masses. This is in stark contrast to E. M. Forster's mature and measured political declarations in which he prioritises personal relations over pressing national claims; his muted praise of a democratic impulse that generously "admits variety" and "permits criticism" of ideological orthodoxies of all kinds (*Two Cheers* 70). Butts's literary endeavour to resuscitate a "real England" becomes the salvaging of a social coterie whose most gifted members have been unfairly deprived of their time-honoured role and status.

VI

The key principle of Butts's secret history is not simply a proto-feminist perception of a daughter exposed to the unfathomable mysteries of a numinous bounded locality. Nor is it a clear-cut dramatisation of the desperate battle between a landed patrician elect and a socially mobile, yet aesthetically stunted bourgeoisie. What Butts repeatedly returns to is the coding of English *family* as a peculiarly problematic social institution whose pact with the elemental terrain of Wessex is sullied by an impolitic or hasty marriage alliance, thus becoming a source of generational dismay (see *Old Country* 93-134). Thus the figure of a malign non-indigenous "pollutant," such as Kralin, acquires a nightmarish tinge in Butts's writing, which warns of "what will happen to the world if it decides to scrap its tradition & all conscious continuity with it" (*Journals* 325).

In contrast to Kralin, who, like Clarence in *Armed with Madness*, “has no known history behind him” (DFT 315), Scylla Taverner venerates the archives of what Butts elsewhere labels “Country History” (“Green” 64). Like the volumes which Butts claimed to have aided her mother to burn after her father’s death in *The Crystal Cabinet*, or like the Book of Ashe with its arcane inscriptions, or Felicity Taverner’s supposedly reprehensible “diaries” (DFT 259), Butts’s mystical rendering of Wessex has to be kept shrouded in obscurity at all costs, a hermetic “text” impervious to the communicative rationality of public debate (cf. Kemp). However much she wishes to reinvent south Dorset’s scenery as a national spiritual resource, she does not trust the transgressing “outsider” (AWM 115), emboldened by escalating domestic tourism, to manage it discreetly. And yet the need to enshrine the “secret history” becomes increasingly urgent in Butts’s oeuvre. In *Death of Felicity Taverner*, Scylla continues her function as priestly initiate from *Armed with Madness*, and puts her sharpened awareness to work by channelling energy into a wildly ambitious antiquarian venture, which tracks and ratifies the private lives of those who traversed her blessed locality:

Scylla’s passion [...] was—spending if necessary her life over it—to leave behind her the full chronicle of their part of England, tell its “historie” with the candour and curiosity, the research and imagination and what today might pass for credulity of a parish Herodotus. There was material there, for ten miles round about them, which had not been touched; not only manor rolls and church registers or the traditions which get themselves tourist-books. She had access to sources, histories of houses, histories of families, to memories that were like visions, to visions which seemed to have to do with memory. To her the people talked, the young as well as the old; and there were times when the trees and stones and turf were not dumb, and she had their speech [...] She did not know how she knew, Kilmeny’s daughter, only what it looked like—the speechless sight of it—her thread to the use of the historic imagination, Ariadne to no Minotaur in the country of the Sanc Grail. (DFT 299-300)

Scylla lavishly details the Taverner clan as a rich repository of national history. This region is a locus of Arthurian glamour as opposed

to the parched post-war metropolitan "Waste Land" (*DFT* 283). Butts elaborates the concept of a neo-feudal artistic ethos to celebrate an apotheosized Wessex over which her priestly female protagonists preside. Her delineation of "the country of the Sanc Grail" associated with Arthurian romance deliberately recalls the Cornish terrain around Tintagel that was at the very core of nineteenth-century thought about the past. Tintagel Castle may be partly comprehended as a monument to invention, particularly the literary skills of the Norman-Welsh cleric, Geoffrey of Monmouth, who began the long process of creating an Arthurian Tintagel in his twelfth-century "history" (Trezise 65). In 1824, long before Tennyson's Arthurian Idylls were developed, the poet Parson Robert Stephen Hawker (1803-75) called the Holy Grail a "Sangraal" in an imitation of medieval language and conceived Arthur in a specifically Cornish context, renaming Tintagel "Dundagel." He had, as Simon Trezise explains, some "success" in putting his mark on the legend in this regard (Trezise 64). Tennyson temporarily incorporated Hawker's version of the name in his *Idylls* and Hardy quoted it in his Cornish novel, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873).

Butts's investment in the Arthurian resonances of Wessex is first crafted in *Ashe of Rings* and its depiction of the complex historical strata underpinning the modern moment; the ancient mystical associations disclose a triumphantly national narrative:

It is said of this place [Badbury Rings] that in the time of Arthur, the legendary king of Britain, Morgan le Fay, an enchantress of that period, had dealings of an inconceivable nature there. Also that it was used by druid priests, and even before their era, as a place for holy and magical rites and ceremonies. (AR 6)

In Scylla's distinctive historiography the Taverner family estate becomes the refined manifestation of the "true" past, in which aesthetic grace, coupled with an acute apprehension of culture and civility, are core principles in constellating a new Avalon. Scylla exploits a voluminous array of sources, both conventional and unorthodox, in order to "leave behind her the full chronicle of [the family's] part of Eng-

land" (*DFT* 300).¹¹ Scylla's antiquarian undertaking invokes one of Hardy's favourite books: John Hutchins's *The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset*, referred to mischievously as "the excellent county history" in his Napoleonic romance, *The Trumpet-Major* (1880).¹² Hutchins, in his Preface to the First Edition (June 1, 1773), saw his "native County of Dorset" as a major focus for antiquarian research: "the advantages of its situation, fertility of its soil, rare productions, the many remains of antiquity with which it abounds [...] well deserves an Historian" (Hutchins, *History of Dorset* 1: vii). There is an element of Hutchins's buoyant eclecticism—not restricting himself to one specific type of source material but dextrously combining literary and material remnants of bygone times—in Scylla's archive. Indeed this enterprise seems recalled by the eponymous protagonist's antiquarian undertaking in John Cowper Powys's West Country novel *Wolf Solent*, published the year after Butts's *Armed with Madness* in 1929:

"Our History will be an entirely new genre," Mr Urquhart was saying. "What I want to do is to isolate the particular portion of the earth's surface called 'Dorset'; as if it were possible to decipher there a palimpsest of successive strata, one inscribed below another, of human impression. Such impressions are for every being made and for every being obliterated in the ebb and flow of events; and the chronicle of them should be continuous, not episodic." (Powys 45)

Scylla's literary testimony is actually a more innovative and arresting demonstration of "the historic imagination" (*DFT* 300) than what Powys delineates in *Wolf Solent*. Scylla foregrounds women's domestic rituals and mystical promptings, especially the speech of "trees and stones and turf" (*DFT* 300). She can apprehend the "speechless sight" (*DFT* 300) of things that appear not to be there, assuming a double viewpoint which merges verifiable concrete evidence with flights of visionary trance: "she saw their land as an exfoliation, not happening in our kind of time, a becoming of the perfected" (*DFT* 300).

VII

A “becoming of the perfected” is what Butts’s secret history of Wessex discloses to those initiates who are attuned to its subliminal resonances. In order to dramatise this concept Butts is forced to smother what she applauds elsewhere in her work: the brilliant diversity and experimental brio of literary modernism. In her short story “Green,” a genuinely “English” consciousness registers intuitively the “[p]ropriety, simplicity, the routine of country-house life” (“Green” 64)—disavowing a bracing plurality of traditions in favour of a single, already completed “national narrative,” rooted in Arthurian imagery and savoured only through exclusive rites of remembrance (Garrity, *Step-Daughters* 207). Butts’s twenty-acre family estate Salterns, hallowed by the poignancy of childhood memory (“[t]he kind of house the Dorsetshire gentry lived in”) is central to her anthropological venture, embodying and invoking in her mind “the old, hardy, fragrant rural world” of “Dorset, the county where, if anywhere, the secret of England is implicit, concealed, yet continually giving out the stored forces of its genius” (CC 14). If from childhood Butts reacted to the comfortless grandeur of her native terrain through the mannered artifice of mythical allusion, it only served to accentuate the “precarious purity” of her birthplace.

“Purity” is the term that reverberates through all Butts’s references to a cryptic history of her homeland. In *Ashe of Rings* Butts indicates that Vanna displays “qualities and values pure” (AR 100). Butts’s rhapsodic evocation in *The Crystal Cabinet* of British prehistory as a “temenos,” an enclosure promising ancient purification, is measured against the tense, neurasthenic languor she imagines as the dubious inheritance of the lifelong urbanite:

[t]hat afternoon, I was received. Like any candidate for ancient initiations, accepted. Then in essence, but a process that time after time would be perfected in me. Rituals whose objects were knitting up and setting out, and the makings of correspondence, a translation which should be ever valid, between the seen and the unseen [...] Like any purified, I was put through cer-

tain paces; through certain objects, united to do their work, made from the roots of my nature to such refinements of sense-perceptions as I did not know that I possessed, made aware of those correspondences. (CC 266)

The goal of “this business of the unseen,” as she calls it, is to “sense a design” traceable to a pre-industrial English culture whose national ideal is rooted in the exiled daughter’s deep feelings for her venerable vicinity. When Hardy designates Tess Durbeyfield as a “Pure Woman,” ironically misapplying the terminology of Christian respectability in the provocative subtitle to his most famous novel, it is meant as a seditious and robust challenge to those repressive attitudes that Mary Butts would go on to attack in her own writing, such as those voiced by the National Vigilance Association, which appealed for sexual abstinence as a woman’s “patriotic” responsibility (Garrity, *Step-Daughters* 217-18).

Tess utilises the imagined female body as a trope for the resplendent Dorset downs, while Butts refuses to equate the “purity” of her natal habitation with female sexual restraint or timidity. She depicts priestly heroines whose behaviour debunks the stern regulation and “fetishizing” of “female chastity” (Garrity, *Step-Daughters* 220). Through Vanna Ashe, Scylla and Felicity, Butts demonstrates how libidinal gusto infuses a lofty spirituality. In *Armed with Madness* Scylla is specifically presented as a young woman familiar with the “scandalous” terms of “erotic conversation” (AWM 32), whose virginity is “hypothetical” (AWM 132). Felicity’s spirited insouciance is based on an implied sexual promiscuity, yet this “erotic expert” (DFT 26) paradoxically retains her stainless corporeal purity (Garrity, *Step-Daughters* 221). Through this descriptive strategy Butts is able to render femininity at once as recognisably human and wispily ethereal: Scylla is both “witch” and “bitch” (AWM 10), combining cosmopolitan panache and chthonic monstrosity. Her cousin Felicity Taverner also evinces a malevolent potential: this “[o]ther Felicity” is compared to “the crescent moon” showing you “its teeth” (DFT 171).

VIII

By 1932, when *Death of Felicity Taverner* was published, Butts's narrative persona was neither able to brook the socio-political ferment she witnessed around her, nor to sanction unreservedly any of the existing counter-movements. She becomes a panicked expatriate from an imaginary Wessex, stranded in a "hideously fabricated world, under conditions that man has never known before" (WH 277), conquered by "people of the towns" with unparalleled motorised access to the countryside, "of whom so large a proportion form our new kind of barbarian" (WH 291). In 1937, the year of her death, Butts still reserved undiminished venom for those she held responsible for despoiling a once mystical province. She evokes the specificity of an intimate locale, and the allure of its threatened associations, from an eerily distant standpoint. With resigned despondency she mourns a

place I shall never see again, that I can never bear to see. Now they have violated it, now that its body has been put to the uses men from cities do to such places as these. Now Salterns is no more than a white house pulled down and built onto, its back broken, split up. [...] The cars that allow these people to run about the earth, and wherever they go to impoverish it. Driving out and abusing or exploiting something that is not their own; that unconsciously they resent—and might do well to fear [...].

I shall never see it again. Except from a long way off. From Purbeck, from the top of Nine Barrow Down, it is still possible to stand, and see, on a clear day, the maggot-knot of dwellings that was once my home. (CC 20)

What is most striking about this embittered rendering of a violated bucolic enclave with its secret history of patrician kudos almost erased by rapacious "men from cities" is how it prompts Butts to indulge a xenophobic perspective whose rhetoric feeds off narrow, exploitative and anti-Semitic stereotypes. Her dependence on what Ian Patterson rightly terms "a scapegoating politics" ("Anarcho-imperialism" 189) actually works against the sentiment voiced so frequently in her journals and correspondence, which affirms modernity's cosmopolitan and progressive verve, an excitement captured by her intensive scru-

tiny of Jane Harrison's classical scholarship. This was "the profoundest study" of Butts's "adolescence—mystery cults from Thrace to Eleusis. I remembered *The Bacchae*. There are my formulae, there my words of power" (*Journals* 149). Virginia Woolf's brisk 1922 summary of *Ashe of Rings* as a "book about the Greeks and the Downs" (Woolf, *Diary* 2: 209) implies Butts's ability to seamlessly weave the grand sweep and the utterly localised into the imaginative fabric of her fiction. The irony here is that Butts's explicit desire to "re-enter greek religion & carry on where Jane Harrison left off" (*Journals* 346) is made to serve a humourless and uneasy concept of racial memory. This formulation not only stifles the sense of Englishness as irretrievably mixed, as a synthetic product of "numerous" historical influences (Young 89); but also negates the vivid panoramic vistas of ancient civilisation afforded by Harrison's comparative mythology.

Butts's fictional recasting of her "homeland" conveys a scorn for democracy that distinguishes the shrill nationalist rhetoric against which Winifred Holtby rails in *Women and a Changing Civilisation* (1934): "[t]he nation is defended as a traditional, instinctive unit, something to which men feel themselves bound by blood and history [...] Its appeal is to the emotion rather than the intellect" (Holtby 159, 163). The ecological and archaeological saga underpinning Butts's oeuvre, with its justification of a "great gentry" (*DFT* 196), Celtic mysticism and purgative ceremonial ultimately promotes an illiberal, even paranoid ideology that flatly refuses to grant the "stranger" access to the august annals of Wessex lore.

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NOTES

¹Today, outside the academy, Butts is best known for her frequently anthologised short story, "Speed the Plough" (1921), which portrays a soldier with shell shock and traumatic amnesia. For a trenchant appraisal of Butts's complex depiction of war trauma see Patterson, "Mary Butts." Part of this chapter, which assesses *Death of Felicity Taverner*, appears as "'The Plan Behind the Plan.'"

²There are signs of a move to bring Mary Butts's work to a much wider audience after decades of unwarranted obscurity. Carcanet Press spearheaded the British revival of interest in her oeuvre when they republished her memoir *The Crystal Cabinet* in 1988 and *With and Without Buttons and Other Stories* in 1991. Nathalie Blondel has authored a meticulously researched biography *Mary Butts: Scenes from the Life* (1998) and seen into print, or reprint, many of her novels through McPherson & Company. *Armed with Madness* was reissued by Penguin Modern Classics in 2001. Butts's short story about Paris in the 1920s, "The Master's Last Dancing," was published in *The New Yorker* 30 March 1998: 109-13. In 2001 Butts featured on the cover of the *Times Literary Supplement*, accompanied by Laura Marcus's article "Mysterious Mary Butts," *Times Literary Supplement* 24 August 2001: 3-4. A selection of Butts's short stories are included in Lawrence Rainey's anthology *Modernism* (777-811). For a detailed overview of the author's career and fictional procedures, see Gariépy. Jane Garrity's *Step-Daughters of England* (2003) remains the most thorough and incisive treatment of Mary Butts's obsession with mysticism, anthropology, race science, gender and national identity.

³As Scylla Taverner remarks in *Armed with Madness*, "this country was given its first human character in the late stone age" (13).

⁴Patrick Wright documents how the "country" was being brought to "a newly abstract focus" in the art of Nash and Sutherland; in the imagery of mass advertising publicity (Shell's country campaigns, London Transport); in music (Elgar, Delius, Grainger, Vaughan Williams) with its manipulation of bucolic association and, in some instances, of actual "folk melodies" (*Old Country* 93-99).

⁵In a 1923 letter to Glenway Wescott, Butts remarked of her birthplace: "It's my native place and I worship it." Qtd. in "Three Letters" (Wagstaff 145).

⁶The Cambridge Ritualists, also known as "the myth and ritual school," were an acclaimed group of classical scholars and philologists, including Jane Ellen Harrison, Gilbert Murray, Francis M. Cornford and Arthur Bernard Cook. They earned this title because of their shared research interest in explicating myth and early forms of classical drama as originating in ritual seasonal killings. Butts's fascination with the classical world explored by these pioneering Hellenists dates back to her childhood. Butts's father, according to *The Crystal Cabinet*, had been a compelling storyteller and with "the tang of his irony [...] the cycles of antique storytelling [...] pleased me as they please all children, the first pleasing that never wears out, only deepens and re-quickens, like [...] a hidden source of loveliness and power" (CC 17-19). In addition to numerous references to Sir James Frazer's comparative mythology throughout her writing, Butts composed a short story called "The Golden Bough." First published in her collection *Speed the Plough* (1923), it has been reprinted twice since: in *Antaeus* 13/14 (1974): 88-97, and in *That Kind of Women: Stories from the Left Bank and Beyond*, ed. Bronte Adams and Trudi Tate (London: Virago, 1991) 16-28. For Butts, Harrison's *Prolegomena* and *Themis* were "immortal words" (Blondel 44). See also Schlesier 213-17.

⁷In the wake of the pogroms that began in the Tsarist Empire in 1881, almost two million Jews from Byelorussia, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine fled into exile. The hundred thousand or so who arrived in England formed, according to Sherman Kadish, the largest population to relocate to the United Kingdom before the Second World War.

⁸This crude construction of the Jewish “speculator” is reminiscent of what G. K. Chesterton termed “the brute powers of modernity” (Chesterton 23).

⁹In 1936 Butts noted her consternation when, during a discussion about fascism and communism, her friend, the Scottish writer Angus Davidson, “riled me [by] calling me ‘anti-Semite,’ when I hate cruelty as much as he, & only want—not to repeat pious platitudes about how wicked it all is, patting myself on the back for being English—but want to understand *how & why* it all happens; why people like ourselves can concur at least in things, actions, which make him & me sick” (*Journals*, 14 November 1936, 461-62). As Nathalie Blondel indicates, Davidson’s reproach must have been especially hurtful to Butts, given her letter to him two years earlier, after Hitler had become Chancellor of Germany, explaining that she and Gabriel Atkin had agreed to assist a Jewish refugee, who was living in Sennen, from the Nazis. See Butts to Angus Davidson, 4 February 1934, Butts Papers. In *The Crystal Cabinet*, completed shortly before her death, she stated her position when remarking, “how easily, as in Nazi Germany, the liberties we now take for granted may be lost” (CC 180).

¹⁰Mary Butts’s biographer Nathalie Blondel carefully explores the degree to which Butts’s own feelings of dislocation from Salterns, the family estate in Dorset, imbues the plot of *Ashe of Rings*. Mary Butts’s great-grandfather, Isaac Butts, had been the patron of William Blake, and her father gave her regular lessons in observation in the Blake Room, which contained a substantial number of his watercolours, engravings, portraits and sketches (*Scenes* xv). In 1905 her father died and nine months later the contents of the Blake Room were sold to a private collector. For Mary Butts the sale represented a grievous loss. Her mother remarried and Butts was sent away to boarding school in Scotland. Butts’s *Journals* and unpublished diaries indicate that she despised her mother for the remainder of her life.

¹¹Given that Scylla’s work-in-progress debunks any distinction between official and unofficial documents, uncovering facets of the past that fall beyond the margins of historical records, she epitomises the modernist fascination with prioritising “subjectivity and perspectivalism at the base of historical knowledge” (See Keane 59-77).

¹²A copy of the third edition of Hutchins’s tome was in Hardy’s Max Gate library.

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