Sacred Wessex: The Ritual Performance of Place in the Work of Thomas Hardy, John Cowper Powys and Mary Butts, 1871-1937

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Abstract

This thesis reads Wessex as a ritually performed space, examining the particularly ritual-conscious work of Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), John Cowper Powys (1872-1963), and Mary Butts (1890-1937). This ritual process is begun with Hardy’s reclamation of the Anglo-Saxon Kingdom name, and with his use of cultural and ritual survivals in his landscape. I argue that anthropological interest and deliberate ritual language positions author and characters as performers, mapping and creating sacred space, through a physical and linguistic movement on the page.

Performance is transferred to the physical landscape through the literary pilgrimage of the curious tourist and a plethora of Wessex guidebooks published at the beginning of the twentieth century. These help form what, in Hardy’s words, is a ‘partly real, partly dream-country’. A borderland, or liminal space is created (a region separate, perceived as being out of time and imbued with significant meaning), and caught between the world of literature and that underfoot.

This Wessex reflects another process of liminality at the turn of the nineteenth century, often defined by anthropologists as a moment of cultural crisis, manifested in war, industrialisation, and momentous social change. The creation of Wessex, then, is in part a response to the upheaval of a transforming world. Increased ritual has been noted in such periods of instability, and Powys’s and Butts’s Wessex furthers this response. Influenced by their interest in anthropology, and in the growing occult practices of the era, they seek to reinvigorate a dying land in what, I argue, is in part a reaction to the legacy of Hardy’s Wessex, its tourism, and the increased urbanisation of its landscape. Their performance moves beyond Hardy’s milieu, in its search for a spiritual ‘Fourth Dimension’, which offers a re-sanctification of the landscape, or an escape from space itself.
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Note on texts used

All references to Thomas Hardy’s Wessex novels refer to the Macmillan 1912 Wessex Edition. This edition has been used because it illustrates the evolving nature of Wessex, and reveals the influence of the reader and critic, and Hardy’s editing, on the ever changing performance of Wessex examined in this study.

All references to the works of John Cowper Powys are to first editions. The one exception is Powys’s Porius (1951). Here, I have used the 2007 Duckworth edition, which gives the first unedited version of the novel, which is closest to Powys’s original vision for his tale, and so reflects this study’s concern with Powys’s and Butts’s own imagining and construction of place, rather than the effect of their literature on others.

References to Butts’s novels are to more recent reprints by McPherson, which depart little from original printings, other than in minor corrections. The 1988 Beacon Press, revised edition of Butts’s A Crystal Cabinet (1937) is used in preference to the original publication because it contains much material cut from the first edition, and again represents the author’s original creative aims.

List of abbreviations for frequently cited texts

\begin{tabular}{ll}
\textit{AR} & \textit{Ashe of Rings} \\
\textit{AWM} & \textit{Armed with Madness} \\
\textit{AL} & \textit{A Laodicean} \\
\textit{BDT} & ‘Building, Dwelling, Thinking’ \\
\textit{BR} & \textit{Brideshead Revisited} \\
\textit{CC} & \textit{The Crystal Cabinet} \\
\textit{D} & \textit{Duccdame} \\
\textit{DFT} & \textit{Death of Felicity Taverner} \\
\textit{DL} & ‘The Dorchester Labourer’ \\
\textit{DM} & \textit{Descents of Memory} \\
\textit{FMC} & \textit{Far from the Madding Crowd}
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
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<tr>
<td>GR</td>
<td>A Glastonbury Romance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HE</td>
<td>Howards End</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HoE</td>
<td>The Hand of Ethelberta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JMB</td>
<td>The Journals of Mary Butts</td>
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<tr>
<td>MC</td>
<td>Maiden Castle</td>
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<tr>
<td>RN</td>
<td>The Return of the Native</td>
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<tr>
<td>SFL</td>
<td>Mary Butts: Scenes from the Life</td>
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<td>TD</td>
<td>Tess of the d'Urbervilles</td>
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<td>WS</td>
<td>Wood and Stone</td>
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<td>WTH</td>
<td>‘A Warning to Hikers’</td>
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<td>WL</td>
<td>The Waste Land</td>
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Corfe Castle: in-between the ritual performances of Wessex

Introducing England, Wessex, Corfe: not necessarily in that order, or that place

If one wanted to show a foreigner England, perhaps the wisest course would be to take him to the final section of the Purbeck hills, and stand him on their summit, a few miles to the east of Corfe. Then system after system of our island would roll together under his feet.¹

In E. M. Forster's *Howards End* (1910), Mrs. Munt takes the visiting Frau Liesecke up onto the Purbeck hills, in Dorset, to impress her foreign guest, and show her England. Frau Liesecke is, however, less than satisfied with the spectacle, finding the hills unexciting, and Poole harbour muddy, comparing unfavourably to the shore of Friedrich Wilhelms Bad in her native land. Responding to this lack of enthusiasm, Mrs. Munt falls into the reassuring recitation of a traditional local rhyme concerning place names - a rhyme to which we are told she is 'much attached' (*HE*, p. 165). This attachment seems matched by Mrs. Munt's and Forster's affection for the piece of English coast on which the characters stand, suggesting a connection to England, and to homeland. Forster claims that to show a foreigner England, the 'wisest course' would be to take them to this location; thus, the author's words affirm the significance of the site, seemingly prior to Mrs. Munt's actions, which themselves act as a performance fulfilling Forster's recommendation. Purbeck then is the wisest place not because Mrs. Munt goes there, nor because Forster writes it so, but because others have written before and will again, and because many other 'Mrs. Munts' have visited before and will continue to do so.

Purbeck, the surrounding Dorset, and the larger south-west landscape have become the place(s) which epitomise England for the English. Literature (like *Howards End*), guidebooks, tourist visits and marketing have created in many

ways a microcosm of England from this south-west corner of the country – an area where the nation did, indeed, first emerge under the leadership of Alfred the Great between 871 and 899. Today, the region is promoted to the foreign tourist as a place to glimpse the ‘real’ and ‘authentic’ England. Corfe is a popular National Trust tourist destination; nearby Poole contains some of the most expensive harbour property in the world; and other castles, country houses, forts and ancient burial mounds crowd the tourist itinerary.

Forster’s authentication of the area, and Mrs Munt’s similarly validating visit, are both a beginning and a continuation of a process of landscape creation in the south-west. In the same way, this passage from Howards End is both a beginning and a continuation of my examination of the processes of the ritual performance of place, and of the mimesis that frequently gives it definition. Situated as the first quotation in the text of this work, the site and the idea of the site are a beginning both physical and linguistic.

Everything appears to evolve from here; Forster writes that up on Purbeck:

Beneath him is the valley of the Frome, and all the wild lands that come tossing down from Dorchester, black and gold, to mirror their gorse in the expanses of Poole. The valley of the Stour is beyond, unaccountable stream, dirty at Blandford, pure at Wimborne – the Stour, sliding out of fat fields, to marry the Avon (HE, p. 164).

Forster describes a physical landscape of Dorset and England, transforming a location into textual place that, though mimicking, alters the landscape, and is – as Forster explains on describing sights beyond the view of Purbeck – a journey of the ‘imagination’ for the reader and the visitor alike. This written expedition exposes the local terrain as part of a unified landscape when the reader is taken to Bournemouth, Southampton, Portsmouth, and Salisbury (HE, p. 164) – the same connections echoed in Mrs Munt’s hackneyed rhyme (p. 165). Place after place is joined, the landscape flowing and converging, like the rivers Stour, Frome and Avon that run through Forster’s rural vista (p. 164). This scene is England, and of England, and at the same time it is apart from England. In this way it is a region – a place (and style of writing that creates place) that Phyllis Bentley writes, ‘depicts the life of that region’, so that the ‘reader is conscious of the

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characteristics which are unique to that place, distinguishing it from the ‘common motherland’.  

For Forster, though, this region is also ‘authentic’ England – a place now thought to be made of narrow lanes, interlacing fields, cliffs along the coast, farms, castles, restored country houses, and cream teas. And, above all, it is a place of ‘purity’, guarded by the sea (HE, p. 164). In short, the vision and expectation is of a rural idyll – an ideal made visible through literature, expectation and tourism, and only a short trip south-west of the modern hub of London. This is the ‘truly’ English identity that Charles Fry claimed visitors anticipated of England at the beginning of the twentieth century. Today they still expect the same, and rather strangely, though such a place has never really existed, it is what visitors often find when they arrive. Place has become hyper-real, where one can no longer distinguish between reality and myth and, as Jean Baudrillard argues, in such places ‘the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept’ – the ‘simulation’ – is no longer preceded by the territory; the map now ‘precedes the territory’. David Lowenthal discusses the processes that have made and remade this ‘Old world’ (what he calls a ‘celebrated’ geography) into a countryside that he claims is now ‘much imagined’, a place that is ‘less and less England, more and more “England-land”, Europe’s offshore theme park’.  

In this nostalgic re-imagined past, mingled with vague recollections of a once-great king who began it all, England again becomes rural location, a place where, as John Rennie Short suggests, countryside ‘becomes the image of the country’ – where ““country” has the double meaning of “rural land” and “native

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Ian Baucom claims that this rural copy or map of itself is a dream of a past England made ‘visible, by rendering it present’. This functions not only as a tourist spectacle but, as A. L. Morton writes, as an ‘English Utopia’ that is a ‘mirror image, more or less distorted, of the historical England’. Double images abound in attempts at England’s definition. England can be read as a whole but also as a region, of the present but also apart from the ‘now’ and everyday, bounded by its utopian characteristics, and by time (often appearing as a past Golden Age). The imaginative rural ideal is itself founded on more substantial bordered locales, shaped by the land enclosures of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. These ‘firmly marked’ rural boundaries made, and make, the ‘countryside safe and familiar’. They at once divide the land into parts and construct a whole.

A regional writing, and a regional view of nation, is analogous to this setting of boundaries. It makes safe the past and the present, ensuring they are known. It also allows, as Merril Jensen’s model study of the subject asserts, an analysis of place to be made. It is a tool of research and presentation for the scholar as much as it is for the regional authors considered in this study. This too is a creative act, and allows a double dwelling in the landscape: at the beginning of the twentieth century Lewis Mumford argued that humankind exists within two worlds – the ‘world within and the world without’ (the dream of utopia and the world of the everyday). The dream not only makes the other bearable but eventually transforms it, Mumford argues. The fabled rural realm of England is such a dream, a reproduction better than the original place of the present, while becoming the present place. It is a borderland space, equally ‘real’ and imaginary, historic and mythic, conforming to Jacques Derrida’s view that ‘there is no

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nationality or nationalism that is not religious or mythological, let us say "mystical". 12

This is the England caught in microcosm in Forster's Purbeck, the passage contributing to its creation, and to a tradition of English literature that is at once nation and region building. Beneath Forster's Purbeck lie other stories - other maps replacing the territory - waiting to be identified by the reader. When Forster writes of the Frome and Dorchester, the Stour, Blandford and Wimborne, a recognisable region begins to emerge. This regional identity, similar to its national counterpart, can, John Lucas argues, be read as a 'form of false consciousness', though like nation and nationalism it operates as a 'very powerful' force. 13 It is likewise 'religious or mythological' in nature, and its tales are similarly found within its literature. In England and Englishness, Lucas traces the development of such a landscape image in poetry, from Oliver Goldsmith to the Romantics and Tennyson. However, it is in the nineteenth-century provincial novel that Lucas locates the greatest source of English and regional construction. One of the authors discussed is Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), who perhaps remains the most famous of English regional novelists thanks to his creation of Wessex.14

As Forster maps the countryside around Purbeck, his cataloguing of place names is familiar to a reader conscious of that most peculiar of regional landscapes, Wessex. Dorchester, Frome, Stour and Blandford are places associated for many with Hardy's literary creation; their Hardyesque implications run through Forster's Dorset scene alongside the rivers. It is Hardy's words and mappings that the reader imagines beneath Forster's. Though Dorchester appears as Casterbridge, and Blandford as Shottsford in Hardy's novels, a plethora of literary criticism, guidebooks and day-trippers have insisted on connecting the two. And Hardy's own maps eventually do the same. His Wessex made manifest in the physical landscape has become an essential part (perhaps the dominant

Raymond Williams writes: 'The real Hardy country [...] is that border country so many of us have been living in: between custom and education, between work and ideas, between love of place and an experience of change'.

In this process, a region has become a nation, and a nation has become regionalised and almost fictional.

**Wessex performed: a creation of writer, reader and tourist**

In 1910, the year of the publication of *Howards End*, Hardy's Wessex was well established in the English consciousness, though, as they are today, readers were still unsure of its exact boundaries. Two years later in 1912, the Wessex Edition of Hardy's novels was published by Macmillan. Hardy's arduous editing and revising process, continuing work begun for the 1895-1896 Osgood Edition, aimed to standardise place names in the novels, establish continuity throughout, and align his fictional milieu more closely to the 'real' Wessex landscape.

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15 David Gervais draws attention to 'strategy of the pastoral', which is usually to make the 'part stand for the whole' (David Gervais, *Literary Englands: Versions of 'Englishness' in Modern Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 11). Here, pastoral Wessex becomes England. It is a pastoralizing often aided by literary criticism. Though focusing on the writing of others in the south-west counties, R. Thurston Hopkins 'cannot', as he writes, 'resist' looking in conclusion at Wessex (R. Thurston Hopkins, *The Literary Landmarks of Devon & Cornwall* (London: Cecil Palmer, 1926), pp. 255-267). Wessex is here a place different and outside, but also encompassing the borders of, Devon and Cornwall. Phyllis Bentley even positions Hardy's creation above writers of different regions (Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, Arnold Bennett), claiming Hardy's regionalism is a 'more intense concentration upon each sight and sound' and on the history, music and folk-lore of his region than that of any other writer, while at the same time his themes are not regional but universal — they go beyond even the nation (Bentley, *The English Regional Novel*, pp. 25, 28). To see the importance Wessex and Hardy play in defining our image of a rural England also see Michael Squires, *The Pastoral Novel: Studies in George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, and D. H. Lawrence* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1974) and John Lucas, *The Literature of Change*. Hardy’s Wessex, as Simon Trezise claims ‘outgrows’ Barnes’s Dorset and overshadows other Wessex writers (*The West Country as a Literary Invention: Putting Fiction in its Place* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), pp. 141, xi). Hardy, in Trezise’s study (and in many others) often overshadows the different south-west English writers and novels discussed, even when Hardy is only one chapter in a larger book. Hardy’s influence is so extensive that in historical and archaeological studies of the south west of England, his Wessex is referred to for evidence, comparison and definition. See P. J. Fowler, *Wessex, Regional Archaeologies* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1967), p. 9, and J. H. Betty, *The Landscape of Wessex* (Bradford-on-Avon: Moonraker Press, 1980), p. 10.

16 Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 197.
this 1895-96 edition came the first official map, created by Hardy. While Hardy was editing, this process of alignment was already well under way elsewhere, as guidebooks like Wilkinson Sherren’s *The Wessex of Romance* (1902) or Sir Frederick Treves’s *Highways and Byways in Dorset* (1906) were published, criticism was written, and tourists gazed at the sites linked to novelistic locations. The author too became part of the landscape. In his essays on Dorset, Llewelyn Powys cannot help but see Hardy in the landscape of which he writes, wondering how often Hardy as a boy wandered along the river near Lower Bockhampton. Wessex became a place you could visit, where one could imagine the sighting of the author as well as his characters. It became this place through performance, and remains a place that can be re-performed.

Performance is the crux of Forster’s English/Wessex/Purbeck/Hardy scene. Forster writes that England, embodied in Purbeck, must be performed: it must be ‘shown’; the individual must be taken to Purbeck to see the landscape. Performance, Henry Bial points out, is usually ‘a tangible, bounded event that evolves the presentation of rehearsed artistic actions’. Forster’s scene is a similarly bounded event: regional and national borders and identity double as a stage to a performance that makes that very stage more ‘real’, more tangible, through the visit. Forster partly achieves this through his description of the area as he takes the reader to the location on the page, in language. And Mrs Munt and Frau Liesecke perform place though their visit to the site. They are performers, making a trip or pilgrimage, cementing the site’s significance through their presence there. As Dean MacCannell explains, this tourist experience allows one to connect ‘one’s own marker to a sight already marked by others’, thereby reaffirming its worth through participation in a ‘collective ritual’ – acts which, like those on the stage, typically have their own boundaries and rules.

While Forster, Munt and the reader make this journey in the text, the passage also urges a physical visit from the reader. A physical journey to the

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17 For details of this editing and mapping process see Simon Gatrell, *Thomas Hardy’s Vision of Wessex* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 112-14.
place would endow it with the significance of which Forster writes, just as repeated visits to a religious shrine entrench its sanctity. Performance is then shifted from page to place, the text inspiring action. Yet, the process also works the other way. Forster writes this scene because Purbeck has already become a microcosm of the nation, as guidebooks of the time attest. Treves, for example, relates a nation’s history through a discussion of Corfe Castle, Purbeck, and its surroundings. Markers had already been left, enabling Forster and Mrs Munt to identify it as England. Something of the ‘real’ landscape has shaped his text.

Though one might consider the actions of the characters within the novel and the actions of the reader (inspired by the text to visit Corfe and Purbeck for themselves) as a performance, we must ask can the text itself be considered a performance? Edward Schieffelin argues it cannot, that ‘performances are ephemeral’, ‘a living social activity’, that ‘[w]hile they refer to the past and [...] future [...] exist only in the present’. Meanwhile, ‘[t]exts are changeless and enduring’. Shieffelin, though, does suggest that text and performance share certain qualities, such as structure and reference to self, but he claims ‘performance is not reducible to text’. Others, however, have read performance as a text, possessing textuality and intertextuality, so why not text as performance? Bial argues that performance moves beyond the stage and can be ‘a way of understanding all types of phenomenon’. Boundaries become blurred. W. B. Worthen suggests that ‘the book itself’ is a ‘production’, and thus is a performance. Its reading too can be performance, indentified by Timothy Brennan as a ‘mass ceremony’ where readers are aware that others will be reading, and so creating a sense of community.

This study examines Wessex as a communal performance, and acknowledges text as a contributor to this, and as a stimulus to other performances, be they action within the physical landscape or the writing of

another text by a different author. Reading text as performance, one observes the writer and reader to be united in their performances of place. Michel de Certeau explains that the author's writing becomes a 'movement of strata, a play of spaces' when the 'different' world of the reader 'slips into the author's place'. As the urban-planned street is 'transformed into a space by walkers', a written place is transformed into space (is performed) by the reader as he reads.26 This echoes artist and professor at the Bauhaus School of design, László Maholy-Nagy's claim that space is a 'sensory experience' and is a 'means of expression'.27 Similarly, in Topographies J. Hillis Miller argues that in Hardy's Return of the Native (1878) characters map Egdon Heath by movement along its many paths - a mapping which also takes place, Miller suggests, in the 'mind of the reader as he or she reads [a] novel'.28 Forster, no doubt conscious of the Wessex associations of his 'England', creates a place that the reader can likewise wander through in this manner, bringing their own and Hardy's world into the places of the text. This same reader can then visit Purbeck, and again perform its space as he/she walks its hills and imagines Hardy's and Forster's novels. One might argue that the critic is the greatest performer of written space, always searching for a new movement within the author's plan and bringing their own spaces into play. This study, then, can be read as yet another performance of that space, or spaces, which constitute Wessex.

In a multiple, shifting, and re-performable location some consistency in language must exist for this performance(s) and its analysis to hold meaning. The words 'space' and 'place' will be used in relation to performance according to de Certeau's understanding of them. To denote the performativity of both written and physical landscapes,29 the textual Wessex will be referred to as the 'written'

29 Performativity will be used in its more general meaning denoting some kind of performance – particularly referring to the performance of culture through ritual; however, J. L Austin's more specific use of the term in How to Do Things with Words (1962) is also relevant. Austin considers certain acts of speech as performative, referring to their effect as actions. For example the utterance 'I do' at a wedding is part of the act that completes the marriage ceremony (J. L. Austin, How to do Things with Words (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 6). The implication of this for the study of ritual is immediately recognisable and equally transferable to the analysis of
landscape (written, write, wrote, writing all signifying a physical performance); the physical landscape will remain 'physical', denoting its seeming substantiality over language, but also in recognition that it is a site that holds physical acts, including that of writing itself. An emergent symmetry between page and landscape quickly becomes evident, when both sites are seen to contain, and are the product of, performance. Their distinguishability diminishes when their spaces begin to be plotted against each other.

Ritual: a considered performance of place, 1871-1937

A growing interdisciplinary critical interest in the study of place has begun to consider Hardy Country. J. Hillis Miller's *Topographies* (1995), Simon Trezise's *The West Country as a Literary Invention* (2000), Roger Ebbatson's *An Imaginary England* (2005) and Andrew Radford's *Mapping the Wessex Novel* (2010) have all contributed to a critical mapping. At the same time, monographs such as Radford's *Thomas Hardy and the Survivals of Time* (2003) and Michael Zeitler's *Representations of Culture* (2007) examine the ritual and folkloric survivals at play within Hardy's landscape; the remaining barrows, agricultural feasting, sacrifice, and mummery are just some of the survivals reconsidered. Performance unites these two areas of study. Like the mapping movement of the characters, the various ritual survivals within Hardy's novels are likewise frequently performances, whether they are the lighting of fires on Egdon Heath in *The Return of the Native* or the celebratory harvest feasting of *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874).

similar acts of speech by characters in novels, but is also, I argue, applicable to the writing within and of the text that initiates or completes an action in the physical world. For instance, the written depiction of a place in Wessex might be considered performative if it is intended to, or does, act upon the physical Wessex landscape, which, as will be discussed, is the intent of some Wessex writers like Mary Butts.

This is not to ignore the fact that the written landscape is also the read landscape – an equally creative act of performance, as already discussed.

This might be seen to reflect the concerns of Hardy himself. Wesley Kort dates a shift in the consideration of place to the late nineteenth century, and 'mark[s] it with Hardy', explaining that this movement 'continues to the present day', where we are 'beginning now to read places as our cultural “scriptures” and to identify and evaluate ourselves and other people spatially' (Wesley A. Kort, *Place and Space in Modern Fiction* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004), p. 5.
However, in considering place as a ritual performance rather than just the site of performance, Wessex becomes much more than Hardy Country or a microcosm of England. It becomes a borderland, a location out of time: a sacred space. By borderland I mean a liminal space. The term, derived from the Latin *limen*, meaning threshold, was first used to describe a transitional stage in a societal rite of passage in anthropologist Arnold van Gennep’s seminal work *Rites de Passage* (1909). In his study, rituals among ‘semicivilised peoples’ are seen to accompany rites of passage found within all societies, such as puberty, marriage and death. Rites concerned with the movement from one social position to another, van Gennep identifies with a ‘*territorial passage*, such as the entrance into a village or house’. 32 Victor Turner discusses the three stages of van Gennep’s rite of passage: ‘*separation, transition, and incorporation*’, giving the example of an individual going into a temple (a sacred space), where he is divided from the rest of society; a ritual act assists his spiritual progress/status but also aids in the designation of that space as sacred — a ‘cultural realm which is defined as “out of time”’. 33 Mircea Eliade sees this time as ‘reversible’, in the sense that it is a ‘*primordial mythical time made present*’, and the ritual a ‘reactualization of a sacred event that took place in a mythical past, “in the beginning”’. 34 This, then, makes the rite a creative act: the ceremony in the temple is an effective performer of space, temporally, physically and culturally, and changes the quality of the occupied area. In the same way, I read Wessex as a liminal space, not only embodying the idea of a sacred space (space separate, perceived as being out of time and imbued with significant meaning), but in the way that Wessex is itself caught in a process of separation, transition and incorporation within the written and physical landscapes. It is a place constantly becoming something else, evolving between texts and performers, and straddling a physical and imaginary existence as region, nation, utopia and place of decline.

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In *Anthropology of Religion* (1997), Bobby Alexander gives a broad definition of ritual as a performance that "effects a transition from the everyday life to an alternative context within which the everyday is transformed".\(^{35}\) Described as a 'transition', we again become aware of its liminality. Such ritual acts are often made from a series of structured and repetitive movements and words. The rite is a very physical performance: 'communication in ritual' primarily 'through the bodies of the actors'.\(^ {36}\) For the practitioner of a religious ritual, action can instil meaning, link the seen to the unseen, the profane to the sacred, humankind to the gods. In a sense it is a rite of passage from one space to another. Secular rituals – those associated with the opening of parliament, royalty, football games and tourist visits – similarly create added meaning, and transform the everyday. In this multiple definition, ritual can be scripted and set, but it might also be spontaneous; though it exists in this world, it can be seen to burst its boundaries. S. J. Tambiah even writes that we cannot in 'any absolute way separate ritual from non-ritual in the societies we study'.\(^ {37}\) The performance of rites, like Wessex, is a topic of boundaries and the spaces in-between.

Two other Wessex authors, John Cowper Powys (1872-1963) and Mary Butts (1890-1937), continue the transformation of Wessex begun by Hardy.\(^ {38}\) Considering both as heirs to Hardy's Wessex, I regard them as early twentieth-century performers (readers, writers and residents) in Hardy's landscape. This period was a time of momentous social, political, and geographical upheaval, due to processes of industrialization, urbanisation, war, and government legislation. Consequently, the era itself can be read as a liminal stage of reformation for England and Wessex.

Günter Berghaus argues that the cyclical nature of capitalism has produced three major crisis periods in western history: the end of the nineteenth century; the

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\(^ {38}\) There are many others we might consider as 'Wessex' authors, including Richard Jefferies, S. Baring Gould, Eden Phillpotts, H. J. Massingham, Dawson Scott, T. F. Powys and Llewellyn Powys.
period after the First World War; and the end of the millennium. The date (and boundary) of the study, 1871-1937, reflects two of these crisis points, and marks the publication of Hardy’s first Wessex novel, Desperate Remedies in 1871, and Powys’s last Wessex novel published in 1936, and Butts’s early death in 1937.

Berghaus writes that these periods of emergency hold an increased ‘intensity of ritualism’ as a technique of survival. 39 I argue that Hardy, Powys and Butts, faced with the crisis of a transforming world and changing west-country landscape, all contributed to such ritual expression. It is a response particularly heightened in the work of Powys and Butts, and is, as Jane Garrity detects in Butts, specifically reacting to ‘England’s inter-war crisis in landscape’, using ‘ancient ritual as a way to preserve nature from corruption’. 40 As later chapters suggest, this crisis and ritual response is matched in the literature and art of Modernism, within which we might locate both Butts and Powys.

A reading of the three authors’ Wessexes is an exploration of national and regional space, and as such suffers from the problems of regionalism that Wendell Berry locates in a ‘pride’ that ‘behaves like nationalism’ or an ‘exploitative industry’ that dwells in the ‘quaint’ or ‘picturesque’. In this she identifies a ‘regional motive [that] is false’ because ‘myth and abstractions of a place are valued apart from the place itself’. These are necessarily a consideration in a multi-sourced formation of Wessex, and remain aspects of Butts’s and Powys’s approach; however, there also exists a type of regionalism thought more ‘authentic’ by Berry, which ‘pertains to living as much as to writing, and it pertains to living before it pertains to writing’. 41 For the three authors considered in this study, Wessex is as much a location of myth, culture, nationhood and idyll as it is a site of home, memory, family and physical activity. Powys argues that

no man, 'however learned, can be called a cultured man while there remains an unbridged gap between his reading and his life'.

Following this assertion, it becomes as important to understand the writer and his/her life as it does his/her work, and we find in Butts and Powys a personal interest in ritual and magic which matches that of their writing. Gerardus Van Der Leeuw writes that the poet, being a man 'who controls the power of the word [...] stands in close relation to the prophet'. This might be true, but the power of such words also surpasses even their author's preaching and prophetic intent, just as Wessex grows beyond its writers, becoming a mythology, and a rite practiced by many. Morine Krissdóttir identifies one point of origin in this movement, in Powys's belief that he was a visionary writer, describing Powys's development of strange rituals of communing with dead Indians, bowing to stones and kissing trees – actions that took hours to complete every day at his home in upstate New York. Butts, possibly a little less eccentrically, read and studied the occult, even staying at occultist Aleister Crowley's notorious 'Abbey' in Italy, where she pursued studies in astral projection, meditation and communing with the dead.

Both authors' occult reading was extensive.

At the same time, the influence of anthropological writings, particularly the Cambridge Ritualists (Jane Ellen Harrison and Sir James Frazer specifically), had great influence on Butts and Powys. Harrison's Themis (1912) was a key text

43 Acquaintance, Robert Medley, writes Butts was 'obsessed with magic' (Robert Medley, Drawn from the Life: A Memoir (London: Faber and Faber, 1983), p. 78). Butts's friend, Stella Bowen, reads 'dark magical meaning' throughout her writings (Stella Bowen, Drawn from Life (London: Virago, 1984), p. 41. Friend and critic, Hugh Ross Williams detects in Butts's prose, elements of ritual — prose and poetry uniting to create 'something of the effect of a rhythmic incantation' (Hugh Ross Williams, 'Portrait of Mary Butts', The Bookman 81 (December 1931), 188-89 (p. 188).
in Butts's, and other modernists' (including T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf) understanding of ritual. Woolf was in fact a close friend of Harrison's. Powys began reading Harrison's and other Ritualists' work in 1929 and, like many writers of the period, he found inspiration in Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890, and then in an expanded 12 volumes, 1906-15). It is a work Butts continuously references in her journals, and which Roslyn Reso Foy rightly highlights in her study of Butts. In an article on the Cornish landscape, Butts notes the survival and renewal of rituals, folklore and traditions and claims that, unlike numerous others places, it is 'possible to observe, from village to village [in Cornwall], such variations on the rituals of “The Golden Bough”'. For Butts such ceremonies were still relevant, and indeed necessary for a troubled modernity.

Michael Zeitler's discussion of Hardy's familiarity with anthropologists such as E. B. Tylor and Frazer (whom Hardy knew personally) reveals that the Wessex Butts and Powys interact with was already a site of ritual, offering what Andrew Radford calls a 'stratified sense of place'. Hardy is very conscious of this layering of place – places of action and performance, of dramatic history and everyday life. In *Jude the Obscure* (1895), Jude stands at a crossroads known as 'Fourways' wondering who has stood there before:

It was literally teeming, stratified, with the shades of human groups, who had met there for tragedy, comedy, farce; real enactments of the intensest kind. At

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48 Powys's read Harrison's *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (1903) and her *Ancient Art and Ritual* (1913). He also read other works by the classical scholars Francis Cornford and Gilbert Murray (DM, pp. 252, 450-51).
49 See John B. Vickery's *The Literary Impact of The Golden Bough* (1973) for a comprehensive discussion of Frazer's influence on modernist writers.
53 Garrity identifies in Butts's work the need of 'modern culture' to 'incorporate elements of ritual practice in order to save rural England' (Garrity, *Step-daughters of England*, p. 190). Butts not only uses ritual to save rural England, she uses it to create it too. Saving and creating almost amount to the same thing in her writing.
Fourways men had stood and talked of Napoleon, the loss of America, the execution of King Charles, the burning of Martyrs, the Crusades, the Norman Conquest, possibly of the arrival of Caesar.  

Hardy almost gives a concise history of England in this one patch of land. Powys and Butts are aware of these complexities of place, and while writing in, and resisting, Hardy's legacy, they hold a reverence for this multiplicity of location explored by Hardy, who had himself become, in a sense, another figure standing at those crossroads.

Butts examines the ritual implications of such a milieu in another article about 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 one's mind. A magic map. Made on foot and by the senses that is usually in no more than two colours, of places which are 'manna' and places which are 'taboo.' They can overlap; and in West Cornwall you are living in a land where culture is overlaid on culture.

Place is not only labelled sacred and profane; here, Butts writes of remapping and re-performing boundaries (partly a magic process she claims). This is done by a movement through place that is both physical and mental; it is a process both Butts and Powys achieve in mapping and re-writing Hardy's Wessex. Even in one of his earlier short stories Powys seems intrigued by the complexity of place, when the protagonist of a ghost story, Doctor Windlas, asks Major Shales (both their names resonating with the meaning of the beach on which the story is set); do you believe 'that places, like people, have their own peculiar souls?'

This complex mapping of Wessex is, like the earliest maps of which Lloyd A Brown writes, 'a story in itself, often incorporating a little folklore and philosophy, some art both good and bad, and a smattering of scientific

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57 Mary Butts, 'Magic of Person and Place', rev. of The Strange Death of President Harding, by Gaston B. Means, and eight other books, The Bookman, 85, 507 (December 1933), 141-43 (p. 141).
58 John Cowper Powys, 'Romer Mowl', in Romer Mowl and Other Stories, ed. by Dr. Bernard Jones (St. Peter Port, Guernsey: Toucan Press, 1974), pp. 7-16 (p. 7).
fact'. All contribute to a manifold structuring of the Wessex landscape—a kind of map, which is, like the poem created by the ruler of Atlantis in Powys's novel *Atlantis* (1954), 'a landscape superimposed upon landscape rather than rhythm upon rhythm that is the method of its message'.

The anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff, recognises that this kind of ritual creation 'defines a portion of reality' (here Wessex), and that the 'act of consciously defining reality calls to our attention that [...] reality is merely a social construct', 'an act of collective imagination', akin to the earliest map making. This study (my own mapping performance) puts 'reason into a spatial context' and so, as Dylan Trigg argues, '[m]ere analysis of space' in such a circumstance 'will not constitute a sufficiently thorough examination of the structure of reason. Instead, reason must precede space'. Here, reason (anthropology and connected theory) not only precedes the spaces explored in this study, it becomes active in the structuring, or restructuring, of them. It is a process of 'defining reality' and recreating Wessex afresh, begun in the three authors' novels. In writing that Wessex was a 'country no man, not Hardy even, has found full words for', Butts realises the possibilities of such a landscape for other writers.

A ritualised language allows Hardy, Powys and Butts to create a writing and landscape that is conscious of itself, conscious of the rites which create it, though these rites stem from an often unconscious tradition of spatial and cultural construction. Pierre Bourdieu proposes in his theory of habitus that the structure of physical and cultural space in which we live is built from

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‘structuring practices’ that have become largely unconscious (their origins and existence forgotten). They are formed from shared events, culture, history, practices, and the myths of its group members. Wessex is arguably similarly structured. Powys’s and Butts’s writing, in particular, searches for recognition of these patterns, making conscious the unrecognised configurations of society that otherwise results in us objectifying all that we do.64

Andrew Radford discusses Wessex in a comparable way, claiming Hardy, Butts and Powys all excavate the landscape through an ‘imaginative archaeology’, so exhuming Wessex in the ‘creative patterns of their fiction’. This reveals the layers of event and meaning held by the landscape. In their ‘excavation’, Radford proposes a movement by the authors that is backwards and downwards in search of survivals, some of which are unconscious and un-noted.65 In considering Wessex as a ritual performance, a similar dual movement can be used to illustrate the three authors’ productions of place, beginning, I argue, with a practice of repetition and mimesis, like that in Forster’s re-performance of Purbeck as an authentic microcosm of England.

Backwards and forwards: in search of new dimensions

In the first volume of The Golden Bough, Frazer explores the mimetic in ritual, and in sympathetic magic – a topic also considered in van Gennep’s equally influential Rites of Passage.66 Frazer explains that ‘[o]ne of the principles of sympathetic magic is that any effect may be produced by imitating it’. A second type of ‘magic sympathy is supposed to exist between a man and any severed portion of his person, as his hair or nails’.67 In the first instance, ‘[i]f it is wished to kill a person an image is made and then destroyed. In the second, hair and nails

65 Andrew Radford, Mapping the Wessex Novel: Landscape, History and the Parochial in British Literature, 1870–1940 (London: Continuum, 2010), pp. 9, 11-12, 29.
66 Van Gennep, Rites of Passage, p. 4.
could be used to similar effect (p.9). Hardy makes use of such a device in *The Return of the Native*, when Susan, in a fearful anger, makes a doll of Eustacia, sticks it with pins, and burns it, hoping to affect the original Eustacia in some way.

The contemporary anthropologist Michael Taussig, connects this type of magic to writing, explaining that when writing of a place, one travels there – ‘a mimetic magic’, ‘[d]rawing upon the notion of sympathetic magic as presented in *The Golden Bough*’. Walter Benjamin (to whom Taussig constantly refers) explains that language is a ‘medium into which the earlier powers of mimetic production [...] have passed’. He supposes that ‘the mimetic gift, which was once the foundation of occult practices, [gradually] gained admittance to writing and language’. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno likewise claim that ‘when language entered history its masters were already priests and sorcerers’. Butts and Powys would have been familiar with this linking of ritual and magic to language and art from reading Harrison’s contention that ‘Art in some sense springs out of religion’ and ‘between them is a connecting link, a bridge, and that bridge is ritual’. Taussig furthers this idea, suggesting poetry is a ‘sympathetic magic’, where ‘ideas become forceful presence using correspondences in order to outwit and even dominate reality’. This is Susan’s intention with the doll of Eustacia, and, as the chapter will illustrate, it is the effect of the Wessex writing of the three authors examined in this study on the physical landscape.

Language for Butts is the key that allows her to unlock place, enabling a site to transport her and the reader beyond the physical world. For Butts, words

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are a rite that links the seen to the unseen. She explains that as a child she wanted to

learn to do more than get choice words by heart and think about them, but to make up new ones, make them do what I wanted them to do. Choose them for myself [...] Make up tunes which were just as much tunes as piano tunes. Only they were word-tunes and I knew, I knew – not how it was done, but that I could do it. (CC, p. 39)

Benjamin similarly writes of a childhood use of language – words used to ‘disguise’ himself. This gift in writing, of ‘perceiving similarities is, in fact, nothing but a weak remnant of the old compulsion to become similar and to behave mimetically’, Benjamin explains, finding particular comfort in words that made him ‘similar to dwelling places, furniture’ – all that surrounded him. Literary critic and philosopher René Girard even claims that ‘great masterpieces of our literature [...] are “more mimetic” than other works because they ‘portray human relations and desire’ that are themselves ‘mimetic’. Consequently, the texts are ‘more “true-to-life”’. While literary Wessex takes much from the physical landscape, the mimesis of writing simultaneously produces a landscape to rival and shape the physical. Arguably, one can observe this process at work, where locations once found in the novel can now be visited by the curious tourist. But, of course, this is a simplification of the processes at work in the creation of place, as it is not only the text that mimics; the physical world does too, while sightseers appear to mediate between the two. Neither does this approach to place through sympathetic magic account for conflicting theories of mimesis. Yet, in turning to ritual, multiple philosophical approaches to artistic mimesis comfortably inhabit the liminal space Wessex is here defined as being. This liminality is in part created by conflicting ideas of mimetic (re)production.

Gervais claims that a bridge between the present and past is “Englishness”, a looking backwards (nostalgia), and is found in novels as diverse as Hardy’s The

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Dynasts, Powys's *Wolf Solent*, Forster's *Howards End* and William Morris’s *News from Nowhere*. This looking back is part of a performance that is a search for the origin, the Golden Age. But as Benjamin writes, and illustrates in his own recollections of childhood, this path to the ‘origin’ is ‘backwards, but backwards into the future’, which though often ‘perverted’ in the meantime (as Edward B. Tylor writes, we are ‘transmitters and modifiers [...] of long past ages’), ‘still holds more promise than the current image of the future’.

Drawing from Sören Aabye Kierkegaard’s *Repetition* (1843), which suggests ‘Repetition and recollection are the same movement, except in opposite directions, for what is recollected has been, is repeated backward, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forward’, I argue that ritual can be read the same way, as a physical and cultural recollection, which is then repeated through performance. The past (a recollection Kierkegaard claims brings unhappiness) is, in terms of Wessex, a mythic-nostalgia of place, reproduced (repeated forward, which brings happiness), in ritual. This movement establishes a Wessex of bygone history and utopian vision as an existent region in the present, where it is at once the same and different from the original image that is reproduced.

Jacques Derrida questions this literary mimesis through a ‘de-construction’ of its language and action. Examining the position of the mimetic act in and out of place, I believe the process appears appropriate to the consideration of ritual liminal space. Mimesis is for Derrida problematic: it has ‘always [been] commanded by truth’ (an idea of what truth is). Mimesis is either a presentation of the thing in itself which cannot appear without its double, or alternatively it is an imitation (judged by its faithfulness to the original). Both are trapped by their relation to the ‘truth’; and both are present at once in a ‘double mark’ of writing, where the truth is escaped from. But Derrida explains that this ‘displacement’

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81 Kierkegaard, ‘Repetition’, p. 131.
does not take place in writing: the ‘dislocation (is what) writes/is written’. 82

Imitation engenders truth or is the ‘very movement of non-truth’. 83 While this
questions the usefulness of considering artistic mimesis in relation to what it is
supposed to copy, Derrida’s destabilising of the mimetic process introduces ideas
of ‘dislocation’, ‘displacement’, and though this movement is not achieved in
writing it is the force that writes. This force is action itself, and in this study it is
the ‘displaced’ and displacing ritual action that, I argue, writes (performs)

Wessex. As part of a displacement, Derrida argues that the text itself fails to
mimic the thing in itself, rather it must always refer to another text. There is
always another referent. This process is evident in a multi-authored and multi-
performed Wessex, where the dislocations resulting in the writing acts begin to
merge. Ritual allows conflicting ideas of mimesis, and visions of Wessex, to exist
in one liminal space found between the different texts. It is a location akin to the
white blank spaces between words and sentences on the page that Derrida
examines and Alan Roughley describes as liminal, where the blank space allows
the reader to ‘move’ between ‘quotations or texts’ in an ‘intertextual play’ of
creation. 84

This space in-between, or outside, becomes for Butts and Powys a search
for something beyond the physical world, requiring another movement of
language and observation to locate what they called the ‘Fourth Dimension’. It
was a different way of seeing things – a skill that Butts claims began in her
childhood, derived from viewing the paintings of William Blake, which hung in
her family home of Salterns, in Dorset. 85 She writes that she ‘brooded’ on them,
until ‘the kind of seeing that there was in William Blake, in the end affected me
both unconsciously and profoundly’ (CC, p. 34). This was a visionary kind of
‘seeing’.

85 Butts’s great grandfather, Thomas Butts, was patron to William Blake; Butts’s family still owned many of his paintings, which hung in a room at Salterns when Mary was a child (CC, p. 13). The collection is now in the Tate Britain.
In defining what the Fourth Dimension is in her biography of Butts, Blondel refers to the *Encyclopaedia of Occultism and Parapsychology* (1991), which defines it as a ‘higher form of space which mathematicians conceive another direction from which a fourth line may be drawn’. It suggests clairvoyants who see things in their traditional three dimensions might ‘simultaneously see it with the four dimensional organ of sight’. Butts called this kind of seeing ‘the knight’s move’:

[T]he law is there – 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.  

Powys too utilises this position, explaining that when writing of England he must come at it ‘“sideways” – must see England like a daydream, a brown study, an onanistic [...] ecstasy’. Like Butts’s approach, this way of seeing is evocative of ceremonial action. Powys heightens this sense with a sexualising, masturbatory reading of the writing and creative event, searching for satisfaction, and some spiritual homeland through it. Such a Wessex evolves between the words of Hardy, Powys and Butts, who, like de Certeau, acknowledge their landscape to be a multitude of intersecting spaces and actions. Functioning like Kierkegaard’s repetition or Butts’s ‘knight’s move’, ritual as an intertextual, inter-spatial repetition and adaptation creates a sacred space – a site set apart, and always in-between.

**Corfe Castle: the stratum of place**

Corfe becomes such a ritually performed place, a microcosm of Wessex and England. Microcosm and macrocosm are themselves a kind of mimesis, or

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88 John Cowper Powys, letter to Dorothy Richardson dated 19 January 1930. Dorothy Richardson Collection. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, box 6, fols 96-101.
sympathetic magic. In a journal entry dated 15 December 1932, Butts notes their importance:

How the theory of microcosm & macrocosm explains things – at least to my type of mind. At least, I can use it to form an imaginative whole, which, I suppose, is what great philosophers do with their infinite gift for abstract speculation. (JMB, p. 407)

The theory can certainly be applied to Butts’s view of the south of England, where ‘sprawled across a kingdom, the history of England [is] open’, to be ‘read’ in writing that is to be seen on the landscape itself (JMB, p. 360). Powys comparably claims that ‘[e]very geographical district has its typical and representative centre, some characteristic spot which sums up [...] and focuses, in limited bounds, qualities and attributes that are diffused in diverse proportions through the larger areas’. 89

And so Corfe becomes this spot, the ‘imaginative whole’, a place, formed from a performance that goes backwards as well as forwards, and that can be excavated by going backwards and downwards, while also peered at sideways, as something ethereal. Mimesis, here, is not only a process of like acting upon like, nor simply text upon text. Neither does this mimesis concern us with ‘truth’ as Derrida believes it has often done; Hardy, Butts, and Powys make it about something beyond ‘truth’. Marcel Proust writes ‘truth does not start until the writer takes two different objects, established their connection [...] and encloses them in the necessary bonds of good style’. 90 Here, truth is what you write it to be. And, as Taussig points out, ‘contextualisation’ is itself a creative and ‘deeply mystifying’ process (one very much evident in this chapter), here relying upon the authors’ and my own constructive ‘gaze’. 91 Therefore, place is what you perform it to be: Corfe as Wessex, Wessex as England, England as Wessex.

Corfe Castle is located on the Isle of Purbeck in Dorset; Purbeck, an isle only in name, is part of the mainland, though indeed rather insulated by its

geographic position. The Castle, now a ruin, much of its stone carted down the hill to build the village below, can be seen in Figure 1. Today the property is maintained by The National Trust and is a popular tourist destination. Guidebooks tell of its significance and reveal something of its history. The *Lonely Planet: Devon, Cornwall & Southwest England* (2008) gives this description of the castle:

The massive, shattered ruins of Corfe Castle loom so dramatically from the landscape it's like blundering into a film set. The defensive fragments tower over an equally photogenic village, which bears the castle's name and is built out of the same cold-grey stone. The combined effect is a cinematographer's dream and with the ruins acting as an ever present backdrop to some good hotels, it's a romantic spot for a meal or an overnight stay.\(^92\)

The castle is not only a recommended tourist attraction, its location is allied with a Hollywood movie set: a 'photogenic' village with 'dramatically' looming ruin of a castle. In the extract, Corfe ceases to exist only in the physical landscape and becomes a guidebook location, a hyperreal site in a cinema world. In the tradition of guidebooks, the writer's further description matches the drama and sales pitch of a film trailer, rendering the final judgement that Corfe is a 'romantic spot' a foregone conclusion. The modern guidebook account owes as much to past representations of such places as it does to contemporary taste and imagination. What one might call the 'Lonely Planet Corfe' has much in common with locations in the Murray and Baedeker guides of the nineteenth century. These guides were, as James Buzard explains, the first to offer a mixture of information and inspiration to their readers in a compact itinerary form.\(^93\) The poetic description, not unlike a Romantic landscape painting, remains in the *Lonely Planet*; the only thing missing from the scene is the shepherd with his flock or a band of camping gypsies. In a mishmash of movie romanticism the guide presents a castle fulfilling all the hopes and expectations of a tourist looking for England.

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Then there is history – a contrast and re-enforcer of the romantic conjuration of place already begun. The historical spiel is necessarily brief, but positions the castle as a key feature of the historical, regional and national landscape, offering just enough to intrigue the prospective visitor. One is informed of the castle’s beginnings, commanded by William the Conqueror in 1068, and then told of its role in the civil war as the loyalist stronghold of the Bankes family. Under siege, Lady Bankes famously lead the defence of the castle while her husband was away. Betrayed from within, the castle fell to the Roundheads, and was demolished.

A similar entry can be found in the *Lonely Planet: England* (2003), describing the ‘magnificent ruins of Corfe [as they] tower above its gorgeous stone village [...] offering wonderful views of the countryside’ – the same views and rolling hills of Forster’s England. This guide, like the other, is mapping Corfe in edited form. It is again (minus the film set analogy) another romantic representation:

Even by English standards, the 1000-year old castle had a dramatic history, with royal poisonings, treacherous stabblings and Civil War sieges, being reduced to the picturesque ruin after the second such assault in 1645. Elements of early Norman
brickwork are still evident, but it's the fractured grandeur of the scene that draws the crowds.94

This handbook gives a little more information in the date for Corfe's demise, but again it constructs Corfe through cultural conceptions of beauty and the sublime. In both manuals there is a mapping and rebuilding of Corfe that fosters the visitor's expectation. While the drama of civil war plays a part in both books, the England guide also alludes to 'poisonings and stabbings' – a glimpse of something that is, as will shortly become apparent, a part of Corfe's mythical identity. The 'Guidebook Corfe(s)' is a place only half built; it is the physical visit and perhaps the purchase of a more detailed Castle guide that will complete the construction. The handbook requires a journey and performance of its reader; it is a call to action not unlike Forster's with which we began. Corfe's significance is only realised when the physical trip is complete.95

As in the relevant chapter of Forster's Howards End, the Corfe segments of the guides do not reveal a connection to Thomas Hardy, but then why should they? A specific knowledge would be needed to associate Corfe Castle with Hardy's use of the site as Corvesgate Castle in The Hand of Ethelberta (1876) and with Hardy's more ambiguous use of Corfe in the construction of Stancy Castle in A Laodicean (1881). But, as both handbooks demonstrate, Hardy's fiction has far greater influence still. The 'culture' introductory section to the south-west guide argues that the 'southwest landscape is a literary one; everywhere there are places famous authors have used as inspirations for their work', citing its writers as Jane Austen, Daphne du Maurier, John Fowles, Richard Blackmore, and Hardy, who is credited with establishing the 'modern use of the word "Wessex"'.96 (the older use being the ancient Anglo Saxon Kingdom that inspired Hardy's application of the name). Hardy too claimed he established the term's popular usage.97

95 On the other hand, it can be argued that these guides offer a form of 'armchair' travel, and that the journey, in the tradition of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's imaginative nature walk in 'The Lime-Tree Bower My Prison' (1797), allows an imaginative completion of the journey to take place, perhaps more successfully than a physical one. Powys would not have approved, lamenting that literature had become too much the process of sedentary people (see fn. 45).
96 Berry and Dixon, Lonely Planet: Devon, Cornwall, p. 43.
97 Originally published under his wife's name but recognised as being primarily Hardy's work, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy claims it is Hardy who established the Wessex name, distinguishing
‘modern use of the word’ becomes more apparent in the *Lonely Planet: England*, where Wessex is used as a regional heading; it is a place you can now visit, and Corfe is located as one of the many landscape features within its boundaries. Like Corfe, the wider landscape is a mixture of small amounts of history, fiction, and derivative prose all meant to tantalise and reassure the visitor.

*Corfe Castle: mapping history*

Like the guidebook Wessex, Hardy’s landscape contains history that might be identified by the reader; this information is reshaped and reordered, just as it is in the guide. Hardy’s Wessex, and his own life in Dorset, are now as much part of the history of the south-west as is the civil war, the Bankes, Corfe and King Alfred. Hardy, though, is perhaps better known. The history of Corfe before Hardy is already located within the flow of romantic and mythic cultural conceptions of place. Three books about Corfe contemporary to Hardy are worth noting. The first, published in 1853, seventeen years before the publication of Hardy’s first novel *Desperate Remedies*, is written by the then owner of Corfe, George Bankes (descendent of the valiant Lady Bankes). The second, published in 1883, is written by Thomas Bond, of the Bond family who were wealthy landowners in the south-west. The third, though not specifically about Corfe, contains information on the castle. This was John Hutchins’s much earlier *The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset* (1741). Hardy owned the third edition (1861) of the four volume book, and had annotated, cut and added material to the first of these volumes.

Bond’s account of Corfe comments on the unreliability of Hutchins’s earlier history. While generally praising the book, Bond claims that Hutchins’s belief that ‘King Edgar was probably the founder of the magnificent structure’ and had sent for ‘workmen out of Italy for [this] purpose’ was a conjecture to make the contemporary reader ‘smile’. Contemporary historians knew better. However,

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him from the earlier poet William Barnes who, it is argued, wrote of Dorset not Wessex (Florence Emily Hardy, *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1891* (London: Macmillan, 1928), pp. 160-61.

if Bond is more certain of Corfe's history, he is equally uncertain of Corfe's structure. As he admits, 'It would add greatly to the interest of Corfe Castle, if we could ascertain with certainty where all the different towers, courts, and apartments' were 'situated, but so complete has been the destruction, so utter is the confusion, that the task seems entirely hopeless' (p. 84). Thus, when describing the physical aspect of the Castle of the past, Bond turns, as did Hutchins before him, to conjecture, utilising phrases such as, 'My idea is that [...]', 'There seems to have been [...]', and 'perhaps there is [...]’ (pp. 53, 72, 77). His mapping is a practice akin to a reader exploring a textual landscape, filling in pieces with their own imagination. Bond wanders Corfe, performing its spaces through acts of speculative thought and writing, erecting textual walls, creating boundaries. He aspires to historical certainty where there is only uncertainty.

Bond also discusses the site's civil-war history, explaining how Lady Bankes (her husband away) led a courageous defence of Corfe from Cromwell's men (pp. 30-38). He includes the 'history' of King Edward the Martyr, who, he explains, was murdered by his stepmother in the area where Corfe Castle now stands – an event that pre-dates the structure of the castle. Edward was said to have been stabbed by his stepmother when accepting a drink from her. Miracles allegedly followed Edward's death, but Bond dismisses these tales as being 'unworthy of a place in history' (p. 8). However, Bankes, the earlier chronicler of Corfe, includes these miracles, making little distinction between them and historical events. He explains that the fountain by which Edward's body lay was said to have gained healing properties and that Edward's body was still 'free from corruption' three years after his death. 99

Bankes appears intent on establishing the site's importance from the opening pages of his 'history', where he claims 'There is reason for concluding that a castle existed at Corfe in the reign of King Alfred' (p. 1). This reason is, he tells us, one of 'presumption' (p. 1). While this is very likely an attempt on the part of Bankes to ensure his family's connection to Alfred through ownership of Corfe, it certainly adds another dimension to place. Bankes locates the castle in

99 George Bankes, The Story of Corfe Castle, And of the Many Who Have Lived There (London: John Murray, 1853), pp. 6, 7
Alfred’s Wessex, alongside the legends that accompany Alfred. He does this regardless of the fact that Corfe was never located in Wessex, the Anglo Saxon Kingdom having ceased to exist by the time of its construction. Corfe is suddenly repositioned centrally to the ancient Kingdom and to the founding of England, which Alfred is credited with overseeing.

Bond’s recreation of the site, seemingly more physical than historical, and dismissing the accounts of miracles associated with Edward’s body, fails to note, unlike the National Trust website for Corfe Castle, that ‘legend has it that King Edward the Martyr was murdered at Corfe by his stepmother’ (my italics). The act and the account are themselves things of legend. Edward was likely killed in the area, but the details remain a mystery. Both accounts again reinforce the location’s connection to the Anglo-Saxon Kingdom of Wessex, and to the formation of England. Today the Lonely Planet still alludes to the stabbing.

Hardy’s Wessex: evolving boundaries

In The Hand of Ethelberta, Hardy’s Corvesgate Castle is connected to the history of Corfe, but the name Corvesgate is an earlier name for the site, linking Corfe and Hardy’s novelistic castle to the Wessex past. The assembling of a Historical Association at the castle in Ethelberta, and the Association president’s explanation that the castle’s last siege took place in 1645, continues the historical positioning of the ruin. The historical Corfe has entered Hardy’s Wessex (1645 being the year of Corfe’s final siege) in a narrative that stresses the historical importance and placing of the castle in a wider landscape changing with modernity.

In A Laodicean, Stancy Castle has no similar historical connection to Corfe, but it seems that Hardy originally drew some inspiration from the Purbeck-located ruin. Its description is at once both reminiscent of parts of Corfe (stood above a village, ‘[i]rregular, dilapidated’, where ‘[o]ver all rose abruptly a square

solid tower apparently not much injured by wars or weather"), and different in the greater detail of the village below it. Almost as if to make up for this lack of sure physical placement, Hardy imbues Stancy Castle with great historical significance. In fact, the de Stancy family might be usefully compared to the Bankes of Corfe - a family long associated with their castle, and with a lineage of historical and heroic deeds that serve to romanticise the family and their home and connect family and castle to an idealised notion of the nation’s history. There is one moment when the link to Corfe is almost assured, when we glimpse the interior of Sir William de Stancy’s house. The house contains a ‘glass case over the fire-place, within which were some large mediaeval door-keys, black with rust and age’ (AL, p. 50). Like the large portraits that are too big for the house, we are told the keys once belonged in the castle. The de Stancys no longer own the castle, and the keys are reminiscent of those to Corfe, awarded to Lady Bankes for her defence of the castle. These were taken to the Bankes’s estate of Kingston Lacy, where they still hang on the wall today.

The two towering locations of history within Ethelberta and A Laodicean have, however, not ensured a stable or critically secure place for either of the novelistic castles or landscapes. Both works have been treated unkindly by critics. Donald Davidson dismisses them as often being seen as inferior work, failing because they try to be modern. And generally criticism of both has been sparse; they appear apart from the main Hardy Canon of the ‘Novels of Character and Environment’. Their position and role in creating the Wessex landscape is unstable, but at the same time perhaps more reflective of the struggles of Wessex’s development. In his study of the evolution of Hardy’s landscape, Simon Gatrell writes that in A Laodicean ‘Hardy appears to want to set aside

104 Hardy too places these novels apart from the others in the editing and ordering of the Wessex Edition. Along with his first and also less read Desperate Remedies (1871), A Laodicean and Ethelberta are grouped under the heading ‘Novels of Ingenuity’, while all others are assigned either the title ‘Romances and Fantasies’ or ‘Novels of Character and Environment’. ‘Ingenuity’ alone suggests a breaking from the norm and from the expectation of the reader.
Wessex altogether, but can’t quite manage it. The novel deals with the modern world to a greater extent than other novels, and much of the latter part of the story takes place outside Wessex in a chase across Europe. Yet Wessex is always home to the characters and a return to its boundaries concludes the adventure. Hardy seems unable to escape Wessex, even if he wanted to; escape would become progressively more difficult as his novels grew in popularity and readers began to see only a rural idyll amid the novels’ greater complexities.

Almost in contrast to A Laodicean, Gatrell writes that it was in Ethelberta that Hardy ‘elaborated the idea’ of Wessex, having introduced the name at the end of his previous novel, Far from the Madding Crowd (xiii). One can find in Ethelberta many connections to the ancient kingdom of Wessex. Ethelberta’s name itself evokes Anglo-Saxon royalty, suggesting Ethelred the Unready, son of King Edgar and Queen Aelfthryth. Ethelred’s predecessor was in fact Edward the martyr who was murdered on the site that would be Corfe. Hardy utilises a similar Anglo-Saxon name in A Pair of Blue Eyes (1873) for his protagonist Elfride, whose name likewise suggests the Anglo-Saxon Elfrida, or Aelfthryth, the name of Ethelred’s mother or, indeed, King Alfred’s daughter. As Ralph Pite notes, while Alfred generally appears to be ‘absent from Hardy’s work, considering Hardy’s use of Alfred’s Kingdom’, signs of Alfred’s legacy remain. In Hardy’s Wessex, Wantage, the birth place of Alfred, is renamed Alfredston; and Francis Troy in Far from the Madding Crowd was at first named Alfred. As Pite acknowledges, Alfred is ‘one of the many historical and cultural layers which make up Wessex’, and can be compared to the equally important but ostensibly absent mythology of King Arthur.

Hardy’s landscape was slow in development, and at first the Wessex name was not used. Though places within the early novels seemed to correspond to the geography of the West Country, Hardy was writing to ‘disguise’ specific towns and villages, using new names and shifting their locations to ‘unfamiliar’ or

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105 Gatrell, Thomas Hardy’s Vision of Wessex, p. 31.
107 Pite also recognises the importance of King Arthur in Hardy’s A Pair of Blue Eyes (1873) and in many of his poems (Pite, Hardy’s Geography, p. 90). He suggests that along with other Arthurian associations, the climax of Tess at Stonehenge links the novel to Merlin, ‘who was said to have magically transported the stone circle from Ireland’ (p. 218, end note 11).
imaginary areas. As Hardy continued to write, real place names appeared (Bristol kept its own name), but other locations such as Weymouth had more than one. In Hardy’s first three novels Weymouth was known as Creston, Budmouth, and by its real title. This contributed greatly to the uncertainty of Hardy’s novelistic topography.

Wessex first appeared as a term to describe Hardy’s evolving landscape towards the end of the Far from the Madding Crowd serialisation in the Cornhill Magazine, November 1874. This naming of the region had taken four years and four novels. Wessex continued to develop, but not in a steady and coherent way. Breaking from imaginary place names, Hardy used only real names for locations in his short story ‘The Distracted Young Preacher’ (1879); while in The Trumpet Major (1880) place names were all real bar one. Mimicry and difference obscured the landscape. For a time, Hardy’s Wessex appeared to be one fictional county covering a large and unclear expanse of the south-west of England. Wessex was further solidified when its borders were themselves mapped. According to Gatrell the first of these was an unofficial map, printed in The Bookman in 1891. Designed by Robertson Nicholl, real place names appeared next to Hardy’s Wessex designations. Hardy produced the first full and authorized map of Wessex for the first collected edition of his novels, in a bid to correct ‘misconceptions of place’ caused by other maps and speculation. This map (Figure 2) corresponds to the county borders of England: North Wessex (Berkshire), Mid Wessex (Wiltshire), Upper Wessex (Hampshire), South Wessex (Dorset), Outer Wessex (Somerset) and Lower Wessex (Devon), but is filled with mostly imaginary Wessex place names. The boundaries of Cornwall remain unnamed on this first map but were later to be called ‘Off Wessex’.

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108 Gatrell, Thomas Hardy’s Vision of Wessex, p. 7.
109 Gatrell, Thomas Hardy’s Vision of Wessex, p. 34.
110 Gatrell, Thomas Hardy’s Vision of Wessex, pp. 101, 94, 113.
This mapping removed some of the ambiguities surrounding the exact constitution of Hardy’s landscape: its borders were now geographically similar to Alfred’s Wessex. Beside name and boundaries, Hardy’s design of the map further suggests the importance of Alfred’s Kingdom, as Pite notes, through the central positioning of Stourhead, called Stourcastle on Hardy’s map. In 1762 construction was begun on Alfred’s Tower at Stour Head. The National Trust’s website for the attraction explains that Henry Hoare II wanted to commemorate Alfred’s victory against the invading Danes. The spot is said to be the location where Alfred again ‘raised his standard’ in 879, ‘after emerging from hiding’.

History and legend tell of Alfred’s later success in the defence of his kingdom, and of his part in uniting and establishing the nation of England. Alfred plays a similar role in uniting and establishing Hardy’s Wessex. Like Bankes’s use of Corfe Castle, the tower becomes a mapped and symbolic hub, from which the

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111 Pite, *Hardy’s Geography*, p. 29.
surrounding landscape flows. On the same map, Stonehenge, with its own prehistoric and mythical associations, finds a similar position of importance at the heart of Hardy’s Wessex. These names and boundaries transfer established meaning to Hardy’s landscape, yet also reposition place, so differentiating it from its source.

Gatrell identifies cultural building blocks as other essential components to Hardy’s structuring of Wessex. They are integral to the characters’, the readers’, and the tourists’ mapping, expectations and performances of the landscape. As the most important of these blocks, Gatrell lists work (much of it rural and performed by the middle classes); local customs (mumming, folk-lore, music); and class (another division of Wessex that has many rules, distinctions and rituals). Hardy’s novels are mostly concerned with the agricultural communities, and with their customs and struggles (be these class-based or otherwise). Gervais writes that, similar to William Morris’s News from Nowhere (1890), reality for Hardy is a base from which one might generalise. If Wessex is read to be like Morris’s landscape, then it might appear that one has stumbled upon an image of an English utopian rural scene – that very place guidebooks would claim to lead us to today. This image of Wessex is an important part of its emerging performance, through writing, reading and tourism; but, while identifying these cultural constituents of Wessex, Gervais warns that a certain reading of them might be damaging: that an ‘English countryman like Gabriel Oak has become a Giles Winterborne, trapped by social circumstance’, and by a public that expects, like Grace does of Giles, ‘someone close to nature’, working the land. The enforced rural idyll destroys Giles in The Woodlanders, and likewise threatens Hardy’s Wessex.

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113 Stonehenge can be read as a microcosm of nation, a site visited today by tourists searching for this England. Barbara Bender recognises Stonehenge as a ‘national icon’, representing a culture’s ‘roots, and “our” and “deep” national past’ (Barbara Bender, Stonehenge: Making Space (Oxford: Berg, 1998), p. 120). The ‘our’ and ‘deep’ draw attention to a nation whose site is an exclusionary (perhaps sacred) space that might be excavated for meaning. It also suggests the otherworldliness of the site – a link that can indeed be found in the energy fields and ley lines some believe centre at the stones. In Powys’s A Glastonbury Romance (1932), John Crow sees England in Stonehenge, centring the site, and making it his nation: ‘This is my England’, he exclaims, ‘This is still alive. This is no dead ruin’ (John Cowper Powys, A Glastonbury Romance (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1932), p. 82). Hereafter cited as GR.

114 Gatrell, Thomas Hardy’s Vision of Wessex, pp. 8-10.

115 Gervais, Literary Englands, pp. 19, 16
While Hardy's two Corfe novels, *A Laodicean* and *Ethelberta*, explore this creative and potentially destructive duality of place and identity, they are themselves but two performances of Wessex. My own brief, almost guidebook-style history of the developing Hardy landscape is another, here shaped by Gatrell's research and interpretation. Even though Gatrell's book appears to be objective textual history rather than critical interpretation, it too completes another creative mapping and performance of the landscape. Interestingly, this is done through the imaginary character of a young girl, Lucy, positioned as a contemporary to Hardy and to the publication of the Wessex novels. Her job in Gatrell's book is to piece together Hardy's evolving landscape on behalf of the reader. She too is a performer, searching for meaning, and creating a whole from the parts of Hardy's Wessex.

Hardy, it would seem, might be cited in defence of these various performances, and even of the reader who searches for the idyllic rural scene in his Wessex. In an article published in the *Forum* (1888), Hardy writes that when reading, the imagination should be used, and that it shall discover 'not only all that was put there by the author' but, 'what was never inserted by him, never foreseen, never contemplated'.\(^{116}\) Powys was to later repeat this view in the preface to his 1952 novel, *The Inmates*, citing Hardy as having 'implied' such a thing to him. This, Powys claims, is an act of imagination surpassing the author, only possible to the 'sympathetic' reader - a further act in the performance of place and its transformative magic.\(^{117}\)

**Hardy's Corfe: two novels, many castles**

*The Hand of Ethelberta*

This imagining and reimagining of Wessex is begun by Hardy. Corvesgate Castle (Corfe) in *Ethelberta* appears on the periphery of Hardy's Wessex, and as the location of only one of the novel's episodes in chapters 30 and 31. Nevertheless, 

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the castle remains central to the events of the novel, the characters forever coming and going around the ruin, as they struggle with their own identities and their place within the landscape and society. *Ethelberta* seems to anticipate and question the regional and national identity that would later arise from various receptions of Hardy’s work. Hardy looks to explore his rural Wessex within the novel, but at every turn (of character and phrase) expectation remains unfulfilled. The intrinsic social building blocks of Hardy’s Wessex, listed by Gatrell (work, local custom, class) become unstable, and fail to support the Wessex of romance, rurality and myth. The reader is permitted a glimpse of a different Wessex; yet, in this disconcerting double the original is uncannily reflected. As Hardy pulls down assumptions of the greater rural ideal, he reassembles them as the castle at the centre of the novel. In *Ethelberta*, this means Corvesgate becomes a site of history, tradition and identity. It holds a position in contrast to character performances of identity that are defined by their deception and changeability.

The Castle’s importance is established in Hardy’s positioning of its main episode near the middle of the novel. In these chapters, Ethelberta is visiting relatives at Knollsea (Swanage), and at the invitation of Lord Mountclere heads to Corvesgate Castle to attend a meeting of the ‘Imperial Archaeological Association’. Ethelberta, thought to be a woman of beauty and independent means has a number of suitors; Mountclere is among them. In reality, she is penniless. Ethelberta continues to hide her poverty and the greater secret of her humble origins in order to maintain her position in society so she might marry a man of means. This and other characters’ continued misrepresentation of self, status and identity, in what might have been a romantic comedy, culminates in a novel of ‘Ingenuity’, where interaction and understanding between person and place fails, so that Ethelberta does not marry Christopher, who seems the novelistic love match, but instead marries the lecherous Lord Mountclere.

This instability of identity is reflected in place within the novel, and contrasts with the seeming certainty of location of Corvesgate, which is endowed with Corfe’s history. To continue her own charade of wealth, Ethelberta maintains residence in a large and briefly rent-free house – the only bequest from her mother-in-law’s will. Here, she establishes her family so that to others they
appear as cook and maid, while her tradesmen brothers must visit through the back (*HoE*, p. 117). This situation parodies the position of the great English House as a symbol of wealth, culture and society, and allows Ethelberta to maintain a believability to her story, so essential to securing a good marriage. It is a desire for success matched in her ambition as writer – in what she calls her ‘story-telling’ (p. 118). From houses like Ethelberta’s, England is traditionally seen to be ruled. Chapter 3 examines the most intense concentration of these values within the English Country House, and the mythology and ritual that has grown around it. Here, it is enough to claim that Ethelberta’s town house distorts the more Victorian values of home and respectability through its dishonesties and pretence.

Others in the novel, who are rich and well-born, reflect Ethelberta’s own deceitfulness, and their mendaciousness is similarly revealed in their country houses. Ethelberta goes to survey the property of one potential suitor, Alfred Neigh, whose surname anticipates Ethelberta’s disappointing discovery that nothing is to be found but a ‘rough rail fence’ around an enclosure containing ‘numerous horses in the last stage of decrepitude, the animals being [...] mere skeletons’ (*HoE*, p. 199). Her suitor’s money has come from the knackers business, and his country house remains unbuilt. Even with the reassuringly historic and Wessex connections of her suitor’s first name, Alfred, the expected English rural pastoral scene is again disappointed, yet at the same time one is aware of it through its failure to manifest.

Lord Mountclere – the seeming epitome of wealth and respectability – whom Ethelberta marries, is likewise revealed (too late) to be a lecher; he is ‘not fit to be the husband of a decent woman’ (*HoE*, p. 369). Like Ethelberta and Alfred, Lord Mountclere, though respectable in name, is again revealed through his house. It is a place affecting an apparent ‘grandeur of massive masonry’, where, the reader is told, beneath concrete slabs lie only red bricks, hidden after King George had visited a previous Lord Mountclere and disapproved of its red constituents (p. 330). It is a house that would ‘hoodwink’ any future ‘seeker for history’: its mediaeval castle origins, long since pulled down, sparsely remain at

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great contrast to the new construction that is severed from the site's past (pp. 328-29).

Alfred and Mountclere are both associated with decay and rottenness (by dying horses and lechery respectively). In *Ethelberta*, Hardy appears to dispel another component of his Wessex landscape through a similar language of death and putrefaction. Immediately after her stepmother's death Ethelberta's poorer and more rural-associated identity is uncovered by another suitor, Christopher Julian. He discovers her staying at a tumbledown cottage in the woods, 'which stood nestling in the shrubbery and ivy like a mushroom among grass' (*HoE*, p. 96). Its mushroom-like appropriateness to place seems to establish the cottage and its occupants where they belong, in rural Wessex, but the mushroom metaphor also suggests something else, continuing the chapter's theme of rot and decline. Christopher, misled by Ethelberta's 'story-telling', comes upon the cottage expecting a grand abode. At his arrival, the day exudes a 'fungous smell', and the sky is 'sunless and stagnant'. Where the trees are often full of life in Hardy's other novels, here they 'show the colours of decline' (p. 93). Christopher's own incongruity to setting is demonstrated when he is given directions to the cottage by a local, according to the types of trees to be seen on the route. He replies that 'a man can hardly tell oaks from elms at that distance' (p. 94), anticipating the problems he is about to uncover with Ethelberta's identity.

When discovered in the woodland, Ethelberta is stood upon a 'stool' formed from the 'stump of a tree', set in a natural theatre of 'beech boughs'. These surround an 'open space' that is 'floored' with 'deep beds of curled old leaves, and cushions of furry moss'. She appears a performer on a natural stage, telling stories to children seated at her feet (*HoE*, p. 98), but Christopher, expecting a 'lady', sees only incongruity, and her 'story-telling' only re-affirms this for the reader who knows of its fraudulent counterpart in Ethelberta's earlier misrepresentations of herself.

The ideal often seen in Hardy's Wessex looks to be rotten; country house and nature are false and in decline. Yet, within this, a vision of expected Wessex still remains. Though Christopher cannot tell one type of tree from another, the
'countryman' who gives him directions can. The Wessex of his other novels still exists, but is no longer the place of his characters, because they are incapable of performing as Hardy's characters often do — as woodsmen, farmers, and labourers. Wessex is manifested through a non-performance, or through the perverse actions of dishonest and scheming characters associated with the higher classes and the cities.

This performance through non-performance continues in Corvesgate (Corfe). The castle is given the historical legitimacy and meaning that people and places within the novel appear to lack. The site becomes the centre of the story through a series of misguided and unfinished actions. It is defined by the discontinuity of actions and places around it, as characters are often seen moving near to Corvesgate, around it, rushing towards and away from it, but only once to and within it. Characters' nearness or their 'not quite going there' acts to produce a there that is, like a happy ending, never quite grasped by the characters.

When Hardy presents Corvesgate to the reader he does so through the language and action of religion and pilgrimage, but rather than Ethelberta's approach and the others' presence there sanctifying the site, the location is sacred in spite of them. Ethelberta travels to the castle for the 'Imperial Archaeological Association', determined to hide her poverty. Being aware that no one will see her arrive, she plans to travel 'without the restraint of ceremony' and without the 'sacrifice of either dignity or cash' (HoE, p. 257). Without 'ceremony' and 'sacrifice' she is a fugitive from Hardy's otherwise pilgrimage-like scene. Borrowing a donkey from a young boy, she rides to the castle (p. 258). Her journey is given meaning by its resemblance to Christ's last journey towards Jerusalem and his death. Ethelberta, the poor rural maid, approaches the castle posing as a lady of society, just as Christ went to Jerusalem, a carpenter as a king. Only, Ethelberta, unlike the reader, is unaware of the parallel, and is ashamed of her poor mode of transport, intending to hide it on arrival. Her journey is written as a route of pilgrimage mimicking, but at the same time utterly differing from, Christ's journey. Ethelberta is exiled from the meaning of the act, and at the same time displaced from the land and the significance it holds. Christ as a sacrificial victim in a sense became part of the land, remapping the road to Jerusalem.
Ethelberta in contrast sneaks through the landscape rather than shaping it, failing to belong in Hardy's Wessex, which, contrastingly to Ethelberta, is filled with meaning and history, where barrows containing 'human dust from prehistoric times' hold a rightful place in an 'antique land' (p. 258).

As Ethelberta travels, she 'behold[s] two sorts of weather pervading Nature at the same time'. To her right (the side of Christ), 'sunbeams' light the sea, revealing a 'fine day', the water appearing as fair as a 'New Jerusalem'. Here the sea, and then bees and butterflies tell of some spiritual or natural rejuvenation (p. 258). But to her left (the side of the Devil) it is 'dark and cloudy', and everything suggests a 'growling south-west gale' (pp. 258-59). She rides between the two - the weather perhaps a symbol of the divinities, and the duality reflecting her own two-fold identity. Ethelberta is symbolically trapped in Hardy's landscape where she does not belong.

Her attempt to hide the donkey at the castle fails, and though it betrays her presence, the Association members do not connect the animal to her. The attendance of these members might reinforce the meaning of the site, as does Ethelberta's, but this is again done through the idea of absence rather than presence: Ethelberta worries about her false persona, and the two gentleman are more interested in Ethelberta than history. Dr. Yore (a name embodying his task - 'days of yore') relates the castle's history to the group, borrowing from Corfe the names and deeds of Stephen, King John, Edward II and Elizabeth (p. 265). Like those 'historians' of Corfe, Bond and Bankes, Yore at moments in his storytelling constructs a castle 'coloured rather by the speaker's imagination than by the pigments of history' (p.266).

At the small gathering it is the Association's president who unwittingly sums up the almost cheerless comedy of the moment, identifying only one of those present as truly belonging in such an important historical site. Having come upon Ethelberta's donkey, he announces that 'it may be appropriate to mention that many were kept here in olden times: they were largely used as beasts of burden in victualling the castle previous to the last siege, in the year sixteen hundred and forty-five' (p. 261). The donkey's historical position is assured in Hardy's ingenious comedy.
A Laodicean

J. I. M. Stewart writes that for many critics a central theme in Hardy's novels is 'the passing of an older society in England and its suppression by a new'. A Laodicean is immediately located in a new and changing world by a subheading proclaiming 'A Story of To-Day'. Unlike Ethelberta, the castle in A Laodicean is more central to the novel's plot, which follows the developing relationship between the new owner of Stancy Castle, Miss Paula Power, and visiting architect George Somerset, who is hired to redesign and renovate it. From the beginning Hardy is concerned with a re-mapping and changing of space that goes beyond purely architectural concern. The castle represents heritage, lineage and a nation's history that is already connected to the modern world by its 'new' clock and telegraph wire (AL, p. 37). Miss de Stancy, whose family once owned the castle, is now companion to its new owner, Paula. At his first meeting, George mistakes her for the owner, detecting in her features a 'defective reprint' of the historical de Stancy profile (p. 29); she must 'hand on a traditional feature with which she did not find herself otherwise in harmony' (p. 30). Miss de Stancy's visage reflects the disharmony that now exists between her family and Stancy Castle - the site is a family feature she is no longer able to hand on, the castle and furniture having been sold before she was born (p. 34).

The new owner, Paula, represents an evolving middle-class modernity, which both seeks change and development and is troubled and fascinated by a past it had previously been excluded from. Paula's father acquired his wealth as a railway contractor, discovering the castle while building a railway line. As Pite discusses, Hardy's interest in the developing rail network and its impact on the physical landscape helps shape and map Hardy's written Wessex; the railway was a development that lost Dorset its 'place within the network of relations that made up [England]', while elsewhere quickening change from 'local independence' and local identity, to another 'homogenous' region of a modernized England (pp. 38, 44). The train allowed interlopers into Wessex to

119 Pite, Hardy's Geography, p. 44.
see a rural ideal, and while mapping the location it equally divided and diminished it. In *A Laodicean* Hardy explores modernity's impact upon old 'Merry England', juxtaposing the historical castle against the railway and the new wealth it generates. However, this fails to be developed as a major theme in the novel, and the sides become less polarised when the battleground is more substantially located within the castle, where acts of remapping space and history are contested.

Paula is attempting to modernize and restore the castle, refurbishing the old but also desiring to build a 'Greek court', with 'fountain' and 'statues like those in the British Museum' (p. 91). She is participating in an act akin to that of the groups and societies who aim to preserve the houses and castles of the past, and which feed the tourist industry today, though her reckless modernisation would now be disapproved of. This process also reflects the sixteenth-century shift from castle to house that began this change. Her desire for Greek columns only adds to the preposterous grandeur and authority desired by owners of such places. Those columns had once designated the dwelling places of the gods – sacred sites now hijacked and mimicked by the wealthy of England, and the nation's cultural institutions. Paula appears to want a museum rather than a functional house. Her interest in preserving this past is developed through her interest in the old de Stancy portraits that still hang on the walls. Paula tells George of her wish to be a de Stancy: 'I want to be romantic and historical', she announces (*AL*, p. 123). She desires an identity linked to the past which her money cannot give her, but she fails to realise that the de Stancy connection to the castle and to history is as tenuous as hers. Captain de Stancy, the 'true' heir, is uninterested in both castle and history; he is far more enamoured with Paula (the daughter of a modern industrialist), and only feigns interest in the 'romantic and historical' with which Paula is infatuated. To aid his wooing of Paula, the Captain makes his own study of his family history, and of the romances and stories surrounding them (p. 208). These actions, like those of Ethelberta, are a part of a complicated 'storytelling', or deceit, directed by Dare, who is eventually revealed to be the bastard son of the Captain. Dare seeks to position the Captain so that he will obstruct Paula and George's romance and allow the de Stancys to reclaim the

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120 Gatrell suspects that illness during the writing of the novel prevented Hardy from developing this theme (*Gatrell, Thomas Hardy's Vision of Wessex*, p. 227).
castle through marriage, and Dare some sort of legitimacy through restoration of
the family name.

It is only George (an outsider) who is continually linked to the castle and
its history. As an architect he is perhaps the most active former and developer of
space in the novel. Paula wants to unite her railway-building family with the de
Stancy romance and history — she is the new laying claim to the old. The Captain
and Dare come from the old world but want to reposition themselves in the new,
through Paula and her money. George is positioned as mediator between the two,
as Hardy seems to be as author. In the castle, George plans to harmonize the old
with the new, ‘heightening and beautifying’ the old ‘rather than subduing it’ (AL,
p. 157). Like Captain de Stancy, George makes a study of the de Stancy history
but, unlike the Captain, it is not done for selfish gain, and is of the castle rather
than the family. George is rather more interested in place than in reputation and
lineage, and his remapping of the castle becomes a subtle act of repetition and
change in comparison to the aims of the others. This might be seen in his early
exploration of the site, itself a physical performance of boundaries and paths.
While exploring, he falls down a dry well, from which he is eventually rescued (p.
82); he later learns that years before a man had fallen in to the same hole and
starved to death (p. 91). While George is repeating history, he is also re-
performing it — in surviving the event, he has successfully renegotiated the past.

Hardy's Wessex might be seen to be attempting to do the same — to
mediate between the old and the new; to re-map and re-perform, trying not to
preserve a stilted ideal of a historical and ancient Wessex. In A Laodicean,
George who attempts to achieve this balance is malignend by the storytelling of
Dare and the Captain (pp. 320, 354-55), and loses his position as Paula's lover
and architect. His identity is questioned, but having cleared his name and
returned home, a marriage is only acceptable to Paula if it takes place away from
her castle. A separation from history is desired because Paula fears that if she
returns home with the name Power, the dead de Stancys will drive her from the

121 As a creator of space, George can be compared with Hardy, the novel's author. Both create and
manipulate space, and Hardy himself was a trained architect, working as one while he wrote his
early novels. Hardy also claimed that A Laodicean 'contained more of the facts of his own life
than anything else he had ever written'. Thomas Hardy, Thomas Hardy: Interviews and
Recollections, ed. by James Gibson (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 63-64.
place (p. 466). This symbolic escape from a haunting past is made physical, when on their wedding night the castle burns down. Similar to Jane's return to Rochester in *Jane Eyre* (1847), the fire seems to cleanse the past and allow a union to occur. The unknown figure that lights the fire piles together the de Stancy paintings before setting them alight. Yet, more is lost in the burning than just the de Stancy past, as mistakenly added to the blaze are paintings of greater national and international importance (p. 475), thereby risking a destruction of a greater history. Pite writes that with the novel's rejection of a 'corrupt aristocracy' something 'more genuine' is also 'rejected'.

Even with this symbolic cleansing, which seems to allow a marriage and a new beginning, the past is not completely purged, nor should it be. What is created in Stancy Castle is a liminal space – a space that is evolving, caught between two worlds (between past, tradition and the future with its newness and inscrutabilities). The importance of history and a desire to be connected to its lineages and histories remain. In the final lines of the novel Paula exclaims to George, 'I wish my castle wasn't burnt; and I wish you were a de Stancy!' (p. 481). In a landscape that correspondingly looks backwards but also forwards, the antecedents of the contemporary milieu threaten to haunt, but they are also integral in the construction of the spaces they continue to move within.

**Guidebooks: remapping and destabilising Wessex**

While Hardy's Wessex might be read as a landscape mediating between the survivals of history and modernity, between decline and progress, and between the physical and the written, such concerns are often set within the mainly rural landscape, its agricultural communities, their customs and beliefs. Often, readers and critics have read these more general aspects of rural region without recognising their austerities and complexities. This type of reading allows the creative ability of the reader to thrive in Hardy's places, shaping and re-performing place through a process similar to the reading and performance I have just completed with *Ethelberta* and *A Laodicean*. Here, reading is an

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interpretative act that redefines the landscape and creates something new. At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, this performance of spaces by the reader within the text began to affect physical as well as textual space. Hardy’s books began to be read as guidebooks as well as works of fiction. At first, Hardy offered no encouragement to this practice of searching for Wessex locations, and his unstably developing landscape, where places might have multiple names, complicated or even hindered the reader in their search.

The first published map of Hardy’s Wessex appeared in *The Bookman* for October 1891. Gatrell comments that Hardy did not object to the map, and may have offered assistance in its composition, but he refused to officially authorize it. An official guide was eventually published in 1913, by Hardy’s friend, Hermann Lea, as a part of Hardy’s Wessex Edition of his novels with Macmillan. Lea exhibits a tone of authority, writing in the introduction:

> We have it on his [Hardy’s] own assurance that the Wessex of the novels and poems is practically identical with the Wessex of history, and includes the counties of Berkshire, Wilts[hire], Somerset, Hampshire, Dorset, and Devon — either wholly or in part.¹²³

As Michael Millgate explains, Lea’s book was to ‘firmly establish itself as the standard source of information about the relationship between the Wessex locations invoked in his novels [...] and the actual topography of south-western England’.¹²⁴

Hardy had begun this more official mapping when he produced his own map for the collected Osgood editions (1895-96), which after being redrawn was included in each novel (see Figure 2).¹²⁵ Millgate writes that in September 1896 (while these new editions and maps were being published), Bertram Windle approached Hardy, asking for information on his fictional Wessex. Windle was working on a new edition of Murray’s *Handbook for Residents and Travellers in Wilts and Dorset* (1899). Hardy’s written landscape and the physical south-west continued to merge in the writing of the guidebook when Hardy supplied ‘a

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wealth of topographical detail’ to aid Windle. Much of the information provided by Hardy was used in Windle’s later guide, *The Wessex of Thomas Hardy* (1902). In his second book, Windle describes the processes at work in the creation of Hardy’s landscape. He writes that Hardy has ‘annexed unto himself a small [...] stretch of country, and has steadily, in novel after novel’, repopulated it with those who have no ‘existence outside the dreamland of its creator’s thoughts’, but who seem so real to the reader. Windle is writing of Hardy’s re-mapping of the landscape. He goes on to link Wessex back to Alfred’s ‘half-forgotten kingdom’ and to the ‘wisest of early kings’, so again establishing an ideal antecedent to Hardy’s Wessex. Windle claims it is a Wessex that has become a ‘living, breathing reality’ – a ‘part of nineteenth century life’ (p. 6). It is a nostalgic and imaginary process assisted by Windle’s own words, creating an expectation in the visitor of a historical and pastoral scene.

Windle’s guide, like the many others that followed, also allowed the reader to ‘trace the scenes described in the novels’ in the physical landscape, and so mapped Hardy’s places back on to the source of their inspiration – a reconfiguration already begun by the reader’s reading and in the use of Hardy’s novels as guidebooks. For Windle, Wessex was a place where one imagined finding ‘Bathsheba and Oak, Dick, Dewy and his wife Fancy’ – characters that are easily used to reinforce the rural myth of the guidebook Wessex.

This mapping process, begun in Hardy’s novels and extended and transformed in subsequent guidebooks, makes the tourist pilgrimage possible, and can be usefully compared with some of the earliest guides for pilgrims to the Holy Land. Similar to Simon Cole’s and John Elsner’s suggestion that early pilgrims to

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127 Bertram C. A. Windle, *The Wessex of Thomas Hardy* (London; John Lane The Bodley Head, 1902), p. 5. In the Preface to the Wessex Edition of *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Hardy acknowledges this evolution of his Wessex, calling Wessex a ‘partly real, partly dream-country’ that had ‘become more and more popular as a practical provincial definition’, where the ‘dream-country’ had become ‘solidified into a utilitarian region which people can go to, take a house in, and write to the papers from (Thomas Hardy, ‘Preface’, in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, The Wessex Novels, 1. Novels of Character and Environment, 2 (London: Macmillan, 1912), pp. vii-ix (p.xvii). Hereafter cited as *FMC*.
128 It appears it remained part of twentieth century life too. In a work exploring a comparison of physical and Hardy Wessex landscapes, Denys Kay-Robinson notes that Casterbridge has changed slightly, only a “new” spire here and there (Denys Kay-Robinson, *Hardy’s Wessex Reappraised* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1972), p. 15).
129 Windle, *The Wessex of Thomas Hardy*, p. 5.
Palestine saw the landscape as 'a physical manifestation of the Bible's text', tourists began to read the south-west of England as a manifestation of Hardy's novels. Hardy's tales, like Biblical stories 'could now be told through topography' — a process that reshaped the landscape when physical sites became locations where textual events had occurred: where Tess had been raped, or the route Ethelberta had taken on her donkey.  

Coleman and Elsner go on to suggest that what they call the 'tourist cult' has a similar text-inspired pilgrimage, where the Holy Scripture is a travel guide (p. 214). Early guides to the Holy Land were written by pilgrims who had used the Bible in their search for Biblical sites; the modern tourist equivalent likewise continues to redraw the landscape, rewriting and shifting meaning, history and even geography. The Wessex guides were doing just this.

Wilkinson Sherren's Wessex handbook, appropriately entitled The Wessex of Romance (1902), also develops a romantic, nostalgic view of Wessex. For Sherren, Wessex not only continues Hardy's attempts to link the location to an ancient past, but represents the rural ideal, where the local people, 'poor and unenlightened as they may be' are actually 'descended from a noble ancestry', and still retain something of their past paganism. The guide has transferred Hardy's characters into the physical landscape, where they supposedly continue to exist in 'union' with 'fields, meads, and wandering roadways'. Sherren goes even further to claim an 'occult relationship between the soil and its children' (pp. 7, 8). Declaring that his guide is based upon sound research and knowledge, Sherren assures the visitor that they can really see such people (p. vi).

Again, one discovers a layering of space upon space, or, indeed one space becomes another, as Wessex is Dorset, Dorset — Wessex, and both are England. Sherren writes that the term 'Wessex' now 'principally [...] denotes Dorset' (p. 24), and so rewrites geographical and cultural space, just as many other Wessex guide writers were doing. For Clive Holland, Wessex, which is 'very largely the

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131 Greg Ringer argues that tourism generally does this, being 'essentially about the creation and reconstruction of geographic landscapes as distinctive tourist destinations through manipulations of history and culture' (Greg Ringer, 'Introduction', in Destinations: Cultural landscapes of tourism, ed. by Greg Ringer (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 1-13 (p. 7)).
The county of Dorset', is a ‘portion of England’ – a region that is also representative of the whole. Holland’s guide focuses for the most part on the ‘historic’ Wessex and, of course, Alfred’s legacy is once again positioned at its centre. R. Thurston Hopkins simply calls his guide *Thomas Hardy’s Dorset* (1922), and his concession to the fictitious nature of Hardy’s landscape is that the rustics of Dorset are ‘perhaps not quite as witty as they are in Hardy’s [...] novels’. They are, however, still ‘fine old agricultural people’.134

In many of the guides, Wessex is further established as a rural ideal in paintings, sketches and photographs. Their importance cannot be underestimated in creating the Wessex the reader expects to find on their visit. In Hardy’s friend, Arthur Mee’s guide, *Dorset: Thomas Hardy’s Country* (1939), the title page advertises ‘218 Places [presented alphabetically in the guide] and 149 Pictures’.135 The guide reorders the landscape, and each photograph reveals a part of the ideal Hardy/historical countryside to be identified by the reader when visiting.

In other publications, paintings also direct the reader, but to a more imaginative and harmonised vision of what the tourist seeks. One illustrator in particular, Walter Tyndale, paints a Wessex of a regional and national rural scene. His are paintings of a rustic genre, much like those created by nineteenth-century painters Edward Bird, David Wilkie, William Collins and Thomas Webster. Christina Payne writes that ‘[a]nyone who has read the novels of George Eliot or Thomas Hardy will recognise this world’.136 More accurately, such paintings show a pastoral vision as unreal as its reading in Hardy’s novels.

Tyndale’s watercolours appeared in many guidebooks of the day, depicting places from around the world. His illustrations of Wessex, in Holland’s 1906 *Wessex*, are a collection of different places from across the physical and Hardy-written landscape. Before the title page of the book, the reader discovers Tyndale’s first painting, entitled ‘A typical Wessex cottage’ (Figure 3), which conforms to the romantic image of a thatched, comfortable abode. Smoke plumes from the chimney, and a mother and child stand at the front door, suggesting a

homeliness and goodness of scene. There are certainly no signs of poverty; one sees only a harmonious country location. The painting is colourful but subdued in tone, almost dream-like, as are many other examples of Tyndale’s work throughout the book. A later illustration, ‘A Wessex Village’ (Figure 4), depicts a similarly romanticised setting: a number of thatched cottages stand behind two children who, hand in hand, follow a road out of the village.

Such rustic representations did not accurately represent ‘evidence of the social, political and economic circumstances’, but, then that was the point, Christiana Payne writes. Images of ‘contented, hardworking labourers’ and their families could ‘help assuage fears of social disorder’.  

In the Wessex guide these pictures also reassure, creating a comforting image of ordered homeland for those who perhaps lived in the disorder of the cities. Though, interestingly, in a

Figure 3. Watercolour by Walter Tyndale, entitled ‘A typical Wessex Cottage’, in Wessex (1906)

later letter to Tyndale for use at an exhibition, Hardy praises the paintings for accuracy of form and colour, and for capturing the ‘mood or temperament’ of place. It seems Hardy too had been charmed by them. The paintings, and we might say Hardy’s acceptance of them, also ensures a transition from painting to physical place that Kenneth Olwig identifies in landscape painting more generally, where the meanings of the painted landscape are transferred to the physical, having a similarly reforming influence over place to that found in cartographical practice.

In the Hardy guides, this recreation of place often continues with a rhetoric that becomes more aggrandising than the illustrations, sometimes straying into Biblical reference when establishing its authority and depicting a paradisiacal Wessex. Charles G. Harper’s first Wessex guide, The Hardy Country (1904), again acknowledges Dorset as the centre of Hardy’s literary creation, and writes that it is a ‘land literally flowing with milk and honey’. If this was so, one can

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understand why tourists wanted to visit its utopian ‘rustic ways’. Harper’s second offering, *Wessex* (1911), dwells more on the historical Wessex, and is designed to sample the ‘picturesque wares the West of England can offer the tourist’. Here, the landscape has become a more consciously touristic commodity. It is a Wessex of ‘romance’, where real places are compared to those of Hardy’s novels, but now it is a Wessex that can be purchased in the form of souvenir, postcard or Hardy-associated memorabilia. Such trinkets have their place in religious pilgrimage too, where pilgrims take something of the holy site home, in the form of an image or relic.

Wessex businesses helped ensure the transference and survival of Hardy’s written landscape, as they realised a profit might be made. Figures 5 and 6 show advertisements from the second edition of *Burrow’s Guide to Wessex* (1928). Figure 5 is an advert for Badger Beer, its brewery based in the historical town of Blandford, but telling motorists ‘Touring in Hardy Country Look out for the “BADGER” Sign’. Figure 6 reveals that a Pottery in Wareham has ‘“EGDON” GLAZES’ in the Colours of the Heath’ – a heath found within Hardy’s novelistic landscape. Wessex was not only becoming a physical place, it was now a place one could sell.

This sale was not only a regional endeavour; just as Forster’s Purbeck and Corfe is proclaimed to be the place you take a visitor to see England, Wessex is proclaimed by the guidebooks to be a microcosmic form of nation (or as Sherren terms it, ‘Merry England’, p. 19). In F. J. Harvey Darton’s 1922 guide, Dorset is the ‘frontier of England’, where you find its ‘true story’. Marrying the parochial and national, Darton explains that one can view the ‘main tendency of English history’ on ‘local exhibition in Dorset’. Physically too, Wessex becomes England: for Treves (an acquaintance of Hardy’s), Dorset with its Hardyesque connections is, geographically, the ‘epitome of the scenery of Southern England’.

MOTORISTS
Touring in the Hardy Country
Look out for the "BADGER" Sign

HALL & WOODHOUSE LTD.
ESTABLISHED 1777

BLANDFORD BREWERY
The Sign of Quality

Motorists will find a number of well-appointed Hotels bearing the "Badger" Sign throughout the Hardy Country, where they will obtain excellent accommodation.

Figure 5. Advertisement for Badger Beer, in Burrow’s Guide to Wessex (1928)

THE SIBLEY POTTERY
WAREHAM

One Mile out of Wareham on the Bournemouth Road.


"EGDON" GLAZES
in the Colours of the Heath.

Hand-glazed and decorated Tiles for Fireplaces and Bathrooms.

The Pottery is always open to Visitors during working hours.

Figure 6. Advertisement for Sibley Pottery, in Burrow’s Guide to Wessex (1928)
Hardy seems to have been wary at first of this guide-writing process. After helping Windle with his first book, he was criticised in a *Guardian* review of the guide for calling Dorsetshire Wessex. In a letter Hardy replied that he actually applies the Wessex name to six counties, not just the one. In response to an accusation of distorting history, he reminds the reader that his work is ‘a work of imagination’ after all.\(^{145}\) Perhaps it was such reproofs, and Hardy’s own belief that what he was writing was fiction, that led him to decline to authorise Hermann Lea’s first Wessex book, *A Handbook to the Wessex Country of Thomas Hardy’s Novels and Poems* (1905), though it appears Hardy was friendly to Lea at the time, and provided helpful information on his Wessex geography. On the 4 July 1906, Hardy also declined to review Treves’s *Highways and Byways* for the *Daily Chronicle*, but he did send a small piece on the subject of books written about his Wessex. It was structurally reorganised and published anonymously by Hardy’s journalist friend, James Milne.\(^{146}\) The piece comments on the number of Wessex guides available at the time, and considers Hardy’s ‘mystifications’ of place in his earlier writing. It explains that there is no ‘doubt it was the novelist’s intention to throw readers off the scent if they thought of searching for real localities. These disguises having become useless were mostly removed later on, and a correct topography given’.\(^{147}\)

Hardy had perhaps bowed to the pressure of the critic, guide writers and public, who wanted to know where his imaginary places could be found. They had rewritten his Wessex and so, in what might be seen as a way to regain control, Hardy attempted to bring stability to his landscape, mapping Wessex and aligning each fictional place name with a ‘real’ world counterpart. This meant rewriting later editions of his novels. Pite suggests that this need to create a stable Wessex ‘is forced upon Hardy’ and reiterates recent criticism when he writes of Wessex being ‘superimposed on the original variety of his novels’.\(^{148}\) We find this change in microcosm in Stancy Castle, which was originally linked to Corfe in Dorset but

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later repositioned as Dunster Castle in Somerset. Whatever the need or reason for Hardy’s endeavour of unification, his landscape editing, as Rosemarie Morgan observes ‘attempts to forge a coherent “Wessex” topography,’ but ‘in many cases, scatters the form and content of the novel[s] in unfortunate ways’. Wessex becomes less stable on the page as its geography in Hardy’s novels becomes more deeply rooted in the physical world.

After transferring publishing rights from Harper to Macmillan, and a discussion of other editions of his novels, Macmillan suggested the Wessex Edition (1912-13). As Gatrell explains, Hardy made many revisions for these, and included photographs by Hermann Lea as frontpieces in each novel. These photographs showed real locations that matched key sites of the novels’ fictional scenes. Ethelberta contains a photograph of Corfe, A Laodicean of Dunster (see Figures 7 and 8). Hardy’s editing, and Lea’s guide and photographs of Wessex continued the merging of written and physical landscapes.

Figure 7. Photograph by Herman Lea, entitled ‘Corvesgate Castle’, in The Hand of Ethelberta, 1912 Wessex Edition

149 See Denys Kay-Robinson, ‘Hardy’s Wessex’, in The genius of Thomas Hardy, ed. by Margaret Drabble (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), pp. 110-118 (p. 113); Pite, Hardy’s Geography, p. 159.
151 Gatrell, Thomas Hardy’s Vision of Wessex, p. 114.
Pilgrimage: performance in word and underfoot

Hardy’s novels and the Wessex guides often reveal a process of moving, travelling, and mapping, from one place to another. Gatrell detects a guidebook tone in some of Hardy’s novels.\(^{152}\) They lead the reader through a Wessex one might not have otherwise seen, in perhaps what is, at times, a parody of a guide. But whereas the guidebook frequently takes much that is found at the surface of the popularised terrain, where day-tripper and weekenders have only enough time to see what is thought to be essential (often the pastoral scenes), Hardy is more subtle and in-depth in his creation.

The guide’s encouragement of the tourist to follow the journeys of Hardy’s characters enables a mimetic performance. Just as place can be seen to become space in the novel when character and reader move within it (a process of reading and physical movement), the guides similarly rewrite or re-perform place – again with the assistance of the imaginative reader. Finally, the tourist sets off into

\(^{152}\) Gatrell, *Thomas Hardy’s Vision of Wessex*, p. 71.
Wessex mapping and performing the locations the novel and the guidebook has given them. It is an act perhaps more reliant on the reading, knowledge and imagination of the reader/tourist than it is on any single text.

And yet the effect of the guide cannot be underestimated. At the beginning of the twentieth century tourism was growing quickly. Thomas Cook was well established and organising trips around the world, and the Murray and the Baedeker guides so popular for travellers in the nineteenth century, offered a ‘cultural mastery’ that could be gained, James Buzard writes, through ‘ritual contact with places and artefacts recounted in the guidebooks’. This influence over people’s knowledge and so interaction with place seems to have gone much further, and even re-scripted the movement of Kaiser Wilhelm, who began standing at his window when the changing of the guard took place because the Baedeker guide had written that this is what he did.\(^{153}\)

The Wessex guidebooks likewise reconfigured place and the expectation of the tourist; places are often listed and ordered into a series of interconnecting locations, in specific relation to each other, where not just the sites but the journey between them becomes significant. Harper’s *The Hardy Country* has chapter headings like ‘Stockbridge to Salisbury and Stonehenge’; while many of the chapters of Windle’s *The Wessex of Thomas Hardy* are entitled ‘Casterbridge to [...]’ wherever it is one is to be guided to next. With Casterbridge as the hub of the landscape, one can move to outlying places as if following the spokes of a wheel. It is a style of guidebook mapping with some tradition; Wordsworth’s *Guide to the Lakes* opens in a similar manner, giving three possible routes to the Lakes, so that one might ‘approach the several scenes in their best, or most convenient, order’.\(^{154}\)

Landscape is redrawn into linked sites of pilgrimage – places of particular importance, such as Casterbridge/Dorchester, or Budmouth/Weymouth, identified and elevated as places worth visiting. Not only do the Wessex guides, like the early guides to the Holy Land, transform place to accord with Hardy’s written landscape, their itineraries, as George Hughes notes, reduce the ‘complexity of

\(^{153}\) Buzard, *The Beaten Track*, pp. 77, 66.

choices’ by evaluating, summarising, and listing what is thought to be most convenient, efficient and best organised. The Corfe entries in the Lonely Planet demonstrate this process – a method of brief and evocatively described tourist routes equally found in Michelin, Rough, and Footprint guides. Almost like a ritual routine, the itinerary is set and easily replicated. Paul Fussell suggests this is what the tourist seeks – a place already ‘discovered by entrepreneurship and prepared for him by the arts of mass publicity’. Under the extremes of tourism, Wessex becomes this sort of known space, where the ‘tourist moves toward the security of pure cliché’.

Like ritual, cliché is reassuring, and by its processes place becomes ‘known’. Glenn Bowman – confirming guide and itinerary are not ‘simply referents pointing unobtrusively’ to specific sites – positions the guide in its wider context as part of an ‘elaborate, intertextual discourse’. As Hughes claims, the guidebook is ‘an invitation to a performance’ (we are participants in the creation of the known place). But rather than ending with the ‘completion of the itinerary’, the act continues through multiple visits by various people. Those who have visited Wessex with a guide might then go back to a Hardy novel or other Wessex writer; they may write (a re-performance) another guide, poem or novel. From the limiting capacity of the guidebook, and perhaps its cliché, a multiplicity of landscape is potentially fostered, ensuring that Wessex cannot be definitively mapped, discovered, or written about, even as the latest guide is printed and read. The guide functions as one more point of intertextuality, continuing a mimesis of landscape that is both replicating and reassuring, yet differentiating and new – a place always liminal because it is always being remapped.

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155 George Hughes, ‘Tourism and the Semiological Realization of Space’, in Destinations, ed. by Ringer, pp. 17-32 (pp. 24-25).
158 Hughes, ‘Tourism and the Semiological Realization of Space’ in Destinations, ed. by Ringer, pp. 17-32 (p. 26).
159 Miller writes of this relationship in terms of Hardy’s Wessex: the ‘novel and map; real map and imaginary map; landscape and map. Each is both prior to the other and later than it, causer and caused, inside it and outside it at once’ (Miller, Topographies, p. 21).
By reading tourism as an act of pilgrimage in the production of Wessex we find Wessex is reinforced as a sacred space. The guidebook writer Alison D. Murray acknowledges Wessex as a ‘land of literary pilgrimage’, and Windle describes its visitor as a ‘pilgrim’. The following performance confirms this, and acts to make culture real, transferring culture from book and person to landscape. Wessex, located like a pilgrimage site such as a church, temple, or holy city, achieves ‘a reputation for having a unique character’, while ‘remaining within the known boundaries of its culture’ — criteria a site of pilgrimage must meet, according to Alan Morinis. This tourist trip is at once a search to escape place and to reach place — to visit the ‘Centre and the Other’ simultaneously. Wessex is again caught in a space in-between. The quintessence of both English and regional place, it also becomes the eroticised other located on home soil — a place beyond the ‘everyday’ England of the town and city where twenty-first century life takes place.

Coleman and Elsner suggest a pilgrimage centre becomes a ‘dramatic arena’, a stage where visitors can ‘enact their own play’. These rites are also a performance of the stage. As David Crouch suggests, we can read tourism as a ‘practice of space’. This practice is both a mental performing of space similar to the reader of a book, and a physical performance of space as one bodily moves

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160 Tourism, Erik Cohen discusses, might be read in two ways: either as leisure, ‘devoid of any spiritual or cultural significance’, or as a search for that culture that sometimes seems to be missing from modern life — a search for the sacred. Erik Cohen, ‘Pilgrimage and Tourism: Convergence and Divergence’, in Sacred Journeys, ed. by Morinis, pp. 47-61 (pp. 48, 49).
162 Windle, The Wessex of Thomas Hardy, p. 5.
163 Klaus-Peter Köpping, Bernard Leistie and Michael Rudolph write that ritual is a way of making culture real (Klaus-Peter Köpping, Bernard Leistie and Michael Rudolph, ‘introduction’, in Ritual and Identity: Performative Practices as Effective Transformations of Social Reality, ed. by Klaus-Peter Köpping, Bernard Leistie and Michael Rudolph, Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006, p. 21.)
through it. Wessex becomes the site, or rather the stage, which holds many smaller stages within (microcosm/macrocosm in the form of castle, house, museum, or town from a Hardy novel). In each performance the larger whole (the identity of practitioner and place) is formed and reaffirmed, building the ‘sense of community’ that Madeline Gray notes occurs from the ‘shared activity’ of pilgrimage.

In 1893, journalist William Thomas Stead promoted a scheme for encouraging pilgrimages to national sites associated with the nation’s history as a way of reinvigorating the country’s sense of its history and values. Stead sent Hardy a letter on the subject and a reply was printed in the Review of Reviews, which Stead was editor of. Hardy writes that pilgrimage is an interesting idea but wonders if there would be difficulties in the mixing of classes at chosen locations. Coleman and Elsner, however, suggest pilgrimage might in fact have helped bridge some of these class differences, contending that ancient pilgrimage ‘celebrated’ identity by linking it to place, and so establishing a feeling of community. A pilgrimage to Wessex, then, can be seen to create a sense of place and community rooted in Hardy’s world, and in the country (nation and countryside). This search for identity can be, as Paul Basu suggests, a search for ‘home’ and ‘homeland’—the very thing Mrs Munt intends to show Frau Liesecke from the Purbeck hills in Howards End.

Sketching Corfe: moving the periphery to the hub

With this tourist-performed Wessex masquerading as England and homeland we

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168 Coleman and John Eade suggest this movement can be read in three ways: 1. As performative action, 2. As part of a semantic field, where meaning contextualises movement, or 3. As metaphor, where pilgrimage discourse may ‘evolve movement rather than require it [physically]’ (Simon Coleman and John Eade, ‘Introduction: Reframing Pilgrimage’, in Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in motion, ed. by Simon Coleman and John Eade (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 1-25 (pp. 16-17)).


again return, like the pilgrim, to Corfe Castle. Examining the many early twentieth-century guides to Hardy’s Wessex, it is soon apparent that Corfe becomes a centre to their remapping and performance. Windle highlights the ‘rich [...] historical associations’ of Corfe, citing Edward’s murder and Lady Bankes’s legendary defence. Many of the other guides also refer to these two stories. Holland expounds Corfe to be an ‘important part [...] in the history of south-eastern Wessex’. Many connect Corfe to Hardy’s Ethelberta, noting that Hardy’s name for Corfe (Corvesgate) is taken from Anglo-Saxon Ceorfan, meaning to cut, and originally refers to the geography of the area. Harper notes this name predates the castle and ‘referred to the passage cut or carved through the [...] hills by the little river Corfe’. Corfe is presented as symbol of national history and identity. On the other hand, A Laodicean loses its Corfe connection, Windle commenting that this particular novel is ‘less topographically accurate than any other’ of Hardy’s.

Other writers urge the visitor to tour the site, mimicking Ethelberta’s pilgrimage; Murray writes that one can ‘follow her footsteps’ to and around Corfe, but can do so more comfortably than Ethelberta did on her donkey. Again the site becomes the ‘historic castle of Corfe’, which tends to fictionalise history and remove the harshness from Hardy’s novel for the tourist. Sherren compares the castle to Avalon and the Round Table, confirming Corfe’s English and mythic status, adding that ‘Legends are to a country what the sunset is to the landscape – blot out the glory from the evening sky, and the earth is cold and unmagical’.

Like Wessex, Corfe appears in numerous paintings and sketches within the handbooks, in fact more so than any other landscape feature. Holland’s Wessex contains three separate watercolours by Tindale (Figures 9-11). Treve’s Highways and Byways contains five images of Corfe by Joseph Pennell (Figures

173 Windle, The Wessex of Thomas Hardy, p. 249.
175 Holland, Wessex, p. 189.
177 Windle, The Wessex of Thomas Hardy, p. 292.
178 Murray, Burrow’s Guide, p. 27.
12-16), and many other guides contain various photographs and pictures of the castle. Alternatively labelled Corfe or Corvesgate, they tell of the site’s centrality to the guidebook vision of a rural Wessex. The paintings help the authors reclaim Corfe from the periphery of Wessex and map it on to the rural ideal their guidebook hopes to lead people to. Like Tindale’s other renderings of Wessex, his Corfe is a romantic rustic spectacle, and set within the rolling hills and farmland of the area. In Figure 9, two people are seen walking up the hill to a picturesque village, while the Corfe street scene of Figure 11 is infused with a pastoral theme in the form of a shepherd herding his flock. It is the rural idyll in watercolours.

Corfe, sketched by Pennell, appears five times in Treves’s guide: twice as a full page drawing (Figures 12 and 16), and as three smaller sketches positioned between the text (Figures 13-15). It is seemingly such an important feature that Corfe appears before the book’s title page, and so introduces the reader to Dorset and Wessex (Figure 12). This first sketch of Corfe is an imposing gothic image of the castle; it is dark and forbidding and matched by Treves’s description of it sat within a ‘dark and blackened land’. It is not unlike the ‘dramatic ruin’ of the Lonely Planet, or the stormy scene of Ethelberta’s journey to the site. Treves writes of the castle, ‘Here is a scene from Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress’. It is place of quest and pilgrimage. Corfe, Treves concludes, is a ‘sacred image’.

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180 Harper gives a similar dark description with reference to Corfe’s history, writing that ‘Like some cruel ogre of folk-lore the Castle of Corfe has drunk deep of blood’ (Harper, The Hardy Country, p. 105).

181 Treves, Highways and Byways, p. 175.
Figure 9. Watercolour by Walter Tyndale, entitled ‘Corfe Castle from Nine Barrows Down’, in Wessex (1906)

Figure 10. Watercolour by Walter Tyndale, entitled ‘Corfe Castle from West Street. A Scene in The Hand of Ethelberta’, in Wessex (1906)
Figure 11. Watercolour by Walter Tyndale, entitled ‘Corfe Castle. The “Corvesgate Castle” of the Hand of Ethelberta’, in Wessex (1906)

Figure 12. Illustration by Joseph Pennell, entitled ‘Corfe Castle: The Bridge and Gateway’, in Highways and Byways (1906)
Figure 13. Illustration by Joseph Pennell, entitled ‘Corfe Castle, from the Swanage Road’, in Highways and Byways (1906)

Figure 14. Illustration by Joseph Pennell, entitled ‘Corfe: The Cross, the Town House, and the Church’, in Highways and Byways (1906)
Figure 15. Illustration by Joseph Pennell, entitled ‘Corfe from the Castle Gate’, in *Highways and Byways* (1906)

Figure 16. Illustration by Joseph Pennell, entitled ‘Corfe’, in *Highways and Byways* (1906)
Wessexes: the Powys performance

When John Cowper Powys began writing his novels in the early twentieth century, Hardy’s Wessex had become a sacred place one could visit; Powys necessarily writes in a place that was Hardy’s, and shaped by Hardy and guidebook as much as it had been by ancient myth and history. A tourist could follow a guide, see the woodland where Tess was attacked, and buy tourist trinkets, ale and pottery. Powys’s landscape begins somewhere between the historic and the Hardyesque.

Critics have often identified only four of Powys’s books as ‘Wessex novels’: Wolf Solent (1929); A Glastonbury Romance (1932); Weymouth Sands (1934); and Maiden Castle (1936). Interestingly, the English edition of Weymouth Sands was published under the title Jobber Skald (1935) because Powys had been sued over similarities between the character Phillip Crow, in A Glastonbury Romance, and one Sir Gerard Hodgkinson. To avoid a similar incident, Weymouth became Sea Sands, but, as Glen Cavaliero notes, it is still ‘clearly recognizable as Weymouth’. It is a fictionalising process reminiscent of Hardy’s Wessex, deliberately used to mislead and create a place apart from and yet within the inspiring landscape.

As it was for Hardy, Wessex for Powys was the landscape of his childhood. The village of Nevilton – the setting for his first novel Wood and Stone – is based upon Montacute. Powys’s father had been vicar there, and Powys spent his childhood in the surrounding Somerset area. Wood and Stone (1915 in the US, 1917 in England), and Ducedame (1925) can both be classified as Wessex novels. Written at the beginning of his career, they are often considered inferior to the later four ‘Wessex novels’, but ideas and themes matured in later writing begin to emerge in these earlier works. Later additions to Powys’s

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182 Crow, a rich industrialist (an evil capitalist figure) in A Glastonbury Romance, is intent on developing the area, and making Wookey Hole caves (a site of natural beauty) into an electric-lit tourist attraction. The real owner of Wookey Hole, Hodgkinson, had already electrified the caves, and objected to the villainous character, which Powys claimed was purely an invention, not knowing of Hodgkinson at the time of writing. Hodgkinson sued, and won damages (Jonathan Goodwin, ‘Nationalism and Re-enchantment in John Cowper Powys’s A Glastonbury Romance’, The Powys Journal, 17 (2007), pp. 115-132 (p. 119)).

Wessex canon are more subtle in their use of Hardy, where the first, *Wood and Stone*, is repeatedly strident in its praise. Indeed, the novel is dedicated to Hardy, ‘with devoted admiration to the greatest poet and novelist of our age’ (*WS*, p. v). The preface goes further still in its adoration, acknowledging that Powys is trespassing on Hardy’s ground (a sacred ground). He writes that one ‘could hardly have the audacity to plant one’s poor standard in the heart of Wessex without obeisance being paid to the literary over-lord of that suggestive region’. He continues by denying that his poor offering is an ‘attempted imitation of the Wessex novelist’, and states that ‘Mr Hardy cannot be imitated’, likening himself to a nomad lighting a fire in honour of the king whose land he is passing through (*WS*, p. xi). Powys was mindful that the landscape had already been skilfully mapped, and place already instilled with great meaning.  

Powys’s Wessex contains more of Hardy still. Survivals appear everywhere. Similarities exist between the authors’ technique and style, while Powys’s descriptive passages on nature and its mirroring of characters’ actions and moods align him again with the older writer. In a letter to his friend Louis Wilkinson, dated 14 December 1955, Powys admits that ‘from T. Hardy I learnt, long long ago, to see all human feelings, gestures, actions & everything else! – my own and everybody’s – against the Inanimate Background of Nature’.  

H. P. Collins claims that in Powys’s second Wessex novel, *Ducdame*, Powys, an ‘emulous’ writer in many ways, ‘almost was Hardy’. C. A Coates notes a similar mimesis in Powys’s characters, in what he reads as being ‘superficial echoes from Hardy’ in Powys’s work. He identifies James Anderson in *Wood and Stone* with Hardy’s Jude, and recognises in the novel’s young girls aspects of Hardy’s Tess. John A. Brebner finds not only similarities in Powys’s work but in *Maiden Castle* he sees a ‘deliberate use of both Hardy and his characters to

explore [the main character’s] Dud’s personality’. Brebner also points out that Dud meditates upon Hardy’s characters. As a representation of the author, Dud seems to be mirroring the thoughts of his creator, seeing Hardy in the people and places around him. The novel also trespasses upon other Hardy spaces – those of Max Gate and Hardy’s statue. Here, the physical and historical Wessex locations associated with Hardy, rather than the novelistic locations, hold power. Similar to the tourist reception of Wessex, where visitors locate Max Gate and the site of Bathsheba’s house in the same milieu, Powys differentiates little between the physical and literary locations, which are arguably in their performance by reader and tourist barely distinguishable.

From these critical examples one also reads not Powys’s recognition and search for Hardy, but the critic’s. Some critical Hardy ‘finds’ seem convincing, especially when considered alongside Powys’s own acknowledgment of Hardy’s influence. Other discoveries, though, seem a little tenuous. Coates’s digging, which finds ‘superficial echoes’ for example, perhaps tell us more of Coates than of Powys or Hardy. Yet, whoever does the mapping, the process is still active, and Hardy’s landscape bleeds into Powys’s, establishing itself as a cultural history for the places of which Powys writes. Aware of this creative process, Powys valued the meanings and associations of such a landscape, whether they were historical or fictional. Towards the conclusion of Wood and Stone, the stonemason Luke Anderson explains the importance of Hardy’s presence. Luke, having left Nevilton for Weymouth, stands on the shore looking towards Portland, ‘Hardy’s Isle of the Slingers’:

As he gazed with familiar pleasure at this unequalled view, Luke could not help thinking to himself how strangely the pervading charm of scenes of this kind is enhanced by personal and literary associations. He recalled the opening chapters of ‘The Well-Beloved,’ that curiously characteristic fantasy-sketch of the great Wessex novelist. (WS, p. 576)

189 In Weymouth Sands Powys repeatedly references inanimate objects around Weymouth as a way of mapping the site and guiding the thoughts of some of the characters. These places included the church spire, the Jubilee Clock and the Statue of King George III. These places have many associations for the locals, but to Magnus Muir they function as an ‘invocation’ of place and memory (John Cowper Powys, Weymouth Sands (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1934), p. 27).
For Luke, the meaning is literary and personal. He not only appreciates Hardy the writer, but as a stonemason Luke relates to the stonemason/sculptor, Jocelyn Pierston, of Hardy’s novel. The fictional associations of place bind Luke to the seaside resort as they mythologize the landscape for him. At the same time one detects an irony in Powys’s choice of words, an almost mocking language of cliché, closer to the journalese of a guidebook explanation of the site. Place is curiously double – of serious intertextual contemplation and experience to Luke, but of possible parody to Powys. There are two performers of the one location; the reader becomes a problematic third, inevitably blurring the first two, or siding with one.

While Luke is away in Weymouth a simultaneous process of mapping occurs by his brother, John. Driven mad, John falls to his death in an unnamed Nevilton quarry, thereafter known as ‘Jimmy’s Drop’. ‘Any future visitors [...] will have to enquire for it’ by that name, and will perhaps then learn of its meaning (WS, p. 571). This naming in death is juxtaposed to a further naming, in the baptism of Gladys’s and Luke’s baby, Mr Romer’s grandchild, around the same time as John’s demise (p. 571). Multiple forces of naming and mapping struggle within the landscape; the naming of the quarry reveals a bitter victory when the final designation of place is not completed by the powerful owner, Romer, but by the sacrificial James.

Taking inspiration from Nietzsche, Powys defines the main conflict of his debut novel as ‘an impulse to Power’ against an ‘impulse to Sacrifice’ (WS, p.3). Characters are divided accordingly. Luke joins Romer and his daughter on the side of power, while James is located with Gladys’s much-abused Italian cousin, Lacrima, and the sickly Ninsy on the side of sacrifice. This battle is reflected in the description and history given to the landscape, but is also mimicking of (influenced by) the powers within the landscape. Powys explains that the conflict is derived from the ‘legendary survivals’ so ‘deep-rooted’ in the West Country (WS, p. 3), emanating from two hills: the pagan sandstone Leo’s Hill, owned by Romer, and the green Nevilton Mount with its links to Christianity (an ancient cross was once discovered within its boundaries). These forces reflect Powys’s struggle to write his landscape against the signifiers of the past, be they of Hardy.
or history. Nevertheless, here they also reveal the power and meaning Powys takes from them. These 'legendary survivals' continually haunt Hardy's Wessex too, where pagan rites and vague magics remain in inherited story and ritual, such as those identified by Radford in the bonfires of Egdon Heath. One detects an occult power in these forces, located in the earth and soil of Powys's novel (WS, p. 5). For Powys, such forces connect the landscape to a spiritual realm, unlike anything imagined by Hardy, where landscape extends beyond survivals located in rites of agriculture and folklore into a mystical dimension beyond.

Critics have noted that, like Hardy's Wessex, Powys's is often rural, that, as Collins explains, Wessex 'remained an Arcadia'. While close reading of Hardy's Wessex reveals something more complicated than Arcadia and little of the occult outside its diminishing country customs, Collins's observation demonstrates the often repeated (mis)reading of Hardy's landscape. He colludes in the performance of Wessex as the rural ideal. His comments hold greater accuracy, though, in reference to Powys, whose Wessex can be read as a 'desired escape, whether by magic or fantasy, from a mechanical world unilluminated by faith' (p. 198). As Collins writes, Powys's landscape often fails to include aspects of modernity such as the car – Powys's roads are unusually empty places (p. 73). Yet, it is not that modernity does not pose a threat, as Philip Crow's industrial ambitions show in A Glastonbury Romance. Powys often sparsely situates these problems within the text, their danger defined through their absence, or by their eventual defeat. Like the flood at the conclusion of A Glastonbury Romance, which washes away Philip Crow's landscape-polluting modern bridge, the act of writing becomes a cleansing ritual act. As Collins argues, Powys in his landscape purification also rejects something larger (similar to the burning of paintings in A Laodicean): the 'social structure or social values' of the region (p. 198). Powys's Wessex develops in an alternative direction to Hardy's, being far more conscious of the 'inanimate, the unseen, the occult' (p. 198). Where Hardy's Wessex might be read as being somewhat limited by time and space, where boundaries are generally maintained, as Jeremy Hooker writes, by placing 'his people in

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190 Radford, Survivals of Time, p. 79.
191 Collins, Old Earth-Man, p. 198.
communities where labour bound them to the natural world', 192 Powys’s Wessex wants to ‘extend the boundaries of old Wessex’ and ‘liberate man from his social trammels’ 193 Hooker again convincingly suggests that Powys’s quest for an ‘Elysian Fourth Dimension’ was to be obtained by another double movement in the creation of space – a ‘movement of consciousness that is at once “backward”’ and into ‘the mind’s god-like power of creating and destroying its world’. 194 The movement is comparable to Kierkegaard’s backwards and forwards motion of repetition, with which I defined ritual, and it holds similarities to Butts’s and Powys’s sideways move into a spiritual dimension. This action was an escape from things to be achieved by ‘plunging deeper into them’, 195 it is an escape planned and executed using Hardy Country so that one might flee its influence and its legacies. Hardy’s Wessex becomes a tool or prop in a rite seeking and thus creating an alternative reality.

Renegotiating Corfe: other castles, other landscapes

Corfe Castle is a survival of history and Hardy, but remains a minor feature of Powys’s Wessex. Corfe is fittingly a site to look back to for Powys, but it does not form part of his or his character’s repeated quest for revelation. In Autobiography (1934), Powys includes part of a poem about Corfe, which he claims was his first attempt at poetry when a child. It tells of a child’s imaginings of ghosts haunting Corfe at night. But the poem is of some interest; its clichéd narrative recognises that space is multiple when one haunting historic presence is scared and overwhelmed by a larger, more embodied spectre. A fight ensues, but in the light of the morning both spirits fade, and only the physical blocks of the castle remain to be seen. 196 Powys is pointing to his own literary origins, perhaps mocking the spirits and layers of reality beyond the physical that so occupy his writing.

193 Collins, Old Earth-Man, p. 2.
194 Hooker, Powys and Jones, p. 16.
195 Collins, Old Earth-Man, p. 2.
196 John Cowper Powys, Autobiography (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1934), p. 68. This poem appears in full in Appendix A.
If Corfe is an early detour in Powys’s literary development, then the castle, more generally, remains a powerful centre of his landscape. This is exemplified in Powys’s exploration of the ancient site of Maiden Castle in his 1936 novel of the same name. The Iron Age hill fort looms across the Dorchester landscape from a mythic past, allowing writer and protagonist, Dud No-Man, to follow a spiritual quest backwards and inwards. This journey appears to be inspired by Sir Mortimer Wheeler’s excavation of Maiden Castle in the summer of 1935. Powys returned to England from the United States that summer and toured the dig, even attending a lecture by Mortimer (DM, p. 313).

In Powys’s novel, the castle becomes a central feature, around which identity is searched for. Characters’ movements around and to and from Maiden Castle almost replicate those of Ethelberta and others around Corfe. Here, though, the journeys to and from and around the site are completed, while Dud aims to uncover his identity rather than conceal it. The protagonist’s name alone (‘No-Man’) suggests this quest is essential to his being. Archaeological excavation of the fort continues throughout the novel and parallels Dud’s own ‘excavation’ for his past and identity.

Important discoveries are made on the dig, revealing the remains of a stone building far older than the already discovered Roman temple. Like Corfe, Maiden Castle is a mixing of ancient sacred place and tourist attraction, and Powys wryly notes that a sign telling tourists to keep to the path is worthy of Pilgrim’s Progress (the same literary illustration Treves used in describing Corfe).197 On his journey to the castle, Dud is accompanied by Quirm, a mad magician figure who believes he hears spirits and that he is the incarnation of the Welsh/Anglo Celtic sun god, Uryen (an identity contrasted to his given Biblical name of Enoch). Yet, Enoch means enlightenment – something both Quirm and Dud seek on their journeys. Dud learns that the name Uryen had originally been intended for him, and that Quirm is in fact his father.198 Dud, however, is unable to accept the mystical significance of the name or his father’s beliefs, and when they arrive at the castle, and Quirm explains to his son that ‘This, they say, was

197 Treves, Highways and Byways, p. 175.
the main gate’, Dud wonders if by ‘they’ he means his spirits or the site’s archaeologists (MC, p. 249).

Powys’s written excavation of the site for meaning is then troubled, unsure whether significance should be ascribed to the site, or rather, which meaning should be ascribed from a possible many, and whether it is spiritual or historical. Even the archaeologists disagree as to the origin of a new find – is it Greek or Roman, connected to the East, or is it a statue of Demeter or some other deity? (MC, p. 398).

In an article in The Times dated 9 October 1908, Hardy describes a similar scene taking place around the excavation of Maumbury Ring in Dorchester. The site was thought to be a Roman amphitheatre, Hardy explaining that for ‘centuries the town, the county and England generally, novelists, poets, historians, guidebook writers [...] had been freely indulging their imaginations in picturing scenes’ of what they assumed went on there. He writes that as the dig continued, the Ring seemed to be older than expected – Neolithic perhaps. But then Roman discoveries are made. The site is uncertain, and Hardy complicates this further by relating more modern tales of the area.199

Powys’s mapping of Maiden Castle through a similar plethora of stories, and through character pilgrimage, culminates in a gathering of Dud and others at the castle on Midsummer Eve. Dud lights a bonfire for the occasion (MC, p. 408), and as the fire dies and the sun’s rays replace its heat, Powys considers the unearthed artefacts, and the power that they have stored from their time in the ground and from the many prayers once offered to them. This energy suddenly explodes within the group, and led by Thuella, those assembled become antagonistic towards Dud (pp. 413-15). His partner, Wizzie, sees him now as a ‘scapegoat figure’ – a ‘Guy Fawkes of Maiden Castle’ – and Dud is only saved from violence by his father, who ritually rushes the two girls across the dying embers of the fire in an improvised cleansing rite (pp. 418-19).

Mixing holiday and tourist actions, archaeological discovery, and pagan ceremony, Powys completes a ceremonial performance of the castle that, while suggesting an ambiguity of location, also holds greater implications for his larger

Wessex milieu. Just as the bonfire at Maiden Castle offers both symbolic cleansing and destruction in mimicry of the sun, Powys later considers the sea and wind as both purifying and blighting forces. The elements, perhaps representative of the ‘they’ (Enoch’s spirits), blow from Chesil Beach across the land to Maiden Castle. The wind carries particles of things ‘sea-perforated, sea-born, sea-bitten’ across the land, and Powys suggests that these particles of the sea might have the same effect as the thought of the sea has on humankind, of both ‘sterilising’ and ‘restoring’ (pp. 454). In the same way the ambiguous ritual significance of Maiden Castle is borne across the greater landscape, blown not only in particle form by the wind, but conveyed by characters who move to and from the site, connecting centre to periphery, and allowing the castle to be a part of, and representative of, the whole.

Krisdóttir writes that Maiden Castle is ‘a metaphor both for a return to that magic centre which Powys has longed for, and the entrance to the other world which he fears’ (DM, p. 316). Radford explores this dual reading of the site, but seems inclined to emphasise the darker forces that might be read within Powys’s creation of the structure, and in the bloody histories of the site and the surrounding landscape, including the massacres of Roman battle, and the nearby burning, at Maumbury Rings, of Mary Channing for the murder of her husband in 1705. These darker intimations of the landscape form an integral part of Dud’s spiritual quest, but never overwhelm it. The potent powers which remain from these horrific past events, enable a looking back for both character and place – backward to a childhood connected to parental identity and formative memory, and backward to the origins and meanings associated with Maiden Castle.

While Dud must confront the darker side of the castle’s history, finally manifested in the attack on him around the fire, he must renegotiate another lingering presence that Maiden Castle and its more sordid histories reflect: Hardy. As Radford notes, Mary Channing had been a preoccupation of The Mayor of Casterbridge too (p. 37), while Hardy’s Maiden Castle-located short story, ‘A

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200 Powys here seems to be alluding to the myth of Aphrodite’s birth from death, where the ritual cycle of death and renewal is located in the goddess as she springs from Uranus’s castrated genitals which have been thrown into the sea.

201 Radford, Mapping the Wessex Novel, pp. 109, 37.
Tryst at an Ancient Earthwork’ is also concerned with archaeological finds, telling of two figures digging for antiquities on the ancient site on a stormy night. For the reader who knows Hardy’s tale, the story seems to haunt Powys’s reproduction of the earthwork in Maiden Castle. In ‘A Tryst’, Hardy’s castle, like Powys’s, is a place of newly discovered divinity in statue form, located in the disinterred figure of Mercury. Like Powys’s Castle, Hardy’s site houses the divinities in the form of wind, which blows about the earthen mound.202 As it does in the imagination of one of Hardy’s diggers, ‘past and present have become so confusedly mingled under the associations of the spot’ that the historical, Hardy, and Powys Maiden Castles all speak in one voice. It is as if we can hear at times the wind of Hardy’s short story, and the ‘voice’ that the place itself seems to have (‘A Tryst at an Ancient Earthwork’, pp. 178, 174) resounds through Powys’s work.

While the castle remains the key landscape feature within the text, Hardy’s Dorset statue is a site of lesser pilgrimage, continually passed and commented upon by character and author,203 and even the influence of the older regional poet, William Barnes, is noted, again in statue form (MC, p. 480). Like the landmarks in Weymouth Sands, Hardy’s statue becomes a point both physical and cultural in Powys’s remapping. Likewise, Hardy’s home, Max Gate, is referred to as the ‘sacred clump of trees planted by Hardy himself’, which ‘marked the great writer’s home’ (p. 203). Powys seems compelled to repeatedly revisit the Hardy-related features almost as much as he does Maiden Castle, thereby positioning Hardy as an integral, and perhaps inescapable, part of Powys’s performance of the Castle, in a novel that both heads to the centre of a Hardy-written landscape, while moving to its periphery. At the edge, space is less reassuringly certain, but potentially of greater spiritual insight to character and author, and perhaps only possible because Powys has constructed something mythical, through language, to escape from.


203 Reference to the Dorchester statue of Hardy can be found on pages 232, 423, and 454 of Maiden Castle.
Mary Butts: Wessex threatened, Corfe revived

At about the same time Powys was writing his Wessex novels, Mary Butts was also writing within, and at a distance from, Hardy’s Wessex. Butts is influenced far less by Hardy, yet he is often present in Butts’s description of the Dorset countryside. The reader and critic can easily imagine Hardy’s characters wandering the same landscape. Butts’s own characters are, though, quite different. They are often troubled, young, intellectual and poor country aristocrats. Unlike Hardy’s characters they know the literary, historical and mythical meanings of the land; like many of Powys’s characters they can be read as extensions of their author, and they too can detect Hardy’s lingering presence in the surrounding sights.

In Butts’s novel, Armed with Madness (1928), an American visitor, Carston, marvelling at the beauty of the Dorset countryside, exclaims ‘This is the England we think of. Hardy’s country, isn’t it?’ Butts is aware that she writes within Hardy’s Wessex; in her time and culture, one cannot escape his presence in Dorset and the West Country. Butts was certainly familiar enough with his work to see his presence there. Carston also reveals that the county, or region, is once again representative of the whole, a microcosm of England: ‘this is the England we think of’, he proclaims, as Forster does in Howards End. Like Forster’s Purbeck, Butts landscape is Hardy’s, and it is not Hardy’s. It is also very much her own. Like Forster and Powys, Butts claims Wessex through a re-performance – a process again deeply rooted in ideas of mythology, the occult and ritual. Similar to Powys, Butts’s creation is a reaction in opposition to the legacies of Hardy’s influence, but is again a response from within, and in accordance with the myths and rites of a pastoral vision of place so associated with Hardy’s inherited landscape, via the guidebook interpretations.

Carston is an outsider, a foreigner in Butts’s Wessex who cannot know the land because he has no physical or race connection to it. Powys makes a similar comparison between English and American landscape, between the large

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205 In a journal entry for 16 August 1921, Butts records having read Tess, and writes of the effect the novel has on her – it ‘rou[s] [her] fear of life’ (JMB, p. 186).
unnamed fields of the US and the those of Wessex that have some ‘historic designation carrying the mind back to the Vikings or to the Danes or to some Monastic Foundation of the time of King Stephen’.\textsuperscript{206} The true dweller in Butts’s Wessex has a symbiotic relationship with the land and therefore Carston, distanced and unknowing like the tourist, sees only a Hardy rural scene. Butts’s characters find themselves trapped between this modern, tourist outsider view of the land and a competing ideal that is dangerously close to the myth she resents. Butts subscribes to a set of rural guidelines that allow her local characters to belong in their landscape. Where Hardy’s rustics are popularly read to belong and dwell in a rural Wessex, Butts’s privileged few hold a similar knowledge of the land and its history. Having dwelt there for generations, they belong. In a letter to her friend Glenway Wescott, Butts writes of the region, ‘It’s my native place and I worship it’.\textsuperscript{207} It is in part this response to the land which allows a belonging to take place.

Patrick Wright describes Butts’s characters as ‘harmonious figures who move in poetic relation to an appropriate landscape’.\textsuperscript{208} They are carefully scripted performers on its stage – actors, who unlike Hardy’s characters in Ethelberta and A Laodicean, are, as Wright observes, ‘defined by the fact that they “know” their place’ (p. 115). For Butts, those who come from beyond Wessex’s borders, and who are often responsible for perpetuating the rural Wessex myth that Butts wishes to defy, are not welcome in what becomes Butts’s corner of England.

Butts selects a number of landscape features across Wessex as exemplary sites of magic, centres of the ‘right’ relationship with place (her relationship). They become sacred spots in a larger sacred milieu. Outsiders are not welcome, and though such sites are powerful places, Butts expounds the need to protect and defend them – a resistance often sought from within the site itself. Corfe Castle is one of these hallowed places, a liminal locale, a conduit from the physical to the

\textsuperscript{207} Mary Butts, letter to Glenway Wescott dated 1923, in A Sacred Quest: The Life and Writings of Mary Butts, ed. by Christopher Wagstaff (New York: McPherson, 1995), pp. 145-146 (p.145). 
spiritual for someone with knowledge. Corfe is of far greater importance to Butts than it is to either Hardy or Powys.209

Like the 'Guidebook Wessex', and Forster's mapping of the area in *Howards End*, Corfe is the centre of Butts's vision of Wessex and England: a microcosm of the whole. It is a place 'where the world really ends', where 'everything man once made into Gods [is] in the state in which he made them, the crude potency'.210 Butts's contemporary H. J. Massingham similarly writes of the 'God-given country of the Purbeck Hills'.211 It is a place between physical and spiritual domains, a site Butts writes in her poem 'Corfe' that is made of 'smoke and ghosts and stone'.212 It is a partly solid, partly ethereal location, built from past memories and actions. Butts's poem continues: 'When I remember you Corfe, I remember Delphi | Because your history also is a mystery of God ('Corfe', I). Corfe is aligned with an eminent centre of the classical world that held the most important oracle of its time. Eventually a place dedicated to Apollo, it was at first a place for the worship of Gaia (the Greek personification of the Earth). In linking Corfe to Delphi, Butts is simultaneously establishing Corfe Castle's historical and spiritual authority, recognising the significance of both, and feminising (as she does to place throughout her work) the sacred site.213

However, in likening Corfe to Delphi, the reader is made aware of the position modern-day Delphi occupies. It is no longer the sacred place it once was. Religious rituals are no longer performed there; the rites of tourism have taken over. For Butts these visits amount to a commodification and spoliation, not a legitimate performance of place. Butts might have acknowledged the ritualistic qualities of tourism, but would have observed no merit in them - seeing them as Cohen writes many do, as a 'mass-leisure phenomenon', 'devoid of any deeper spiritual or cultural significance'.214 Buzard explains that tourism at the time was

209 In her biography of Butts, Blondel tells of a visit by Butts and friends to Dorset, in which Butts takes them to see her favourite regional places; Corfe is among them (SFL, p. 113).
212 Mary Butts, 'Corfe', in *An Objectivist's Anthology*, ed. by Louis Zukofsky (To Publishers: Var, France, 1932), pp. 36-39 (p. 36, I). Butts 'Corfe' is given in full in Appendix B.
213 Garrity observes: 'Butts aligns women and nature with myth, and privileges them as authentic signifiers of Englishness' (Garrity, *Step-daughters of England*, p. 189). In this role, the female is not only, as Garrity notes, the 'saviour' of the nation; in this central position she is also its creator.
seen by many to be a destroyer of a place’s ‘sanctity’; we can include Butts in the group of ‘anti-tourists’ who ‘wanted to show a uniquely meaningful relationship with visited places’. For Butts a tourist would profane a sacred site.

Butts’s concept of what is sacred in such a location is troubled by her privileging of the mythical and historical components of place, because these constituents are often the motivation for a tourist visit. Her vision of a pastoral England and Wessex has much in common with the touristic creation of the rural idyll. For this reason, the modernist ‘deifying [of] the simulacrum’, which as Jane Garrity points out, Butts was greatly scornful of – preferring what is ‘real’, ‘natural’, and ‘sacred’ – remains a great part of her own Wessex vision. But for Butts, these histories and myths fortify places like Corfe against the processes of modernity and tourism, the difference being the position that such a visit is viewed from and what is seen. As Foy recognises, the importance of Corfe for Butts comes from its ‘ability to survive the ravages of time and mankind’. Again, the out-of-time quality of place is observed, but this is more closely related to the physical, in-time land. Corfe is built on ‘rock’ as well as ‘smoke’ and ‘ghosts’. It is the ‘hub’ of the land, located in and connected to ‘turf and the weed | And the wind moulded trees | And the hazel thicket | And the red blackberry thorn’ (‘Corfe’, I). Though manmade, Corfe here appears to inhabit nature’s time, cyclical rather than linear history, so a repetitive and timeless quality is maintained.

This measure of sanctity is transferred from the castle to the surrounding Wessex landscape. In ‘Corfe’, Butts chants ‘God keep the Hollow Land from all wrong! | God keep the Hollow Land going strong!’ (III, II). This mystical place name is again used in her novel Death of Felicity Taverner (1932) to describe Wessex. Taken from William Morris’s story ‘The Hollow Land: A Tale’, the name refers to an earthly paradise, ‘the second best of the places God has made,

215 Buzard, The Beaten Track, pp. 11, 12.
216 Garrity, Step-daughters of England, p. 188.
217 Foy, Ritual, Myth, and Mysticism, p. 90.
for Heaven also is the work of His hand'.\textsuperscript{219} Similarly, Butts's Hollow Land is an earthly paradise: England as it should be — the tourist rural ideal without the tourists. In an article entitled 'Vandal Visitors to the West' (1934), Butts despairs at the period of June to September that attracts holidaymakers to the Cornish area she was living in at the time of writing. She laments that access has be granted 'by the cheap car, the motor omnibus and the fashion for walking in packs'. Now the west is open to 'alien, haphazard influences from without', she writes, where nothing is 'planned, nothing protected, no one on guard, everyone exploiter or exploited'.\textsuperscript{220}

\begin{quote}
The tourist is but one of many threats to land, however. In Butts's \textit{Ashe of Rings} (1925) the land, and those rightfully dwelling in it, is threatened by the Great War. In \textit{Death of Felicity Taverner} the menace comes from urbanization. Two pamphlets further Butts's lament: 'Traps for Unbelievers' (1932) warns of the consequences of the decline of religious belief and its effects on society, individual and place, while 'Warning to Hikers' (1932) expresses concerns over population mobility, and the subsequent destruction of nature through tourist practices. Butts calls this 'rediscovering' of the countryside by the new tourist the 'cult of nature', which threatens to speed the destruction of the thing it supposedly valued.\textsuperscript{221} As a counter to these, Butts calls upon the land to rise up in resistance:

\begin{quote}
Pour the wind into it, the thick sea rain,
Blot out the landscape and destroy the train.
Turn back our folk from it, we hate the lot
Turn the American and turn the Scot
[...]
Arm the rabbits with tiger's teeth
[...]
By pain in belly and foot and mouth
Keep them out of our sacred south.
\end{quote}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textit{Corfe}, III
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{219} William Morris, 'The Hollow Land: A Tale', in \textit{The Collected Works of William Morris}, 24 vols (London: Longmans Green, 1910-1915), I (1910), pp. 254-90 (p. 280). A prayer, or song, in Morris's story runs, 'Christ keep the Hollow Land | All the summer-tide | Still we cannot understand | Where the waters glide' (p. 289). The main protagonist of the tale is named Florian (p. 254) — the same name Butts uses as a magical and martyred ancestor of the Ashe family in her novel \textit{Ashe of Rings}.

\textsuperscript{220} Mary Butts, 'Vandal Visitors to the West', \textit{Everyman}, 39 (June 1934), 484.

\textsuperscript{221} Mary Butts, 'Warning to Hikers', in \textit{Ashe of Rings' and Other Writings: 'Ashe of Rings', 'Imaginary Letters', 'Warning to Hikers', 'Traps for Unbelievers', 'Ghosties and Ghoulies'} (New York: McPherson, 1998), pp.267-95 (p. 269). Hereafter cited as \textit{WTH}. 
The elements are commanded, and nature urged to arm itself. The wind and rain hint at the divinity in nature, or nature as god — matching the 'crude potency' found in Corfe, and similarly in Powys's Maiden Castle. As in Ethelberta and Maiden Castle, nature here is a cleansing force. Here, Butts calls upon it to halt the modern desecration of the sacred. The exclusivity of castle blurs to exclusivity of nation when Butts's incantation becomes 'Turn the American and turn the Scot' ('Corfe', III).

In Butts's construction of Corfe the writer/reader/performer emerges at the centre and, at the same time, on the margins of space, just as Powys's Dud does in relation to Maiden Castle, and Ethelberta in relation to Corvesgate. Butts reaffirms this duality of position in her short story 'In the South' (1923), where the title immediately makes us aware that we are again in Butts's 'sacred south'. The tale tells of a brother and sister who, though sharing a very close relationship, have not seen each other for many years. Meeting in a village, they climb a hill to a ruined castle. The castle is never named, but as Blondel explains, the landscape is 'suggestive of Mary Butts's beloved Corfe' (SFL, p. 118). As in her poem, the castle is referred to as the 'hub'. Its description as a 'ruin' with its 'towers', atop a 'small steep hill', above a village of 'warm stone houses' ('In the South', p. 200) is reminiscent of Corfe, but again troubled slightly by its almost guidebook tone, though this is used by Butts to establish a link to Corfe without using the Corfe name. Nevertheless, brother and sister are not wholly dissimilar to the visiting tourist.

However, writing of the brother's reunion with his sister, Butts explains that 'he was stone returning to its rock, wood to its tree, water to its source in a place of stones and small trees' ('In the South', p. 193). In turn, both are linked to

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222 The designation of the south as sanctified place relies, in part, on the cultural position the area had taken at the end of the nineteenth century, in contrast to a more industrialising northern landscape. With the acknowledgment of the south as being the birth place of England, its coastal and sea border to Europe, and the histories of its defence, it became (and still is) the epitome of England and Englishness. With its many rural areas, its white cliffs at Dover, and numerous country estates, the south remains a similar borderland to that of Wessex. In 1906, poet Edward Thomas published a collection of essays entitled The South Country. In these, the southern landscape is celebrated through attention to landscape, history, and folklore, establishing it as both historical and mythical milieu.

223 Mary Butts, 'In the South', in Speed the Plough and Other Stories (London: Chapman & Hall, 1923), p. 200.
the place they have come to: ‘The country they were in, their own country, was made of turf hills, patched with small trees and stones and hammered by the sea’ (p. 193). All three are linked by earth, wood, stone and water — those old inanimate forces from which Powys constructs his mystical Wessex. The land is as much a part of them as they are of it, and the castle is symbolic of the whole. Elsewhere they are described as ‘lords of the land’ (p. 193-194), pleased to be back ‘in their own country’ — a place that ‘composed their beauties and knew its own and took them back’ (p. 200). Corfe is both homeland and paradise, in the tradition of a visionary view of England. But this makes it no less real for Butts. She acknowledges the part that the imagination plays: Corfe is partly a ‘make-believe world that was the property of the two who had grown up together’ (p. 194). She establishes Corfe as a place in the mind as much as it is in the physical landscape. Reading this with reference to de Certeau, both a mental and physical performance is made around Butts’s Corfe. Place becomes space, becomes sacred. As with Powys, the journey is both backwards and inwards (utilising history, tradition and one’s own consciousness). It is also, in terms of ritual, both a backward and forward performance, as memory and place are enlivened and remapped through the visit, reaffirming the site’s sanctity. Butts tries to make clear that this is no tourist excursion; the visiting friend/tourist is left at the bottom of the hill to wander in the forest. Not possessing the required knowledge or connection, he is unwelcome, and is forced further outside the scene when Butts suggests an incestuous quality to the relationship of brother and sister.

While Butts and the two characters create Corfe, both also acknowledge a duality to place that scares them, that positions them outside of the castle:

‘It takes more than people to put this place off its stroke. Do you know it frightens me? It has been here so long watching us come and go.’

‘Think of it the other way: that it only exists because we are here to look at it, and because we love it.’ (‘In the South’, p. 198)

Like the Wessex landscape, Corfe’s meaning, power and significance is already established before the influence of its latest acolytes. Location and its sanctity were created by others, but also seem to have existed apart from people — people cannot disrupt it. The site is an aspect of nature and of the spiritual world within
and beyond it. It is viewed according to Powys’s ‘sideways’ view, or Butts’s ‘knight’s move’. This reading of a spiritual landscape suggests both the separate aspect of nature, and the place which is there because ‘we are here to look at it’. We are here to read it. This is ‘we’, the brother and sister in Butts’s story; ‘we’, Hardy’s Ethelberta and Miss Power; ‘we’, the authors, the readers, the historians, the tourists, and the Lonely Planet guidebook writers. Each one redesigns Corfe, so that place is never fixed, never stable – always an interaction of different spaces, a space of in-betweenness and becoming.

Andrew Radford notes this subjective difference when comparing Hardy’s and Butts’s landscape. He writes that Butts was attempting to ‘redefine what [she] believed was Hardy’s increasingly dispirited awareness of a region compromised by a host of desecrating and intrusive urban influences’. This mindfulness is evident in the work of both authors, but if Butts’s approach is different, as Radford claims, then she is successfully changing Wessex (‘Hardy’s Country’), and claiming it for her own. Radford argues that Butts is attempting to preserve what Hardy has deemed already dead, through performance of a ‘vibrant pre-Christian mythology’ (p. 116). Ritual and mythic survivals are at play in both authors’ landscapes, and, whether dying or reviving, both participate in the continuing performance of Wessex – as does Powys’s landscape – where the written, the read and the walked places remain performable, if only through the medium of the tourist guide. Butts has yet to gain acknowledgment in a guidebook, but her popularity is slowly growing. Before long she too may help form the tourist map of Wessex that she would have detested.

Agriculture and gardening: a crisis of dwelling in the poetics of Wessex space

Performing the landscape: dividing ritual from myth

It was as if these men and boys had suddenly dived into past ages, and fetched therefrom an hour and deed which had been familiar with this spot. The ashes of the original British pyre which blazed from that summit lay fresh and undisturbed in the barrow beneath their tread. The flames from the funeral piles long ago kindled there had shone down upon the lowlands as these were shining now. Festival fires to Thor and Woden had followed on the same ground and duly had their day. Indeed, it is pretty well known that such blazes as this the heathmen were now enjoying are rather the lineal descendents from jumbled Druidical rites and Saxon ceremonies than the invention of popular feeling about Gunpowder Plot.¹

In the third chapter of Thomas Hardy's The Return of the Native - entitled 'The Custom of the Country' - the reader comes upon a scene of ritual survival in the Wessex landscape. The heathmen of Egdon stand before their bonfire while Hardy relates associated stories to their actions: myths explaining these fiery rites. As Michael Zeitler suggests, this chapter 'raises Hardy's Wessex ethnography to a new complexity, connecting rituals of peasant culture to mythic and potentially tragic portrayals of the human condition'.² Yet, none of the myths offered for the lighting of the fires suffices as explanation; a farrago of 'Druidical rites and Saxon ceremonies', festivals to gods and memorials to traitors, are incongruous to the blaze and to each other. And though Hardy and the reader are privy to the fire's various mythical connections, Hardy's intention, as Andrew Radford notes, is to deny such insight to those lighting and feeding the fire.³

This multiplicity of meaning, characters' ignorance, and a deliberate blending of ritual and myth, can be read as an elaborate attempt to create a sense of death that foreshadows and envelops the tragic events of the novel, with the maypole dance at the novel's conclusion positioned as an antithesis to the

³ Andrew Radford, Thomas Hardy and the Survivals of Time (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p. 79.
manifestation of death in Grandfer Cantle's dance at the opening fire. Yet, this explanation, like Hardy's mythical suggestions, seems wanting. The novel holds little prospect of rebirth, but there is more to the landscape and its population than simple decline and death. Radford, though, rightly draws the reader's attention to the scene's association with 'various forms of dissolution and failure' within the characters (age, failed marriage and infirmity); coupled with fading pagan survivals, these prophesy the 'extinction' of a group divided from 'historical continuity with their heritage'. But still the heathmen, oblivious to this doom, continue in their ritualistic act. Only the meanings for these actions have been lost, which, rather than denying, actually affirms some sort of continuity, where historical continuity often precariously exists because of its divorce from explicit meaning. Continuity remains, as Edward Tylor would agree, not in meaning but in action.

If interpretation of this perceived decline is sought through the ritualistic-myth theories of Victorian comparative anthropologists, such as Tylor, Frazer, and Harrison, then it must be concluded that myth is only an attempted explanation of an anachronistic and misunderstood ritual. The mummers play mechanically performed at the beginning of Hardy's tale again reflects this sense of lost meaning. Radford claims that the 'Heath-folk no longer represent the self-sufficient agricultural communities that fashioned traditional drama, dance and poetry'. These performances are doubly divorced from significance; firstly, through their connection with the later explanatory processes of myth, and secondly through a further decline envisaged by Hardy, where even this meaning is lost or uncertain. Any continuity revealed in the physical performance as ritual action (separate from meaning and myth) is also problematised when viewed from a similar anthropological standpoint. Harrison explores the issue through reference to ancient Greece, in Ancient Art and Ritual (1913):

4 Radford, Survivals of Time, pp. 80, 79.
5 Tylor notes 'survivals' that have 'lasted on into' 'the new state of things'; 'the proper home and meaning of these things' are, however, found in the past. Edward. B. Tylor, Primitive Culture: Research into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1871), I, p. 64.
6 Martha Carpentier writes that this idea was common to all comparative anthropologists at the time (Martha C. Carpentier, Ritual, Myth, and the Modernist Text: The Influence of Jane Ellen Harrison on Joyce, Eliot and Woolf (Australia: Gordon and Breach, 1999), p. 46).
7 Radford, Survivals of Time, p. 82.
In his actual life he hunts and fishes and ploughs and sows, being utterly intent on the practical end of gaining his food; in the dromenon [rites] of the Spring Festival, though his acts are unpractical, being mere singing and dancing and mimicry, his intent is practical, to induce the return of his food-supply. In the drama the representation may remain for a time the same, but the intent is altered: man has come out from action, he is separate from the dancers, and has become a spectator. The drama is an end in itself.8

Harrison postulates that the ritual performances of a harmonised ritual/work culture eventually become an act on the stage. The rites of older agrarian societies lose their practical intent of ensuring a good harvest by influencing crop, weather and divinity. For the population of modern Athens such actions are seasonal entertainments. Radford rightly argues that this process has taken place with the fire and mummery of Egdon. But, in measuring Egdon’s performances against those of the seemingly more successful and agriculturally-linked feasts of Far From the Madding Crowd, worth is only established by comparing theatre with theatre. Turner explains, ‘Ritual, unlike theatre, does not distinguish between audience and performers’.9 At the fire and mumming the audience is many, and, like the ceremony of feasting, amusement is the aim. Arguably, the aestheticisation of these rituals is established and subsequently furthered by Harrison, Hardy and Radford as all three mythologize, to some degree, the relationships of ritual and work in the vision of a once harmonious agricultural past that never truly existed. While a continuity of action remains in the cultural performances of Hardy’s landscape, it might be read as theatre rather than ritual.

However, even before ritual loses what Harrison calls its ‘practical intent’, she divides it into two modes of acting: work and ritual are separate acts, the latter in support of the former. Radford’s analysis similarly follows this structure. Most likely those in the fields ploughing and sowing were also involved in the supportive ritual productions, some of which Harrison explains were mimetic – possibly of work, nature or the elements. Pierre Bourdieu suggests some rites were simply a ‘practical mimesis’ of the natural process which needs to be

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facilitated'. Such an act reveals a relationship with nature, but this magical mimicry can, as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno suggest, be seen as a 'substitution' that 'takes a step toward discursive logic', and so begins the passage to the explanatory myths that 'set in motion the endless process of enlightenment' that would lead humankind away from the land into city.

While Hardy's depiction of rural society may well suggest a widening gap between cultivation and its supporting rites, and between humankind and the land (an interpretation that would have Hardy's Wessex be a simple reflection of an accepted view of nineteenth-century rural England), Hardy's artistic mimesis transforms a state of potential decline by amalgamating both work and ritual in one act. Whereas Harrison and Radford acknowledge agriculture's historical link to ritual, Hardy converts the agricultural labour in his novels into a performative ceremonial tool, which helps create his Wessex milieu and establish a close performative relationship with the landscape. Hardy's is a more conscious ritualizing of a rural location and language, akin to Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*, where poetic use of 'rustic life' and its simple language are justified by locating within them a 'far more philosophical' note, that reveals a closer connection to the soil. Hardy and his reader, aware of the ritual significance of his landscape, can again be contrasted to Hardy's characters that remain mostly unconscious of agriculture's ritual implications.

Though the large farming regions of Wessex are today more automated, requiring fewer skilled workers than they once did, the landscape is often still viewed according to the rural ideals discussed in Chapter 1. This imaginative space cohabits with an otherwise industrialised and intensively farmed place. One must acknowledge this shift in agricultural practices, intensified in the latter part of the nineteenth century, when reading Hardy's ritualised acts of husbandry. Hardy's use of an older agricultural way of life can perhaps be read as an act of


defiance of, or as resistance to, the changes taking place, or as a form of artistic alterity with similar aims. Read as ritual, however, Hardy’s farming activity never completely displaces the agricultural decline that seeps into the Wessex novels. But the ‘magic’ of literary/ritual mimesis does at least still those changes.

Continuing to read this period as one of crisis and upheaval, Mary Butts’s perception of a further distanced relationship of humankind from the land is explored here through the ritual response of gardening, read as a replacement rite for what appeared to her in the early twentieth century a lost agricultural existence. Both authors seek structured performances of the Wessex landscape in their endeavours to create something sacred in the working of the soil.

This ritual grounding and interpretation of cultivated land and practice has historical precedent in Wessex, where farming since the Neolithic period has contained ‘ceremonial or cult centres’ that, as Geoffrey Wainwright explains, lie at the centre of landscape evolution, and ‘appear at or shortly after the development of economically efficient agricultural techniques’, as a tool or ‘system of supernatural controls’ (what Harrison calls ritual’s ‘practical intent’).13 Further centralising the role of ritual, Martyn Barber contemplates the Neolithic flint mines of the south of England and the ‘interaction between the mundane [...] subsistence activities of individuals and groups [...] and the broader cosmological concerns’ that help shape these activities. He explains that what we ‘might today characterise as religious beliefs and ritual practices were an integral, if sometimes hard to observe, element of everyday life’.14 This suggests subconsciously ritual components of agricultural-type work, but also reveals a changing interpretation (a ritualising) of studied actions by later commentators. Barber goes on to detail a mining site, whose layout and tools were consciously governed by ritual and social traditions (pp 21, 22). The mine’s space is to its workers/practitioner (consciously and subconsciously) at once sacred and mundane, as it similarly is to the later reader/critic. Hardy reinforces this manifold liminal space of practitioner

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and anthropologist by locating sacred and mundane acts of husbandry as constituents of his written landscape. Wessex ritual survivals are re-explored but also developed, continuing a process of centuries that shaped, built, and allowed communities to dwell in the south-west landscape. As Desmond Bonney explains, often survivals of manmade features were reused and adapted from one period and society to another, serving a ‘variety of economic, social and political needs’. The site of Maiden Castle in Dorset for instance, once an Iron Age hill fort, was also utilised for defence by the Romans; Roman roads and Iron Age boundaries were later used as parish and estate boundaries (pp.168-69). And even the burial sites of the Bronze Age were reused for Saxon graves (p. 173). Hardy, then, salvages these sites in the creation of his own Wessex boundaries and paths, where his characters continue the ritualised construction of place.

Dwelling: making space sacred

Returning to the opening scene of Hardy’s Native, we find that in spite of the heath’s bareness, and its declining agricultural community, ritual and agriculture blend in performance on the barrow. Characters stand on a previously ritually formed place – constructed twice over at least (once in its building, and then in the funeral rites performed upon it. Perhaps the Saxons also utilised the site for a later burial?). Such a death-related ceremonial foundation to the scene adds credence to Radford’s reading of the bonfire event as a portent for death. Hardy, though, in the chapter’s opening lines, ‘Had a looker-on been posted in the immediate vicinity [...]’ (RN, p. 15), invites the reader to see (and perform through the act of reading) something more than just the fire. As a ‘looker-on’ the reader glimpses a more structured and creative ritual performance in the initial construction of the pyre. Rites blur with the theatries of spectacle, complicating and placing the scene in a border space between Hardy’s ritualistic intention and his aim to entertain the reader.

Yet, the sanctifying ritual sense of the sight never succumbs to the almost guidebook invitation to watch. The barrow has inspired a pilgrimage: 'boys and men' of the 'neighbouring hamlets' arrive, carrying 'furze-faggots', hoisted 'upon the shoulder by means of a long stake' (RN, p. 15). Their designated route and the carrying of furze on specialised instruments helps create a pilgrimage event where, as Madeleine Gray explains, such actions 'locate the pilgrim in ritual space even while travelling'. The paths are a performance essential to the journey and increase the significance of the final destination – its importance confirmed by the necessity and perhaps accompanying hardship of travel. These paths also radiate from, and lead to, the site, becoming part of the site, and drawing the greater part of the landscape, and the reader who also follows its paths, towards it.

Furze, the main fuel for the fire, is taken from the heath – an area where furze 'almost exclusively prevailed as a product' in a place that sustains little other agricultural work (RN, p. 15). The returning Clym hopes to re-establish himself as a native through the product, becoming a furze-collector. The building of the pyre then involves the men's agricultural bond to place, their livelihood intimately linked to the seemingly disconnected ritual of Hardy's making. While Clym's attempts at re-assimilation might be seen to fail, each man working towards the building of the fire is 'so involved in furze by his method of carrying the faggots that he appeared like a bush on legs' (p. 15). Those not carrying the furze are positioned as complementary performers of the space, as they 'lifted their eyes and swept the vast expanse of country commanded by their position': practitioners are united with the earth, and to the sky, and so by implication to the gods for whom, Hardy later notes, such fires were once made. Furze completes the relationship of man to land, and of man and land to the heavens. The fire, its building, the barrow it stands upon, and the surrounding fields and paths are part of the performance: a unity – to use Martin Heidegger's language – of earth, man, sky and divinity. 18

17 Madeleine Gray, 'The pilgrimage as ritual space', in Holy Ground, ed. by Smith and Brooks, pp. 91-97 (p. 91).
In *Topographies*, Miller discusses this unity of mortal, earth, sky and divinity (what Heidegger calls the ‘fourfold’, *BDT*, p. 147), as he maps Hardy’s *Native* against Heidegger’s concept of ‘dwelling’. *Poetry, Language, Thought* (1971), a collection of Heidegger’s essays concerning art, contemplates humankind’s place in the landscape – a positioning made possible through the poetic, and achieved through a unity of the ‘fourfold’. As Miller demonstrates, Heidegger’s writing proves a useful interpretive tool when approaching Hardy’s work; it also offers a language suited to a discussion of ritual and the creation of the sacred. As E. Relph argues, when the ‘fusion of dwelling and building, of the earth and the sky and the gods and mortals, is total, then geographical space is essentially sacred’. Heidegger’s theory and language is, I argue, one of great ritual significance, enhanced by the esoteric flavour of its language and the possibilities for multiple interpretations of the text.

Heidegger extrapolates meaning from, and deconstructs, his concept of ‘dwelling’ through associations with building; he explains that the Old English and High German word building, *Bauen*, also means ‘to dwell’ (*BDT*, p.144). An etymological examination establishes a layering of meaning, and creates an immediate link to the poetic (dwelling through language). So to dwell is to build twice over – physically and linguistically. Heidegger continues to extract meaning, building his theory through language: dwelling is to live in place, but is also the ‘manner in which we humans are on the earth’. ‘To be a human being means to be on the earth as a mortal’ (p. 145). Two of the fourfold, mortal and earth, are introduced. Man on the earth builds. But this word, *Bauen*, also means ‘to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for, specifically to till the soil, to cultivate the vine’ (the how of building by man on earth, so that dwelling is achieved (p. 145.).

This building is also accomplished through construction as well as cultivation. Miller points to the three images that for Heidegger link man to the

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landscape: the ‘cleft’; the ‘bridge’; and the ‘ring’. The cleft is a line, a path; it can join one place to another, it can divide, or it can be the ‘furrow cut by the plough, grave of the seed or grain’ (p. 13). Miller draws attention to the paths that crisscross Egdon Heath, along which the characters are forever hurrying, mapping the surface with their steps (p. 19). Roberto Dainotto describes this as ‘Hardy’s characters becoming the expression of a topography laid out in the map’ of Egdon. One observes this mapping in the physical movement along the paths taken by the furze carriers when building the bonfire. Heidegger’s ‘bridge’ functions in a similar way, both connecting and dividing. The ‘ring’, however, unlike the circular barrow or the enclosing walls of the home, is more than just a boundary. Humankind, their building, farming, the ‘cleft’ and the ‘bridge’ all create a unity for Heidegger between the four elements of man, earth, sky and the divinity — a unity we can read in Egdon’s bonfire-making scene. The ‘ring’ represents this all-encompassing boundary of the four — what Heidegger calls the ‘fourfold’. In his building/dwelling man and earth are for Heidegger already joined with the other two: “on the earth” already means “under the sky.” Both of these also mean “remaining before the divinities” (BDT, p. 147).

The act of building makes possible the fourfold. Just as the region for Heidegger gathers towards it rather than limiting space, an object, or a ‘thing’, such as a path, or a temple, gathers the fourfold to it — it admits the fourfold and it installs the fourfold (BDT, p. 155). Similar to de Certeau’s writing that place becomes space by movement through it, a temple, or like place, becomes meaningful for Heidegger through movement, through housing the fourfold; it gathers, letting them in. Heidegger calls this ‘presencing’ the fourfold (BDT, p. 149). The building of the fire in the Native can be read in this way, gathering the paths and fields, the earth and the sky to it. Hardy seems to create a comparable unified space; and, as with Heidegger, physical movement and language are

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essential components of this process. What occurs here of particular interest (in terms of both Heidegger and Hardy) is the emergence of the ‘poetic’, where Heidegger tells us man dwells. Heidegger explains that in language ‘the word traverses the expanse of the leeway between earth and sky. Language holds open the realm in which man, upon the earth and beneath the sky, inhabits the house of the world’. Language echoes the physical act of building as it gathers the fourfold to it. Here, dwelling is reminiscent of a liturgical ordering of space, through both the action and word of a religious performance.

Julian Young locates this poetical force in a ‘twofold’ of man and gods (earth and sky represent nature; man and divinity signify culture). For Young the ‘poetical’ allows humankind to understand where understanding is impossible (p. 377). It allows comprehension of the forces and spaces beyond control; it permits humankind to create their gods in explanation, just as early divinities were found in the sky – in the weather, the sun and the stars. Culture is made manifest through dwelling, just as culture can be given physical form through ritual. Ritual allows humankind to move from the seen (man, earth and sky) to the unseen (divinities). As Young argues, when man dwells ‘poetically’ this means that he dwells ‘in, and only in, the holy’ (p. 377). Action (physical or linguistic), uniting earth, mortal, sky and divinity, creates such holy or sacred space. Here, the ‘dwelling-space’ must be a ‘bounded space’, Young writes (p. 380), and if one does not respect the ground, one does not know it is sacred ground (p. 379). A mindfulness seems to be required – one present in Hardy’s use of agriculture but perhaps not in his characters’.

As previously mentioned, characters seem ritually unaware, but, with consideration of Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, they might still be seen to represent an unconscious ritual of the agricultural community. Bourdieu’s habitus (a structuring of physical and cultural space by ‘structuring practices’ of history,

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27 Klaus-Peter Köpping, Bernard Leistle and Michael Rudolph argue that ritual can be seen as a way of ‘making “culture” real as a mode of existence’. (Köpping, Leistle and Rudolph, ‘Introduction’, in Ritual and Identity: Performative Practices as Effective Transformations of Social Reality, ed. by Klaus-Peter Köpping, Bernard Leistle and Michael Rudolph (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006), pp. 9-30 (p. 21)
culture, myth and habit) might be applied to agriculture. Agricultural actions and events can be read as practices that are often no longer conscious observances but performances that have been objectified. 28 Not unlike Heidegger's dwelling, habitas is described as an 'art of living' (p.88), reinforced, Bourdieu argues, through ritual practices of everyday events (p. 89). Applying this to farming, 29 we can read an agricultural art of living, an agricultural habitas, with its many rituals and practices as objectifying controls over the communities who had lived that way for centuries. Hardy's conscious ritual language and construction might be seen to illuminate the already ritualised practices of his performers.

More recently, Heidegger's more conscious act of 'dwelling' has become some sort of panacea for ecocritics' environmental concern; 30 to 'dwell' has come to mean living in harmony with nature and environment. Relph interprets this 'dwelling' between the 'fourfold' as 'places which evolve, and have an organic quality', and that while 'building' is part of that, it must be done in consideration of place and of the nature around you. 31 Hardy's Wessex has been given numerous similar readings. J. I. M. Stewart claims a 'reverence for [the] natural world' in Hardy's work, 32 while Margaret Drabble has written that Hardy's Gabriel Oak views nature as a mother figure. 33 For Andrew Enstice there is 'harmony' between man and nature everywhere in Hardy's Wessex, mediated...
through agricultural living. Miller's reading of the Native is critical of Heidegger for being 'beguiled by the dream of a harmonious and unified culture', illustrated by idyllic peasant communities working the land. In contrast, Hardy is judged to be 'too close to farmwork and handiwork himself to sentimentalize it as a proper way to dwell'. Working the land can be arduous in Hardy's Wessex, as even Gabriel Oak in Far from the Madding Crowd — though exhibiting the closest and most erudite relationship with the land of all Hardy's characters — suffers from its seemingly indifferent cruelty, when losing his sheep and livelihood to its capricious nature. Miller rightly precludes the idea of idyllic dwelling from a reading of Hardy, but I believe one might also over-read these faults in Heidegger. His view of husbandry may be somewhat anachronistic, but the unity of dwelling appears to be more usefully read as harmonious or visionary, in as far as it adheres to rules and actions as set down in his writing. His often mysticism-coloured philosophy arguably encourages a reading alloying fourfold dwelling with a practice that is significantly ritualised. We can read in both Heidegger's 'dwelling' and Farmer Oak's actions, for instance, not the pleasant, pastoral means of living but a merging of the practical agricultural act and the impractical ritual act in the creation of sacred space.

Miller notes Heidegger's 'dwelling' as a place-creating concept and the importance of its intersecting paths and boundaries. He argues not only that art is an extension of this, but that the paths are themselves art (p. 15). While he describes this process as mapping, Miller does not develop the idea, as Relph suggests, in its capacity as a creator of sacred space. The paths of Egdon are performed by those who walk them. Here, art and ritual mix; the spectacle of story, and the repeated and repetitive pilgrimage of characters both create and follow the paths of the heath. The Wessex-seeking tourist through their leisure and ritual might be seen to create a matching route in the physical landscape. These text-inspired travels frequently lead to other sites connected with Hardy's

35 Miller, Topographies, pp. 55, 56.
novels, to places equally of ritual construction such as a barrow, or through the surrounding fields themselves – places so integral in the building of Wessex. As Miller explains, for Heidegger these fields are paths (clefts), found in the ‘furrow cut by the plough, grave of the seed or grain’ (p. 13). For Hardy and reader such ‘paths’ of husbandry are as important as the routes that cross Egdon.

Agricultural boundaries: history, ritual and performance

The south-west of England is both a milieu of ritual geographic survivals and a place where farming has long created regional boundaries. Both offer a sort of map for Hardy to follow. J. H. Bettey writes that this farming formation of land began to develop in Wessex around 3500 BC, when settlers from the continent brought with them new ‘techniques of agriculture and stock-breeding’. As archaeologist P. J. Fowler discusses, these settlers also built ‘earthwork enclosures’ and burial barrows, which can still be found across Wessex today, and are, he argues, ‘characteristic’ of the landscape. Fowler suggests that a ‘distinct “Wessex culture”’ began to emerge around 1500 BC (during the Bronze Age), as land boundaries during this time were laid out (p. 28). There is also evidence of much flint mining for materials (p. 30). However, it is the shape of the Iron Age fields that seem to mark the landscape more evidently today, perhaps owing to the new wooden ploughs in use during this period. Further technological advances with the arrival of the Romans in A.D 43, and their mining of the Mendips for lead (pp. 19-21), ensured agricultural survivals remained an active marker of place: furrows, boundaries and hedgerows (Heidegger’s ‘cleft’) divide and connect both the physical, and Hardy’s, landscape.

Though early agriculture-based communities shaped the landscape, their task was, at least to begin with, guided by the land itself to some degree. As with mining for lead, flint or granite, which could only take place where deposits were

38 It is interesting to note Fowler’s use of the Hardy/historical term ‘Wessex’, applied to a period and place located long before the term or area of Wessex existed either on page or under foot. Hardy’s influence is far reaching—backwards as well as forwards.
39 Bettey, The Landscape of Wessex, p. 16.
found, the type of farming an area could sustain was dictated by land and soil varieties. As knowledge of the land improved, the best use of the soil was found. In Wessex, the chalk areas of Wiltshire, Dorset and Hampshire were used to grow corn and rear sheep. The clay areas of North Wiltshire, central Somerset and North and West Dorset held small farms, many of them dairy. Some of the hillier parts of Wessex – the Mendips, parts of North and West Somerset, and Exmoor – were used for dairy and arable. Meanwhile the poorer soils of eastern Dorset, Poole and Hampshire were used for pasture.

The physical landscape and soil varieties, and Hardy’s knowledge of them, shape the author’s written Wessex; nature and manmade agricultural boundaries somewhat dictate the locations and types of farming of the novel, mirroring the original authority imposed by nature upon West Country farmers. This accumulating mimesis allows readers a degree of ‘insideness’ to cultivated Wessex. Relph defines ‘insideness’ as a belonging to a place and identifying with it, in this case as a farmer or labourer might identify with the local area. It is a relationship reliant upon special knowledge. Mediated through the novel, a ‘vicarious insideness’ is fostered (p. 52), linking the reader not only to the physical landscape, but to the written one too. The farming details engender a feeling of privileged knowledge, leading the reader to a perceived closeness to the physical Wessex that they come to believe is very similar, if not the same place. Hardy’s accuracy of representation of ‘real’ place is praised by Bettey, who writes that Hardy’s description of the Dorset heathland (Egdon) ‘cannot be bettered’. Like the poorer soils of east Dorset, Egdon Heath is a harsh, unchanging landscape, almost unfarmable. The agricultural work of Hardy’s novels corresponds to the geography and geology of Dorset. Figure 17, below, shows a map taken from B. P. Birch’s discussion of place and character movements in Hardy’s ‘Novels of Character and Environment’. Locations are mapped within

41 Relph, place and placelessness, p. 49.
42 Bettey, Landscape of Wessex, p. 10.
the soil types of the Dorset landscape.\(^{43}\) Egdon Heath is mapped onto the heath lands of Dorset, where sheep farming and gorse collection take place. The soil types likewise determine what employment Tess gains in her wanderings across the South Wessex region, in \textit{Tess}. Though not appearing in Figure 17, the dairy farm at which Tess meets Clare is located in the clay, where better grazing for cattle is to be found. When Tess is later forced to Flintcombe Ash, she relocates to the chalk and her work is redirected to crops appropriate to that soil type.\(^{44}\) Bathsheba’s farm at Weatherby, in \textit{Far from the Madding Crowd}, is located on chalk – ideal for crops and sheep. Here, Oak (a shepherd by trade), and Bathsheba (a farmer), grow corn and oats, and rear sheep.\(^{45}\)

These soil boundaries are as distinct as, and map the area as thoroughly as, Hardy’s Wessex borders, roads and paths. The soil creates regions and distinct

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\(^{45}\) Thomas Hardy, \textit{Far From the Madding Crowd}, The Wessex Novels, 1. Novels of Character and Environment, 2 (London: Macmillan, 1912), pp. 182-183, 163.
pathways that must be followed by the characters and communities who work them. Interpreting nature's boundaries as guiding and restricting human activities—and likewise Hardy's writing of them—we might be led to a reading aligned with an increasingly conventional interpretation of Heidegger's dwelling as an eco-ethical approach. Again, examining meaning through language, Heidegger introduces the word 'sparing': an Old English/High German words for building and dwelling meaning to 'remain in peace' (BDT, p. 147). 'Sparing' is 'when we leave something beforehand in its own nature': when the peace of man and earth is preserved (p. 147). He explains that through 'sparing', humankind 'saves' the earth:

To save the earth is more than to exploit it or even wear it out. Saving the earth does not master the earth and does not subjugate it, which is merely one step from spoliation (p. 148).

Relph concludes, that 'sparing' is 'letting things [...] be the way they are; it is a tolerance for them [...] it is taking care of them through building or cultivating without trying to subordinate them to the human will' (p. 39). It is no surprise that environmentalists and ecocritics read this as a new-found land ethic. Yet, agricultural work is far from being an act of complete tolerance. Even more primitive agrarian societies had to master and subordinate the land to make it fruitful. Relph might write that 'dwelling' is not a 'deliberate [...] attempt to mould space', but agriculture is. Likewise, farming practices of Hardy's characters, and Hardy's own linguistic mirroring of an agricultural landscape, is one of similar mastery.

Heidegger's 'sparing' is achieved when the unity of the fourfold defines its processes, where working of the environment must be done in the 'right' way—mindfully. Bourdieu explains that traditional accompanying rites to ploughing have the 'function of disguising and thereby sanctioning the inevitable collision of two contrary principles that the peasant brings about in forcing nature, doing it violence and violation, as he must, with ploughshare and knife'. Sacrilegious acts are intentionally transformed.46 This ritual 'sparing', or rather ritual acknowledgment (though perhaps subconscious) of violating the soil lingers

within Hardy’s landscape in various ceremonial survivals, such as the harvest feast in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. But, in ritualising agricultural work itself, Hardy transforms the physical borders and actions of Wessex farming into a more mindful act, accentuating them so that Hardy is not restricted in his use of their physical borders and traditions. Rather, it is possible that he is respectfully acknowledging of them; and, almost reciprocating, they enable him to exceed their measure and create a landscape (bounded as both agricultural and a sanctified space must be) that gathers space and meaning to it, just as Heidegger’s regions gather rather than limit. The word and the act of ritual are what allow the ‘sparing’ mode of dwelling to exist, without resorting to antiquated interpretations of farming; ritual permits husbandry to still be a process of balance and respect.

**Farmer Oak and the shearing barn: making space sacred**

Farmer Gabriel Oak, in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, can be seen to be the most knowledgeable and ritually adept of all Hardy’s agricultural performers, through an ‘insideness’ to place. Oak has often been hailed by critics as some sort of ‘earthman’, a figure, who, as Marjorie Garson writes, is in tune with nature. Garson argues that Nature’s time is the same as Oak’s time. 47 He operates within certain natural boundaries, and his knowledge of these, and his performance of his agricultural tasks, distinguishes him from others. Oak is by far the most proficient hand on Bathsheba’s farm. Proving his worth by saving Bathsheba’s barn from fire (*FMC*, p. 51), and in utilizing specialist knowledge to save her sheep from impending death from poisoning (p. 157), he is eventually rewarded in his appointment to manager of both Bathsheba’s and Boldwood’s farms (p. 380). Yet, while he is a skilled individual above all others he is not a lone worker, but rather a member of a larger agricultural community defined by its shared aims and values.

In his seminal *The Ritual Process* (1969), Victor Turner uses the Latin noun *communitas* rather than community, in order to denote a greater sense of

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togetherness and solidarity. Communitas refers to a community spirit often defined by and experienced through liminality – that period of transition and transformation found within ritual performance. Though attacked by more recent critics the concept has carried much weight in ritual and anthropological study, and I find its extended meaning of benefit here. For Turner, communitas embodies the ritual and the sacred within the group or community. Though ‘in principle boundless’, practice seems to be limited to a region. It is therefore a practice within, and in the creation of, boundaries. This might be religious, or equally secular – of church, or coronation event. Turner argues that social positions, rites and events are proficient generators of the sacred without necessarily being religious or spiritual.

We might identify at the centre of cultivation a liminality created simply by the cyclical nature of the work, where the seasonal passages of life, death and rebirth reproduce a sense of becoming and change, so initiating similar threshold ceremonies and rites. The seasons offer another natural boundary to Hardy’s structuring of his novels, along with the weather, which can be read as a reoccurring protagonist throughout Hardy’s work, shaping and frustrating characters’ plans, and binding the landscape itself. The English weather, as Homi K. Bhabha suggests, also ‘encourages memories of “deep” nation crafted in chalk and limestone’ – England the pastoral and mythical haven.

The liminality of the seasons is reflected in the seasonal rites of feasting, fairs and markets, like those found in Far From the Madding Crowd and Under the Greenwood Tree. As Zeitler writes, in Hardy’s youth, Dorchester was ‘regulated by the seasons and the agricultural and ecclesiastical calendars’. But, like Radford, Zeitler argues that such rituals surviving on Egdon Heath are no longer linked to agricultural acts in a modernising world, therefore denying the community’s link to a traditionally ‘regenerative mythopoetic culture’ (p. 125). Again, critical distinction is made between agricultural work and its supporting

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52 Zeitler, Representations of Culture, pp. 18-19.
rituals, whereas Hardy's ritualising of community farming processes creates, like Bourdieu's *habitus*, a structure of rites within and between those others identified as failures.

A heightened sense of *communitas* — one given structure by the seasons — can be read in Bathsheba's farm as it reaches one of the agricultural year's main events, the sheep shearing (*FMC*, p. 163), which Hardy designs as a moment of amplified ritual. Its significance might be compared to Roy A. Rappaport's observation of a religious ceremony and its group's tendency as the event proceeds to become more 'coordinated' (more structured in form): a more 'unified whole'. Hardy's shearing scene exhibits such characteristics, and the barn that holds these actions becomes not only the site of performance but part of the performance itself.

The chapter heading, 'The Great Barn and the Sheep-Shearers', begins this process, alluding to the scale and importance of the location. It is a 'Great' place, a building of 'vast porches [...] lofty enough to admit a wagon laden to its highest with corn'. Its design is of 'heavy pointed arches of stone', and 'dusky, filmed, chestnut roof, braced and tied in by huge collars, curves, and diagonals', which are 'far nobler in design [...] than nine-tenths of those in our modern churches' (*FMC*, p. 164). As Radford explains, 'Hardy implies that, in technologically primitive societies, religion was woven seamlessly into the rich fabric of daily routine; there was no crude division between the sacred and the secular'. The barn 'not only emulated the form of the neighbouring church of the parish [with its transepts] but vied with it in antiquity'. With transepts typical of a Romanesque or Gothic church the building resembles a crucifix in form, and is therefore sanctuary-like. It is a building apart: no one knows if the barn 'had ever formed one of a group of conventional buildings' (*FMC*, p. 164).

Hardy erects the barn as a *templum* (a sacred place) in the Weatherbury landscape. Like homes and, indeed, some churches we can interpret the building as a place embodying what Edward S. Casey calls 'hestial dwelling'.

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54 Radford, *Survivals of Time*, p. 70.
after Hestia, Greek goddess of the hearth, of order in the home and the family, Casey’s concept embodies these principles. Any place wishing to encourage ‘hestial dwelling’ will be ‘centred and self-enclosed. The implicit directionality will be from the centre toward the periphery and will thus [...] “extend inner order outward”’ (p. 133). Though both church and barn are often vast, cold spaces, Hardy’s manipulation of descriptive language and the movement of the characters act to enshrine a ‘hestial’ place. The shearsers are found at the centre of the action, by the huge doors, thrown open to let in the sunlight, creating a warmth of scene (FMC, p. 165). The shearing pen is central, with waiting areas for the sheep positioned around the periphery, as the women are likewise in the ‘background’ collecting the fleeces (p. 166). The action evolves outward from the central shearing work of the men; and, as all participants work as a unified whole, they begin to embody Turner’s communitas, where the group ritual performs sacred space.

But the farming communitas evolves into more than a mere creator of ‘hestial dwelling’, which by definition must remain inside, building-bound. Outside the barn, nature is described in its summer heights: ‘Every green was young, every pore was open, and every stalk was swollen with racing currents of juice. God was palpably present in the country’ (FMC, p. 163). The barn and those within are not out of place within this natural, fecund scene, they are part of it; God is present in both. The barn (or church) and the men who work inside shearing are as one; the sheep link proceedings to the crops outside, which they help to fertilize; and outside all of nature seems to shine. Hardy explains that ‘the barn was natural to the shearsers, and the shearsers were in harmony with the barn’ (p. 166). All are in harmony with their natural environment, not through a misguided idealisation of farm work, but through a deliberate ritualising of its actions. The rigor and harshness of work remain, but are imbued with a significance that ensures work is not seen as being mere labour but as a natural and integral part of community, environment, and nature itself. There is, in Heideggerean terms, a meeting of mortal, earth, sky and divinity: the building is linked to the men within, to nature and the sky outside, and so to the heavens; and the divinities’ presence is reaffirmed by the barn’s church associations. Through
Hardy’s carefully chosen words in the construction of the building – transformed by the movement of people within – the fourfold is drawn into the site. Work and ritual unite to generate a creative point of liminality, where the reader is gathered with the many aspects of transformation, to witness the practice of a consecrating ceremony.

Farmer Oak presides over this performance as chief and most experienced shearer/priest. There is a slip in the act though when Oak, distracted by his jealousy of Boldwood’s consorting with Bathsheba, cuts the sheep (*FMC*, pp. 169-70). Bathsheba berates Oak, just as he has chastised others for the same offence. Blood has been spilt, and the sanctity of the scene threatened in an inversion of Christian communion. For Hardy, the sacrifice of the lamb (of God) and the offering of its body and blood to those assembled is unwelcome. Blood here does not purify as it does for the church, or as it has for Hardy when characters’ deaths in the *Native* ensure the continued integrity of Egdon Heath. Here, blood is of envy and shame, testing Oak’s own abilities and his relationship with Bathsheba. The scene might be compared to Sir Gawain’s testing by the Green Knight. Gawain, partly failing his oath to his host, and in his duties as knight and courtly lover, receives a minor punishment for his slight transgression: a nick, rather than a blow to the neck from the Green Knight’s axe.\(^5\) In the tale, the rituals of romance for Gawain are measured against those of the hunt, while for Oak they are measured against the shearing. Oak strays but a little in his duties; the agricultural performance falters in the creation of the scene, but recovers. In contrast, Boldwood’s obsession with Bathsheba will distract him from his agricultural duties and lead to ruin and murder.

When shearing is completed, the supporting ritual of the shearing supper takes place. Radford focuses on the use of feasting in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, an interest for anthropological enquiry in the Victorian era.\(^5\) Though loaded with ritual performances, the ceremony of the Shearing Supper lacks the constructive possibilities of *communitas* explored in the barn. The feast’s social rituals combine fine dress, drinking, eating and singing, and the mood is


\[^5\] Radford, *Survivals of Time*, p. 67.
celebratory, but ordered hestial dwelling is replaced by an entropic spiral of failed actions divided from the praxis and community of farming. Joseph Poorgrass’s song plays upon the language and cyclicality of cultivation, linking sowing with spring, love and the customs of courtship (FMC, p. 177). Boldwood, too, contributes to the sense of ritual, when he again approaches Bathsheba about the possibility of marriage. But these rituals are fruitless. Boldwood is unsuccessful with his proposal (p. 181) and Poorgrass’s singing is laughed at (p. 177). Meanwhile, Oaks’s central position is usurped when he is forced, by Boldwood’s arrival, to move from Bathsheba’s side. Only in the labours of the field can ceremonial success be achieved in Hardy’s novel. At the feast, ritual is removed from its practical intent, and as a sham theatre it is denied success. The only meaningful actions of the feast are read jealously by Oak in the interactions between Boldwood and Bathsheba (p. 179).

The Shearing Supper’s rites, though ineffective, are less problematic than the drunken debauch of the double threshold event of the Harvest Home/wedding banquet. Though perhaps more authentic and Dionysian, and therefore associated with agriculture and regenerative cycles, the emphasis here is on destruction. The theatre of the feast threatens to jeopardize the performance of more constructive agricultural rituals that must be performed before the coming storm. As a consequence Oak is left to battle the storm and prevent the ruination of the newly harvested crops. Troy and the other men lie drunk in the shearing barn (a desecration of an earlier sacred space). The shearing scene’s early sense of communitas is lost, and Oak remains a solitary performer risking his life in the storm. The danger and the ferocity of the weather (pp. 285-88) certainly deny an

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environmentalist reading of harmonious dwelling with nature. Here, such an existence is a battle.

Oak’s position as ritual adept is reinforced as he reads portents of the coming storm in the earth and sky. His sense of the weather’s change (FMC, p. 274) is confirmed in the discovery of slugs moving indoors to escape the coming storm (p. 278). Powys would call this the reading of ‘omens’ in ‘highways and hedges’ – a ‘rough earth-wisdom of ploughed fields’ (‘a thing no philosophy can include and no psychology explain’). 59 Oak’s powers are again recognised when he searches the ‘one class of manifestation on this matter that he thoroughly understood’ – the ‘instinct of sheep’ (FMC, p. 278). A reading of nature and its boundaries (again the weather) motivates Oak to necessary action. He thatches and covers the crops (‘pile[s] of wealth’, p. 282), while above there is an ‘utter expiration of air from the whole heaven [...] which might have been likened to a death’ (p. 283). Hardy positions Oak at the centre of this cataclysmic event, uniting earth, man and sky in his acts of building, while the divinity is revealed in its harshest form.

The appearance of a candle, bestowing a sense of ghostliness or perhaps religious ceremony, reveals Bathsheba’s arrival. As she assists Oak, Hardy’s depiction of events again invites a reading of ritual performance, with Oak standing on top of the stack, as if on an unlit pyre the heavens themselves are attempting to ignite (FMC, p. 284). Bathsheba assists in the thatching, gathering and bringing the sheaves to Oak, as in ceremonial repetition she ascends and descends the stack on which he stands (p. 287). The lightning enacts a ‘dance of death’ above them, ‘skeletons [...] dancing, leaping, striding’ in their show (p. 287). A voice seems to cry out in the sky, and a tree is struck by lightning – an almost perverse re-enactment of God speaking from the burning bush to Moses. 60 The strike narrowly misses the stack, Oak, and Bathsheba (p. 288). The storm passes over head as the pair successfully battle and outwit nature, the divinities and death. A thatched monument tells of their victory. Their battle ends like the

60 Exodus 3.
close of a ceremony, as from the sky a sound like 'successive strokes on a gong' is heard (p. 288).

In contrast to Oak, Boldwood has failed in the performance of his duties; once a skilled farmer, now made incapable by despair and drink, his harvest is destroyed by the storm. Even more the outsider, Troy, unlike the others, has never had the skills or connection to place embodied in the farming community. As antithesis to the farmer, Troy is by trade a soldier. He is a man of military rituals, but they are of war and create no bond with place; rather, they foster a regimented wandering from barracks town to barracks town. Yet, married to Bathsheba and living at the farm house, a sense of ownership leads Troy to fallaciously believe he has a similar connection to the land as those who work it (FMC, p. 272). Reading Troy's misguided belief with Jonathan Bate's environmental reading of Heidegger's 'dwelling', one might conclude that 'Dwelling is not owning'. Troy neither knows nor respects his environment in a 'sparing' manner. From a ritual reading of this concept, Troy is seen to lack the ability to create a meaningful space because of ritual ineptitude and exclusion from the agricultural communitas.

When Troy attempts to create and shape the landscape around him his performance is mocked by Hardy, as again the weather intervenes as an elemental supernatural force. Troy's abandoned true love, Fanny, who carries his child, dies from exposure and exhaustion on her passage by foot to Casterbridge. His excessive remorse and the ordering of a tomb stone begin a performance of established mourning and funeral rites (FMC, p. 356), followed by the planting of flowers on her grave. This traditional act is initially destabilised by its occurrence at night (p. 357). Timing though does not deter Troy, and lantern light coupled with a meticulous arrangement of plants (the 'snowdrops were arranged in a line outside', the 'crocuses and hyacinths were to grow in rows', summer flowers at her 'head and feet', and 'forget-me-nots over her heart', p. 358) foster a skewed ghostly rite of burial and remembrance. A blurring of fulfilment and deviance from recognised ritual is complicated by Troy's prostration on the tomb; again, a duality of meaning tells of exhaustion and despair or the possibilities of worship.

61 Jonathan Bate, 'Poetry and Biodiversity', in Writing the Environment, ed. by Kerridge and Sammells, pp. 53-70 (p. 62).
Sleeping by the grave, mirroring his lover’s corpse, Troy discovers upon waking that the night’s torrential rain, funnelled by a fault in the gargoyles on the church roof, has washed the flowers away and turned Fanny’s grave into a bog (pp. 361-63). The gargoyles, as traditional features of the church used to ward off evil spirits, have frustrated Troy’s attempts at ritual performance. Unlike Oak before the storm, Troy is unable to complete his task and successfully create the space on which he practices his art. The heavens and sky above collude with the sacred site of the church (a place that like the shearing barn connects man, earth, sky and divinity in its architectural design and through the sanctifying rituals it holds). Troy’s performance is ineffective; the boundary and design of the grave are washed away. Muddled rites and his midnight timing, coupled with previous alienating acts towards the farming community have estranged Troy from both church and agricultural communitas. Hardy here also denies the church any effective position in the performing of sacred space; the secularities of the shearing barn remain superior in their religious and ritual significance.

An equally unproductive agricultural routine is echoed in Wildeve’s actions (or rather lack of) in the Native. While Wildeve’s name hints at a connection to nature, it also tells of an outsider from the garden—a refugee from paradise. His name’s religious and ritual implications are not enough though as he holds no agricultural skill. A problematic duality of name is further manifested in the land. Wildeve owns a farmed plot of heath, known to all as ‘Wildeve’s Patch’ (RN, p. 39); it is a place of rare fecundity on barren land. Yet, like Troy’s before him, Wildeve’s ownership is not matched in work. The patch is a plot of land redeemed from the heath, and after long and laborious years brought into cultivation. The man who had discovered it could be tilled died of the labour: the man who succeeded him in possession ruined himself in fertilizing it. Wildeve came like Amerigo Vespucci, and received the honours due to those who had gone before. (RN, pp. 39-40)

The processes of agricultural dwelling (tilling, fertilisation, and struggle against nature) are not completed by Wildeve. He has merely procured the land forged through other men’s labour. He has taken no part in its reclamation from nature; he has not forged its boundaries. Where Troy represents a lack of knowledge of the rites and tasks of husbandry that must be performed for the community to
survive, Wildeve is never part of the community that works the heath. As Merryn Williams observes of Egdon Heath: ‘only those who have succeeded in forming the right relationship with it survive’. Both Wildeve and Troy own but do not ritually dwell – the right acts remain unperformed. Wildeve’s attempts to flee the community and the agricultural life are met with a destruction reflecting that met by Troy’s attempts at funeral rites. Again, water (perhaps an act of purification on the part of the divinities) intervenes, drowning Wildeve and Eustacia as they attempt to flee the heath (RN, pp. 445-46).

Outside sacred space: the decline of agricultural rituals

Troy, Wildeve and Eustacia can be seen to represent an inability to perform the farming rituals that construct the Wessex of Hardy’s novels. But they are not alone. As Hardy’s agriculturally constructed world follows the same patterns as the physical landscape, his Wessex reveals the decline taking place in husbandry of the period.

In the Native, Eustacia desires the busy life of the city, planning an escape from the heath to Budmouth (Weymouth), and then on to Paris (RN p. 406), where she dreams of owning a little shop – ambitions which are disappointed in the novel. This anticipated journey mimics the population movement from English village to the city taking place in the mid-to-late-nineteenth century, made possible in part by the growth of transportation links. Bettey writes that depopulation of villages began with ‘girls leaving to work as domestic servants or shop assistants in the growing resorts of Bournemouth and Weymouth [Hardy’s Budmouth], or in the rapidly expanding towns further afield’. Jan Marsh notes that ‘between 1801 and 1911 the proportion of the population living in urban areas rose from twenty to eighty per cent’. Richard Perren explains that after the 1870s this movement drastically reduced the available labour forces in the

countryside. In his article 'The Dorchester Labourer' (1883), Hardy comments on the inevitability of this depopulation, but argues that the movement from village to town is 'the tendency of water to flow uphill when forced'. He contends that the labourer had 'ploughed and sown [the fields] from boyhood, and it was impossible for him [...] to sink altogether the character of natural guardian' in him (DL, p. 181). The labourer inhabits not his rightful but traditional place, one defined by nostalgic expectation and ritual that privileges a closeness to the land. It is a bond Hardy uses in the construction of his novelistic landscape, but he is aware that such expectation could also be damaging, as it is for Giles in The Woodlanders. This position of the labourer is both creative and destructive. Closely aligned with the reader and tourist development of Wessex discussed in the first chapter, a rural ideal is fostered by the middleclass city-dwelling readers whose location and employment had led to the decline of the communities and acts of cultivation they expected to see. Their new mental and touristic creation is a mimesis ensuring the continuation of the original physical and written landscapes but it equally destroys them through its idealising differentiation. At the same time it risks insisting that these workers stay in the country in comparative poverty to the city – a location they might otherwise benefit from. Hardy neither idealises nor critiques this positioning of the labourer in the field, nor the place of the richer resident of the city; rather, he observes and records the changes of a traditional relationship.

Often portrayed as lamenting the advances of modernity, Hardy in fact seems more ambivalent, realising that towns offered advantages of money and work in contrast to the often harsh life of the farm worker. He admits that changes were both good and bad, that the labourers while 'losing their individuality [...] are widening their ideas, and gaining freedom' (DL, p. 181). His illustration of change is arguably less about fear of modernity, than a fear of the unknown. If one reads the traditions of historical agricultural performance as ritual, then rituals had offered assurance through tradition; it was what was known

and understood. For Hardy the ‘increasing[ly] nomadic’ labourer was faced with ‘uncertainty’, disconnected from place and its customs (DL, pp. 181, 182). As agriculture changed so did the experience of place; realising this, Hardy’s novels find security in ritualistic forms.

Though many, like Butts, saw the larger town and city as a symbol of a destructive modernity, the town had always been a traditional feature of the West Country agricultural community, and Hardy recognises its importance in The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886):

Casterbridge was the complement of the rural life around; not its urban opposite. Bees and butterflies in the cornfields at the top of the town, who desired to get to the meads at the bottom, took no circuitous course, but flew straight down High Street without any apparent consciousness that they were traversing strange latitudes.

Town and country function as an organic whole. Casterbridge (Dorchester) dates back to the Iron Age and had long been a central market town to the Dorset region of Wessex. As Williams notes, The Mayor of Casterbridge portrays this busy agricultural centre as a place living ‘by the seasonal fluctuations of the corn trade’, becoming periodically the region’s hub. In Tess beehives are to be taken to market in Casterbridge (TD, p. 34), while other Wessex towns are equally important to the agricultural community. In Under the Greenwood Tree, Dick also delivers bees to market at Budmouth, and at Greenhill Fair (in Woodbury, where an annual fair was held every September during the nineteenth century), shepherds and farmers from across the region gather for the sheep fair (FMC, p. 387). The breeds of sheep at this gathering correspond to areas inside and outside the Wessex landscape: ‘South Downs’ sheep, the ‘old Wessex horned breeds’, ‘Oxfordshire’, ‘Leicesters’, ‘Cotswolds’ and ‘Exmoors’ (pp. 387-88).

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69 Williams, Thomas Hardy and Rural England, p. 118.
70 Thomas Hardy, Under the Greenwood Tree; or, the Mellstock Quire: A Rural Painting of the Dutch School, The Wessex Novels, 1. Novels of Character and Environment, 7 (London: Macmillan, 1912), p. 118.
Hardy writes of a town regulated by similar boundaries to those of the farmed countryside. Season and weather dictate occupation and movement of workers, and a sense of pilgrimage around these town hubs is heightened through Hardy’s use of ritual language and location: the fair is positioned on an ‘ancient earthwork’ and the journey to it is described as a ‘pilgrimage’ (FMC, p. 386). Pilgrimages from outlying areas with the sheep, coupled with the rites of sales and farming at the fair, create an agricultural communitas like that of the shearing barn in Far From the Madding Crowd.

The evolution of the town in the later nineteenth century, however, did not fit these patterns. In his preface to The Mayor of Casterbridge, Hardy writes that the ‘Corn Trade, on which so much of the action turns, had an importance that can hardly be realised by those accustomed to the sixpenny loaf of the present date, and to the present indifference of the public to harvest weather’. 71 F. R. Leavis’s and Denys Thompson’s polemic Culture and Environment (1933) was one of many early twentieth-century echoes of this fear, where the ‘modern citizen’ was thought to be ignorant of ‘how the necessaries of life come to him’. 72 Agriculture, its rituals and boundaries no longer connected city and countryside. Bread arrived in the store with customers having little knowledge of how it got there, and fewer people were involved with bringing it to the store in the first place. Towns were becoming places of industry and shopping, and the agricultural pilgrimage was at an end; those who visited from the country then to return now stayed to work and live.

Advancing agricultural techniques and technology also played a great part in this change. Landowner, farmer and labourer were all affected – the landowner perhaps least of all at first, but as worker’s rights improved and unions began to emerge this, too, altered. The mid-nineteenth century farming of which Hardy often writes, is described by Bettey as a ‘prosperous [...] period’. 73 In fact, Alun Howkins describes the time between the 1840s and 1870s as a ‘golden age

73 Bettey, Man and Land, p. 22.
of high farming’. Bettey illustrates such prosperity through reference to Dairyman Dick, in Hardy’s Tess — again contributing to the enshrinement of Hardy’s landscape in the physical Wessex. Dick was ‘sufficiently affluent to dress in shining broad-cloth on Sundays and be addressed as Mister Richard Crick’, Bettey explains (p. 22). However, as Bettey elsewhere discusses, this prosperity was not enjoyed by the labourers employed by the farmers. Bettey considers Sir James Caird’s enquiry into English Agriculture (1850-1851) that revealed ‘low standards of housing and diet of the labourers’ (p. 68), citing an ‘absence of even the most rudimentary sanitary arrangements for many labourers’ cottages’, where ‘dampness’ and ‘overcrowd[ing]’ were common problems (p. 69).

The enclosures of fields that took away common land also contributed to a changing relationship with the farmed landscape. Beginning in the eighteenth century (‘Forty-four percent of all Dorset enclosures by Act of Parliament took place during the period 1793-1815’), the enclosures continued into the nineteenth century, and the rural poor suffered the consequences of this enforced remapping. While enclosure increased efficiency, it removed common land that had been used by many for grazing, and forced the smaller tenants to sell their patches of soil. These rural poor became landless labourers. But, at the same time, it is these boundaries that eventually created the reassuring definition of rural England that is still so valued today.

Improvements in technologies removed particular forms of farming too, and by the beginning of the twentieth century, practices like the water meadows (a process by which fields were flooded so that grass could grow earlier in the cold season) were disappearing. They could no longer take the weight of modern machinery, and fertilizers made them an outmoded feature. Wendell Berry’s environmentalist approach laments this shift from agricultural practices that

75 Bettey, Rural Life, pp. 62-72.
76 Bettey, Man and Land, p. 7.
77 Interestingly, water meadows are still part of Powys’s Wessex landscape. Their disappearance during the period, but their inclusion in Powys’s novels, suggests a possible nostalgia for these old places and techniques. See Wood and Stone, p. 638 and John Cowper Powys, Ducdame (New York: Doubleday, 1925), pp. 238, 297. Hereafter cited as D.
78 Bettey, The Landscape of Wessex, p. 40.
followed the cyclical nature of the year to the more modern ‘linear’ model, where fertilizers allow anything to be grown anywhere at any time. Accompanying cyclical rituals therefore lose their mimetic power. Steam ploughing, introduced in the 1860s (and seen at an agricultural show, alongside the mechanical thresher in Hardy’s Jude, p. 358), made work more efficient still and far less labourer reliant. In Tess, Hardy reveals that such machinery was changing or, indeed, destroying the traditional processes of agricultural work. The thresher operator in Tess stands ‘by the engine’, a ‘dark motionless being, a sooty and grimy’, isolated figure (TD, p. 415). Hardy claims that the machine’s operator ‘was in the agricultural world, but not of it. He served fire and smoke’. Tess and the other labourers ‘of the fields served vegetation, weather, frost, and sun’ (p. 415). Tess’s work is elevated in its ceremonial significance, linguistically positioning such labour in a fourfold pattern of earth, man, sky and divinity, just as it is at the Weatherby barn in Far from the Madding Crowd. Hardy’s ritualised organicism and custom are in stark contrast to the machine that breaks down traditional rites. Man and machine coming from the north are outsiders to place and custom, and the operator’s thoughts are described as being ‘turned inwards upon himself, his eye on his iron charge, hardly perceiving the scenes around him, and caring for them not at all’ (TD, p. 415). These new farming techniques lack the subconscious ritual of traditional farming practitioners, and in recognition Hardy denies them the ritual elevation he reserves for more traditional agricultural activities.

The nineteenth century ended with an agricultural depression in England. Wet summers, poor grain yields and cheap imports from Canada and America in the late 1870s all contributed. Between 1870 and 1880 the output of grain had dropped by 25 percent. Farms like Bathsheba’s smaller interests, which had not been swallowed up through the enclosures, had to be sold, or their traditional crops changed. With corn and grain production down, sheep were no longer

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79 Berry, A Continuous Harmony, p. 159.
80 In an earlier period from that in which Tess is set, English farm labourers reacted against the invasion of new machinery; angry about the conditions of poverty and fearing that new machines were replacing them, many rioted in 1830, burning or dismantled threshing machines (Bettey, Man and Land, p. 11).
81 Bettey, Rural Life, p. 38.
needed to fertilise the soil. Grain-growing regions on the chalk land were converted into pasture, changing a landscape that had remained unchanged for centuries. Instead, cows grazed and produced milk.

Evolving boundaries: a pilgrimage of gardens

Several years into the new century the change seemed to halt; Wessex soil briefly reverted to its original corn growing usage during the food production drives of World War One. However, this arable land quickly reverted to pasture at the end of the war. By this period even larger parts of the population had moved to towns and cities, and many began to notice and even mourn the change that had taken place in England’s traditional agricultural existence. At the beginning of the new century, Mary Butts was one of its chief mourners, adamant that the Wessex of agriculture and Hardy had almost vanished.

Like Hardy, Butts notes the ritualistic elements of this old existence - a blending of nature and culture like that also presented by D. H. Lawrence in The Rainbow (1915). Amid many ritual-like scenes, chapter 4 witnesses a contrived, rhythmic movement of moonlit corn gathering that privileges agriculture as a site of ceremony. The novel more generally is concerned with the changing relationship of the Brangwen family with the soil and its cultivation.

In an article pleading for the continued recognition of agriculture’s importance, Butts writes,

If our farming ceased or refused to produce a surplus, the towns would cease to be. The farmer is the sustainer of our race - a vital figure. Yet to such a pitch have we come that people have forgotten this, and the farmer, the staff of the nation’s life, is forced to explain himself and court the townsman.82

H. J. Massingham similarly observes that ‘we are not accustomed nowadays to think that we owe anything as a nation to the country’ 83 Butts positions a rejection and ignorance of agriculture’s importance alongside an unmindfulness of

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82 Mary Butts, ‘“Back to the Land”: A Plea to the Town Dweller’, rev. of Country Days by A. G. Street, Daily Telegraph, 21 November 1933, p. 15.

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allied mythical and ritual survivals. She finds in society’s modern defiance a denial of nature itself that would ensure any survivals would not last. In her polemical pamphlet, ‘Warning to Hikers’ (1932) Butts argues that society’s relationship with place had broken with centuries of tradition:

And on that land has been written the history of [...] man, stone times and bronze times, his little cities and small house and great; his beautiful and terrible works, his conquests of nature and his compromises with her; his worship and services and rivalry with her. Until to-day, after the last hundred years, his denial of her has spread like a nest of sores. (*WTH*, p. 274)

Butts establishes a historical continuity to humankind’s relationship with the land. Being since the Stone Age, a relationship of ‘conquest’ and ‘compromise’, she recognises that nature’s boundaries must be breached but also respected. Ritual moves to religiosity when ‘worship’ is deemed an integral part of the association with the natural environment. Only, for Butts, the rites of this traditional covenant had reached a point where humankind no longer respected or acknowledged nature’s boundaries, denying and subduing them.

As a consequence of this perceived failure, Butts’s creation, unlike Hardy’s agricultural performance of Wessex, is often a diatribe on loss – on how, to use Heidegger’s terminology, people fail to ‘dwell’ as they had once done. While Butts goes on to create her own rituals of place, they are often defined by what had once been, rather than by what still survived. She argues that ‘the breeding and isolation of millions of industrial workers in large towns’ disconnected man from the land (*WTH*, p. 274). She bemoans the ‘pain’ of walking on ‘iron pavements’ (p. 276), and the city’s ‘manufactured’ ‘weather’, ‘climate’, its ‘whole environment’ (pp. 275-76). What might appear to be the construction of paths and boundaries serves not to bind, or limit, or create any sort of recognisable sacred space; they simply cover and suffocate the landscape. The ritual performance of place embodied in the shearing barn in *Far from the Madding Crowd* is far removed from these manmade modern, urban conditions. There is no unity of earth, man, sky and divinity in the limited performances of the city; Butts detects only new destructive and illegitimate boundaries, where people were beginning to realise that they went about their lives without any ‘organised or
private' 'belief or practice'. For Butts nature and religion are united in their
decline. Massingham likewise connects the two. ‘Good husbandry may be
historically called the root of good literature, true piety and the art and craft of
living’, he writes. For Butts, agriculture, art, and ritual are intertwined; and they
are the means to a better relationship with the land.

Of course, agricultural England had not entirely disappeared, nor its
rituals. In *Howards End*, Forster describes surviving pockets of country dwelling
as ‘England’s hope’. He writes of those whose ‘hours were ruled, not by a
London office, but by the movements of the crops and the sun’. For Forster, these
few ‘clumsily carr[ied] forward the torch of the sun, until such time as the nation
sees fit to take it up’. This vision is ruled by nature’s time and boundaries; it is
cyclical and ritualistic. But Forster’s is a problematic and hesitant definition of
what exactly the future England might be and who was welcome in it. Closing on
the cottage garden scene of Howards End, Henry, Margaret, Helen and Tom
represent those inhabiting the new world. Noticeably absent is the working class
Leonard. But, the spirit of Mrs Wilcox remains a part of the genius loci of garden
and house – a place embodying England’s memories and traditions, and where the
nearby freshly cut field offers hope in its promise of a good crop (*HE*, p. 342).

As in the closing passage of Forster’s novel, the garden embodied new
hope for many writers, politicians, social planners and artists at the beginning of
the twentieth century. For Butts it became a ritual tool, a performance to re-
sanctify the soil that a dying agricultural existence had threatened to surrender to
modern pavements and roads. The new call to the garden was often announced
with religious ferocity, and, as it was for Butts, it frequently appeared as a
ritualistic performance of place.

But if gardening was to be a replacement for an older agricultural link to
the land, would it be enough? The gardening of one’s own small plot, the
planting of flowers or a visit to a large landscape garden is a minor activity when
compared with the daily routines and practices of farming. If one viewed

84 Mary Butts, *Traps for Unbelievers*, in *Ashe of Rings* and Other Writings: *Ashe of Rings*,
*Imaginary Letters*, *Warning to Hikers*, *Traps for Unbelievers*, *Ghosties and Ghoulies* (New
gardening as one ritual event growing in use to replace another, then Eric Hobsbawm warns that ‘new traditions have not filled more than a small part of the space left by the secular decline of old traditions and customs’. The ‘past becomes increasingly less relevant as a model’ for new behaviours. Nevertheless, gardening has its links to the past. It has a paradoxical history of privilege and poverty, of wealthy landscape gardens and, especially in Butts’s time, small allotments for the poor. With connections to the past it has, as Rappaport discusses, a chance of becoming ‘established’: the survival of new rituals relies on there being something older within, so that the tradition, meaning, continuity and gravitas that come with time and repetition, and give ritual its power, are maintained. To be purely new and manmade denies ritual its link to the spiritual or divine (p. 32). The conclusion to Howards End suggests gardening’s rites were very much connected to those found in a vision of an older, traditional agricultural England.

Problematically, gardening personally embodies the same sort of decline for Butts as agriculture. While Hardy grew up in Higher Bockhampton, a few miles from Dorchester, surrounded by the agricultural community, Butts spent her childhood on her family’s twenty-one acre estate, of Salterns, in Dorset. The Butts estate was unconnected to the agricultural community, but Butts certainly did not see it that way. Such estates had often been centres of agricultural Wessex; Hardy demonstrates this with characters such as Mrs Charmond in The Woodlanders. Landowners were just as reliant upon the land as the farmers who leased it from them, and the labourers who worked it. For Butts, the landowners (she included her family in this group) and labourers were the true inheritors and guardians of agricultural England. ‘In our society’, she writes, ‘the upper classes, and what is left of our aristocracy have never left the land’, adding that ‘the country was their home as it was the peasants’ (WTH, p. 278). To Butts the real villain was the banality of the rising middle classes, and the working classes of the cities, all of whom had their hands, as William Butler Yeats would claim, in a

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88 Rappaport, Ritual and Religion, p. 32.
'greasy till'. In Butts's lifetime the family estate had to be sold, and the gardens of her childhood were lost to her. Butts saw this as an 'undoing in less than half a lifetime of the work of centuries' — an 'unmaking' of everything her family represented. And so memories of her childhood garden evoke a similar sense of loss to that engendered by the disappearing agricultural communities of Wessex.

In her final published work, an autobiography of her childhood, *The Crystal Cabinet*, Butts re-imagines her juvenile years, many of them spent at Salterns. She contends that 'of all crimes possible against childhood, to deprive them of a country upbringing is the most dreadful of all', when 'perceptions are awakened' and 'values are realised' (*CC*, p. 6). Butts’s memoirs envision the estate’s gardens and grounds as an earthly paradise, a sacred place — a beacon of the Wessex landscape at the very core of Butts’s development. Carolyn Merchant points to the Garden of Eden myth as an important shaper of Western Culture, for Butts the story defines her life from childhood. She claims the garden at Salterns was:

Tended as it had been for more than a century, a Perfectness. Less than a hundred acres, inland towards Bournemouth on the north-east, open heathland the young firs were beginning to encroach on. Then towards the house, a mysterious belt of wood. Several woods meeting on rising ground, ending in a dark half-moon to enclose the garden and the house. Inside this cusp, the orchard and kitchen garden [...] Then a belt of shrubbery. Then the house [...] its green lawn ran out softly between the points of the moon [...] between the beeches, the lawn flowed down to fields, studded with oaks. (*CC*, pp. 14-15)

A poetic language of movement and shape creates a garden that moves between its parts. Nature ‘flows’, runs, rises between points, and the language that shapes the area with its sibilance lends a soft tantalising sensuousness to the description. Butts carefully constructs place, sculpting a unity from its encompassing

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89 William Butler Yeats, 'September 1913', in *Collected Poems*, ed. by Augustine Martin (London: Vintage, 1992), pp. 102-03 (ll. 1-3). Butts admired Yeats and makes reference to him throughout her journals. Blondel claims this admiration came from a shared quest, a search for the "divine" life" (Blondel, in *JMB*, pp. 1-41 (p. 22)). This was a search for some sort of spiritual existence beyond the physical, one that might be sought through the use of ritual.


boundaries, which are deliberately brought to the foreground, so that the reader is aware that it is both part of the greater agricultural landscape, and a separate oasis of sacred space within it. One gains a sense that this place belongs to this corner of Dorset and always has. Tended for more than a century, Butts’s garden is implicitly connected to the more famous gardens of Wessex and England, so enhancing Saltern’s mimetic magic, which reflects the authority of English history and landscape garden, and matched with Biblical allusions to paradise.

The great landscape gardens of Wessex began to appear in the eighteenth century, as England’s wealth increased. The new estates replaced those of the sixteenth and seventeenth that had themselves replaced the powerful castles of the past. The land of agricultural Wessex had long been owned and distributed by the land owners; the house, and later its garden, became an expression of their power.92 While the next chapter discusses the importance of the country house in the Wessex landscape, the focus here remains on the garden. The two, however, are never completely divided, for it is the garden that connects the house to the greater Wessex milieu.

While early English gardens, such as Winchester Castle, were slow to develop and contained more practical elements (a herbary was added in 1178, and a ‘lawn garden’ in 1252),93 the gardens of the sixteenth century became a more ‘visual spectacle’ (p. 158). The great gardens of the eighteenth century began to use nature as part of what could be called architectural design (p. 165). This Stephen Daniels explains, is what the landscape gardener Lancelot (Capability) Brown (1716-1783) called ‘place making’.94 The later landscape gardener Humphrey Repton (1752-1818) called his work, more modestly, ‘landscape gardening’, and took a mixture of classes for clients.95 This shift, reflecting continuing societal change, is seemingly mirrored in each designer’s techniques – Brown working from large, imperial-like maps, Repton from humbler watercolours. Nevertheless, Daniels writes that Repton still feared for what ‘old

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93 Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*, p. 156.
95 Daniels, *Fields of Vision*, pp. 82, 83.
England’ was becoming (pp. 83). Both designers (along with the earlier William Kent (1685-1748) helped create the symbols of power and wealth – though in quite different styles – that still dominate parts of Wessex today. Their work includes gardens and landscaping at Milton Abbey, Ashton Court, Corsham Court, and Mamhead Park. Casey argues that there appeared a blurring between estate and nature during this period of landscape design. Its development essentially changed how we experience a garden, and what the garden signifies today.

By association, Butts’s garden is positioned in this history of the nation. Yet a garden’s very nature is to be outside of history – a place apart from the town, a quiet oasis. The garden, then, is mythically and symbolically both in and outside of history. Butts’s own literary recreation edges Salterns further into an ‘out of time’ position, lifting it from its physical associations into a realm apart. Casey similarly positions the garden as a place in-between. Unlike the hestial dwelling of a building, he explains that in a garden one enters an ‘intermediate’ place ‘between the completely constructed and the frankly wild’ – between ‘monument (e.g., a house) and boundary (that of the property in which the garden is located)’ (p. 154). In essence the garden is an ambiguous sacred space, at its centre an unequivocally sacred shrine in the form of a house. The boundaries of the profane world are forever within its reach. Casey argues that in a garden, one is ‘edged out of domestic enclosure [...] moving toward [...] uncultivated land’ – one is ‘marginal, halfway between the sacred and the profane’ (p. 154). Space is again liminal – a multiplicity of interacting spaces, as areas continually encroach upon each other.

Butts’s childhood garden is a nexus of this liminality: the house’s ‘green lawn ran out softly between [...] tall beeches’ and ‘the lawn flowed down to fields’ (CC, p. 15). Here, the grounds unite the wilder aspect of nature (the heath and great trees) with cultivation: the ‘kitchen garden’, ‘orchard’, ‘ancient apple-trees’, paths with ‘clipped box hedges about two feet high’, and the ‘croquet-lawn’ (p. 6). In Butts’s first published novel, Ashe of Rings, one finds a similar

97 Casey, Getting Back Into Place, p. 166.
intermediary description: the house and garden are part of the natural landscape but also a point of sanctity within it. Positioned by the mystical earthen rings of the title, above a cliff, the house's walled garden becomes a place where the 'air is filtered from the sea wind, and made a mixing bowl for scents, for bees, coloured insects and noisy birds'.

It is a spiritual, timeless location, but equally it is defined by its history and that of the surrounding landscape with its links to Roman, Saxon and Celtic survivals (AR, p. 6).

In *The Crystal Cabinet*, Butts has her younger self perform within Saltern's garden boundaries—a child replicating in action the thoughts of her older self. For Butts, the garden, like nature, contains power and fear; just as Giles Oak and other agricultural workers must battle against the harsher side of the environment, so must Butts. A particular tree in the grounds of Salterns, ancient and of 'dreadful power', is a 'thing to fear and adore' (CC, p. 82). Butts explains that this dreaded wild side of nature is not to be hidden or destroyed but played with and understood, for the sake of the land and for the development of oneself, so that one might understand 'the reality of things' (p. 6). As a worshipped site, the tree is performed through visits and recognition and is, through language (a site to 'adore'), reaffirmed in its sacredness. Believing humankind to have lost contact with the 'wet and stony', 'treacherous', and 'perilous' 'life out of doors' (WTH, p. 275), Butts saw her adoration in the garden as a way to let in some of the lost fear. It allows one to 'measure' (in a Heideggerean sense) the world around oneself—to represent the divinity in things through literature, and through a process of mystification. While *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *The Return of the Native* achieve this measuring of the fearful aspect of the divinity through the sky and the weather, Butts does so through the trees and the soil. The tree stretches up to the sky though, from a point within the grounds, its paths and house. Butts's ritual and literary reimagining of garden and childhood corresponds to the image of the fourfold, while her physical, chronological, and developmental passage within the grounds and childhood might be seen to be influenced by William Blake, and her juvenile

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experience of the garden can be mapped as a path from innocence to experience. Butts's dual garden paradise of fear and loveliness is climactically performed when the child confronts the fearful aspects of night in the garden—'[running] around the garden after dark' to meet her fear, and because 'God is everywhere' (CC, p. 26). Fear and loveliness are both aspects of the divinity. The garden connects the two, and unites the other dualities of the cultivated and uncultivated, light and dark, history and timelessness, the sacred and profane. As Mary runs, and elsewhere walks and plays in the garden, she traces, or performs, its paths and boundaries, like those crossing Egdon Heath map its space.

Casey develops this idea of mapping and dwelling further when considering visits to the famous landscape gardens of England, such as Blenheim, redesigned by Capability Brown. Here, one walks, meets people and ponders the garden's development and history. Casey argues one 'dwells' not only 'on foot' but also 'in thought, as well as in history — and thus in language'. As it is for Heidegger, it is here language that allows this dwelling in history and in place. Words help create event, place and their understanding. Casey's writing continues this process, elucidating this often subconscious multiple dwelling through the additional language-built habitation of his own theoretical interpretation. He goes on to write that dwelling in Blenheim in 'multiple modes' and on 'many levels' leaves him 'on the edge of dwelling' — inhabiting a liminal space (p. 170).

This interaction of manifold spaces is ritually enhanced when we consider the implications of the bank holiday and weekend tourist pilgrimage to Blenheim today. Just as Mark Neumann notes visitors looking at the Grand Canyon through such 'figurative or literal' devices as guides and maps, those at Blenheim become 'absorbed in the metaphors of Art, Spirituality, History' through similar devices, further complicating and combining the 'experience' and 'image' of the estate. Again, this being in, and performing of, place is done through language, revealing the mimetic qualities associated with a linguistic attempt to recreate and

99 Casey, Getting Back Into Place, p. 170.
understand physical space. Dwelling is not only done through language, it is made multiple through language: art, its antecedent ritual, Casey’s criticism, and Heidegger’s poetic add to a layering and liminality of location within the boundaries of this written paragraph, potentially displacing the physical locale for the reader who has, or will, visit Blenheim.

For gardener and writer Newman Flower, a comparable experience of place is realised through time spent with his friend Thomas Hardy, shortly before Hardy’s death. Flower explains the greater appreciation for the garden that he learnt from his friend. In an article, Flower aligns the poet with the garden; Hardy recreates the garden as they walk its paths, infusing it with something greater through the ‘fingers of the Great Artist’.\textsuperscript{101} With Hardy’s assistance, Flower redraws the garden in a more meaningful way, connecting it with their walk, conversation and with Hardy’s literary abilities. Here, dwelling is again a multiple act. Hardy’s gardener, Bertie Norman Stephens, associates Hardy’s own garden at Max Gate with this multiplicity of space in the simple manner of noting that Hardy’s garden was a mixture of planted and wild flowers. Stephens tells that Hardy’s favourites were the wild variety and the weeds.\textsuperscript{102} For Flower this garden of meanings, movement, language and history is something beautiful, just as it is for Butts. While Flower’s garden only hints at death through associations with Hardy’s subsequent demise, Butts’s experience is intimately associated with the death and decline of society’s agricultural rites. Much of Butts writing can be seen as an attempt to reconnect to this vision of her childhood Wessex – one sought through an evolution in the rituals of gardening.

Recommended garden visits: aesthetics and sustenance in the garden

While Butts wrote the elegiac \textit{The Crystal Cabinet} in the late nineteen-thirties, she became an avid gardener herself, writing many gardening articles. As she


considered a small plot of land, her approach to the garden allied her more closely with agriculture than her family estate had ever done. For those working in husbandry, gardens had meant something different.

Away from the privilege of the land owner's grounds, labourers of the nineteenth century often lived lives of appalling hardship. This poverty, coupled with the depressions in agriculture at the end of the Napoleonic wars, led to riots in 1816 and 'near insurrection' in 1830. As a result one saw the emergence of the small plot of land, or allotment, being offered as a remedy or pacifier to these social ills. It was a way for the outsider, the exile from wealth and influence, to feel empowered. Some groups campaigned for allotments to be provided at low rent to poorer labourers, so they might have a little patch of their own to grow food. While never entrenched in law, many landlords did make such an allowance. 103 William Cobbett argued the benefits of such small pieces of land in his Cottage Economy (1822) – land that might allow a 'large part of the food of a considerable family to be raised'. 104 Towards the end of the century, this need for the poor to be appeased with a little land was less necessary. However, gardening was again encouraged among the population, especially the poor, for different reasons. Many more were now living in the city, and were, as Butts points out, while often there from necessity, cut off from nature (WTH, p. 269). The garden became a recommended prescription for the city dwellers' troubles.

A contemporary of the late nineteenth century, William Robinson (a gardener and journalist, who launched his own gardening journal, The Garden, in 1871), wrote that

The union – a happy marriage it should be – between the house beautiful and the ground near it is worthy of more thought than it has been in the past, and the best ways of effecting that union artistically should interest men more and more as our cities grow larger and our lovely English landscape shrinks back from them. The views of older writers will help us little, for a wholly different state of things has arisen in these mechanical days. 105

Robinson draws the reader’s attention to the aesthetics of the garden and its relationship to the house. Such considerations had once troubled only the privileged and wealthy. But, as Robinson writes, a ‘wholly different state of things ha[d] arisen’, and people in the Victorian period flocked to visit gardens that embodied these principles of beauty and order – gardens once inaccessible to the masses. This movement of the population, and Robinson’s language of marriage, again suggests a relationship of ritual qualities between the house and the garden; and, while older writers might not be able to enlighten society as to how to solve a modern problem, many contemporary writers offered solutions.

Numerous Victorian authors appeared to be increasingly preoccupied with this movement towards garden visiting. Michael Waters records a number of examples where this surrogating occurs in Victorian literature. In Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* (1855) it is evident in ‘Margaret Hale’s attachment to the garden of Helstone vicarage’, 106 and in *David Copperfield*’s (1850) troubled Mr Wickford, who finds peace in visiting his out of town garden (p.166). In Charlotte Yonge’s *The Pillars of the House* (1873) a poor city curate’s family take a trip to the pleasant grounds of a country estate (p. 157). Each novel suggests a benefit from an interaction with nature through the medium of the garden. Waters notes that ‘generally [...] the garden in Victorian literature is identified with the more positive qualities ascribed to the countryside’, and is often ‘surrogate for nature in its pastoral and generous modes. Its antitheses are the city [...] and the wilderness’ (p. 150). Unlike Casey’s garden that mediates between a cultivated sacred and a wild profane, here the garden sits amid the profanity and misery of the city and a regenerative wildness of nature. The garden became, as Carter notes, a matter of morality for the Victorians: ‘moralists and educators [...] observed an increasing urban population losing its sense of dependence on the soil’. The garden was recommended to increase ‘mental and spiritual well-being’. 107 As well as guiding morality, gardens more practically offered food –

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and as Stephen Constantine discusses this was certainly gardening’s primary concern in the villages.¹⁰⁸

This recommended gardening finds a sort of parallel in the rustic painting of the period, which depicted rural settings of agricultural workers and their families. These were a contrast to harsher conditions in the cities, but also showed rural families who made the best of limited resources – an ‘object lesson for the city masses, [...] demonstrating the link between the virtues of piety, family affection, frugality and happiness’.¹⁰⁹ Conforming to the ideal of Victorian family life and reassuring fears of social disorder, these paintings functioned as a form of social control, imposing standards, allaying fears.¹¹⁰ The practice of a recommended garden-visiting ceremony is equally troubling. Stephen Bending and Andrew McRae consider its position as a ‘shared aesthetic space’ in the eighteenth century that allowed the assertion of a common ‘class identity’ by the ‘propertied’ middleclass and the aristocracy.¹¹¹ This exhibits the same constraints and ‘fixity and formality’ of ‘rules’ that David Torevell ascribes to ritual practice and its places. Rules and expectations of the ‘ritual arenas’ of the garden control ‘spatial direction, movement and gesture’,¹¹² and then encourage a continuing observance of the rules within life, outside of its boundaries. Like the smaller plots of land these rites of garden visiting can be read as a form of class control.

Back to the land: searching for paradise in the garden

Continuing to read the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a period of crisis, one discovers, as Günter Berghaus discusses, an ‘intensity of ritualism’ in response, as a technique of survival.¹¹³ Echoing Hardy’s use of agriculture as

ritual, the growth and development of gardening in this period can be read as a new rite: a new spiritual and secular exercise in the production of the sacred. A troubled society found in gardening a ritual that might eventually unite the countryside and the city. This approach became known as the 'back-to-the-land' movement. At its core we might locate the idea that the processes of garden and gardening would hold practical and spiritual benefits. Often it sought to recreate an Eden by bringing individuals' gardens together into a commune-like existence where, though not the main or only concern, the gardening or cultivation of the land (often aiming to achieve a self-subsistence), was used in an attempt to create a *communitas*, away from the noise and pollution of the old cities. Religion took centre stage early on. One early commune founded in Whiteway in the Cotswolds in 1898 was a mix of ideas and people that included members from the group the 'Brotherhood Church'. Another project, begun in 1892 by the Rev. Herbert, aimed to create farm colonies, drawing from volunteers and the city’s unemployed (p. 124). The evangelical William Booth founded his colony in Hadleigh, Essex in 1891, believing the ‘souls of the urban proletariat [...] needed saving’ (pp. 126-27). Many other groups sprung up around the country, often with similar aims: to be self-sufficient, live off the land and reconnect to nature. They were creating sanctuaries away from cities and modern life.

The realization of the Garden City at Letchworth in the early twentieth century, is for Marsh a ‘vindication’ of the ‘ideas and aspirations’ of the ‘back-to-the-land movement’ (p. 220). The concept of the Garden City was conceived by Ebenezer Howard in his *Tomorrow: a Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (1898). The book appeared under the new title *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* in 1902. As a manifesto uniting city and country in a new vision for humankind’s habitation, it embodies many of the goals of a communal and agricultural return to the land sought by earlier groups.

Indeed, what can be seen as earlier examples of the garden city also influenced Howard. George Cadbury’s Bournville in Birmingham was established in 1893, and aimed to create an ideal community for Cadbury’s workers. Bournville included many gardens, but no public houses; outdoor

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114 Marsh, *Back to the Land* pp. 107, 104.
pursuits were encouraged. William Hesketh Lever, the owner of soap makers
Lever Brothers (now part of Unilever), began work on a similar project in 1899
near Liverpool, called Port Sunlight. Both patrons positioned themselves as
‘paternalistic landlords’, in the old style of the English aristocratic land owner. 115
Both were involved in the Garden City Association, which held its first meeting
on 10 June 1899. 116 At a Garden City conference at Bournville in 1901, Cadbury
reportedly spoke of ‘getting men into the land where they could enjoy their
gardens’, and of bringing people ‘into contact with Nature’. Cadbury was later to
say that by improving people’s surroundings the nation could be raised, ‘morally,
physically and spiritually’. As a practicing Quaker he had a religious mission,
while Lever similarly wanted to ‘socialize and Christianize business relations’. 117

Strikingly, Howard’s early conception of his garden city is one of
ritualistic consideration. The designs are formal, made of horizontal lines and
concentric circles, and annotated with Biblical language, proclaiming ‘Go Up &
Possess the Land’. These Biblical words of longing for homeland in
Deuteronomy appear in Figure 18 – an early cross section of the planned city
design that was not included in the published book. As Standish Meacham
explains, ‘many of those engaged in bringing the garden cities […] to life no doubt
believed that they were doing God’s will, though they seldom declared [this]
explicitly’. 118 Peter Hodgson regards the theologian and the artist as comparable
in their engagement in a ‘creative act’, looking for a ‘possible world in which
human beings can dwell humanly’; here, these occupations seem to merge even
further in the aspirations of the designers of the garden city. 119

Figure 19 reveals one of Howard’s designs for the city. The diagram
depicts a group of Howard’s ideal cities – a central city, with smaller satellite
cities around it. Each city was to be made of concentric circles of dwelling, where
people lived, shopped and worked, all arranged around a central garden. Each
house would also have its own garden. Boulevards would radiate from the central

115 Standish Meacham, Regaining Paradise: Englishness and the Early Garden City Movement
119 Peter Hodgson, Theology in the Fiction of George Eliot: The Mystery Beneath the Real
city garden, linking inner and outer rings of the city’s design. On the outskirts of the city industry, farming, factories and coal yards would be located. Train routes would encircle the city and radiate from its centre, connecting it to other cities. The utopian designs tell of sacred space, ideas of ‘dwelling’ that would solve all humankind’s problems.

The layout of the city might be compared to older tribal designs of villages that would incorporate secular and religious areas into the villages plan, with the most sacred sites at the centre, and the profane sites outside the main perimeters. Planners still do something similar today. We often find the most sacred points of the city at its centre – the secular town hall, and the religious cathedral. In fact, if you compare Figure 19 and Figure 20, interesting similarities in design can be seen. Figure 20 is a plan of St. Peter’s Basilica, and is used by Casey as an example of a religious building conforming to the principles of the earlier discussed hestial dwelling. The two designs (though the church, of course, an interior, and the garden city exterior) are comparable in form – a creation of sacred space where, as Casey explains, the plan tends to be ‘at once centred and self enclosed. The implicit directionality will be from the centre toward the periphery and will thus obey the architectural counsel to “extend inner order outward”’ (p. 133). Such order is thus performed by those entering the church or city, using its aisles or its train routes, conforming to routines of performance and pilgrimage.

The Garden City was to be a fusion of country and city, of order and disorder, nature and concrete, with the garden at its centre just as agriculture had once been the centre of England’s communities. Howard’s was a monumental utopian dream, his aim to build the New Jerusalem. He even opens his manifesto with the first lines of Blake’s Milton (1804), words which were set to music in 1916 by Sir Hubert Parry, to make the hugely nationalistic hymn Jerusalem. The final result of Howard’s rousing vision, displayed in Letchworth, Welwyn and Hampstead, was the creation of the modern English suburb. The garden city made manifest was quite different from Howard’s rigid plans, much like St.

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121 Casey, Getting Back Into Place, pp. 134-35.
Peters' Basilica, whose building departs from the earlier vision. As C. B. Purdom explains, the reality of the garden city was a 'very different thing from [...] Howard's ideal'. 122

![Diagram](image)

Figure 18. Cross-section of the garden city, in Robert Beevers and others, Garden Cities and New Towns (Due to copyright this image must not be copied)

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Writing of the ideal made manifest in Letchworth, Purdom argues that the city was not built 'for times that are gone'; a garden makes him think of the
future. 123 Marsh too defines the project as ‘not backwardly nostalgic but forward-looking’. 124 But, just as the garden city does not follow its original plan, neither does it completely follow this forward-looking ideal. Meacham writes that the founders looked to a ‘mythic past’; 125 Aileen Reid notes that architects Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker, who helped design Letchworth, ‘had a deep nostalgia for rural life’, and this shows in their architecture. 126 In some ways the new garden city could not escape the mythic rural England of the past. Instead, it helped repeat it forward, with some modifications, into the future.

Seen as an improvement by many, others would visit the first Garden City, Letchworth, as a curiosity, something to be laughed at with the children on a day out. John Betjeman writes a satirical poem ‘Group Life: Letchworth’, amused at the ‘decorative leatherwork’, ‘folk-tune’ and ‘Morris Dancers’ that come to define this new form of communal living. 127 For others, such new suburban living was a thing to be detested. Many, including Butts, feared such an ideal. Butts scorned the ‘new Jerusalem of the social reformer’, which was to be ‘all suburb’ (CC, p. 92). Her own vision was never so grand and inclusive; her vision was Wessex based, and very exclusive.

Yet we might compare Butts’s idea of Wessex with Howard’s and other social reformers’ visions for England. As Meacham discusses, the Garden City was inherently a movement of ‘Englishness’ that revealed such sentiment belonged not only to the landed, ruling elite but also to the reformer, 128 and to the ‘enlightened’ middle classes. The difference between the elite and Howard was that the masses were invited. Butts subscribes to the former Englishness, partly defined in a connection to the land through the family’s ancestral home – a place of privilege and spirituality that excluded the majority.

Another figure of the period, Rolf Gardiner, was more strident in the exclusionary policies that might be found in Butts. In the interwar years he

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124 Marsh, Back to the Land, p. 220.
125 Meacham, Regaining Paradise, p. 1.
128 Meacham, Regaining Paradise, p. 19.
continued a tree planting project in Dorset to fortify the soil began by his father Henry Balfour Gardiner. He also ran back-to-the-land camps, with English and German students, in the hope of a reuniting Germany and England after the Great War. His enthusiasm for the German youth groups and environmental policies, however, was allied with anti-Semitic views and Nazi sympathies.129 This was a darker side to the back-to-the-land movement, Englishness and ritual. In search of a ‘spiritual home’, Gardiner writes that nowhere was better than Wessex to found such a place: It was ‘strong, archaic’, the land of the ‘Saxons’ and ‘Alfred’. To get back to this vision of Old England, Gardiner urges ‘daily ritual’ – to ‘practice the ritual of dawn and noon and sunset, the ritual of kindling fire and pouring water’.

Again, the recommendation was for the old rites of agricultural dwelling.

While Butts always wanted to keep the ‘masses’ out of her beloved Wessex, her reconnection through gardening in later years was never a process or ritual that suggested the extremes of Gardiner’s fascism, the empiric, or the Englishness of the Garden City. Her own reconnection to the soil was an uneasy alliance between aristocratic visions of the past and a subdued, resisting elitism of literary Modernism. Despite the divide between the two – one with its conservative traditions, the other looking to make things new – both had their rituals. Amidst this position of potential conflict, Butts found something spiritual.

A plot of one’s own: Butts’s modern sacred garden

In her last years at Sennen Cove, Butts found this spiritual experience in her small bungalow and its garden. She divided her time between her writing, rug making and gardening, which begins to enter her journals and letters. In a journal entry dated 1 February 1933, for instance, Butts notes ‘the bulbs are coming up. Even this late cold hasn’t snubbed them’ (JMB, p. 414). She was always mindful of the environment and weather, which contained something of the fearful that must be

respected but also battled against: in May 1935 she lost much of her garden to a storm. She rebuilt it and, with the arrival of her friend Angus Davidson at another bungalow in Sennen, the pair spent much of their time tending their gardens together (SFL, p. 375). When Butts was not gardening she was often writing. While her lament for the death of the English estate and its garden was written at Sennen, her gardening articles are filled with greater hope. They speak not so much of loss as they do of getting back to the land and creating secluded consecrated space within it.

In Garden Plots, Shelley Saguaro argues that the ‘anti-monumental’ sentiment of the modernists and their interest in ‘the pluralities of perspective’ might be read in their use of the ‘short story form’: a method of modernist resistance ‘against popular mass culture’. Butts favoured the short story and the book review as a creative medium. She uses her concisely formed but meditative reviews to discuss the topics that most interested her and shaped her work. These include contemporary modernist writing, the occult, the classics, and of course gardening. Just as Saguaro writes of the “small plot” of the short story [...] correlating with the small plot of urban and suburban gardens’ (p. 3), Butts’s often carefully and tightly structured pieces might be thought of as small carefully tended plots of ideas.

Saguaro discusses Virginia Woolf’s short story ‘Kew Gardens’ (1919) as an example of garden writing and modernist subversion. Woolf appears to challenge the grandeur and ‘monument’ status of Kew, which as Saguaro points out was founded with royal money in the 1750s, its mix of exotic species telling of imperial acquisition (pp. 13, 11). Woolf’s story soars between the larger splashes of colour that visitors to the gardens experience and the smaller paths of the snail below them. Like Butts’s childhood garden – its boundaries defined and filled with childhood memories and their interpretations – Kew inspires recollections for those tracing its paths: memories or romance for some, and of ‘Heaven’ and the ‘ancients’ for others (pp. 84-86). The mapping and performing

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of the garden is akin to Casey’s wanderings of Blenheim, and of the ‘dwelling’ that takes place in thought, on foot, and in language.\textsuperscript{133}

Butts describes a similar map making in an article, when she writes of a magic map one produces on foot and in the mind. She recognises the constituents of the physical landscape as they are mapped and performed by physical movement and language, where space is both written and read, and often divided into places which are either sacred or profane.\textsuperscript{134} As Bryony Orme suggests ‘there can be no consistent division of sacred from profane’. Between cultures ‘boundaries must [...] remain imprecise’.\textsuperscript{135} Butts’s Sennen garden can be read as an attempt to perform another sacred space – small, personal, establishing a solid, unambiguous boundary over a plethora of other meanings, and in resistance to dominant cultural movements of the time. Her various articles on gardening support this reading, each reaffirming the ideal of the bordered sacred garden space as it embodies the rituals of art, history and Butts’s day-to-day living.

Butts’s article ‘On Gardens: Gardens and Gardening’ (1932), like Woolf’s ‘Kew Gardens’, addresses the national and more monumental idea of war. One of Woolf’s reminiscing characters, wandering London’s garden, claims that with this new war, the spirits of the ancients are ‘rolling between the hills like thunder’ (‘Kew Gardens’, p. 86). Butts, as opposed to war as Woolf, muses that the small garden plot might be the antidote needed to stop another occurring. Richard Sudell comments that after World War One there had been a ‘remarkable increase in the amount of interest taken in gardening generally’.\textsuperscript{136} Butts reviews a number of gardening publications that demonstrate this growth, and in one article develops the idea of the garden as peacemaker:

Men have not yet gone to war about their gardens; even Babylon was not taken for its slung terraces. In his garden a man can stand up, without the compulsion to knock his next door gardener down and lay his country waste. Bulb-stealing has never had the same atmosphere or produced the same literature as cattle-raiding.

\textsuperscript{133} Casey, \textit{Getting Back Into Place}, p. 170.
\textsuperscript{134} See Mary Butts, ‘Magic of Person and Place’, rev. of \textit{The Strange Death of President Harding}, by Gaston B. Means, and eight other books, \textit{The Bookman}, 85, 507 (December 1933), 141-43 (p. 141).
Man the gardener is kept very busy and behaves himself. At the only cost - a high
cost but a fair one - that he makes less history.137

Perhaps people had had enough of history after the horrors of the First World
War, and, while gardening might not prevent another war, it could be seen as a
process of reconnection to the land - a means of forming or reforming a home, a
'dwelling' and an abiding sense of belonging.

Another writer and gardener would later, in 1945, write something similar
to Butts. Writing after World War Two, but in reference to World War One,
Newman Flower describes the garden he plants with seeds taken in 1919 from the
battlefields around the Somme. From these seeds he creates what he calls his
'War Garden', which goes on to gain an interest from people from around the
world, who even request seeds from it.138 Flower has created a shrine to the dead;
something living, regenerating and cyclical in honour of their memory. He
completes his War Garden piece with a story of two men, living as neighbours,
who hate each other, and how through the growing of an extraordinary large
marrow by one of the men, they are united, 'the marrow [lying] on a trestle table
[between them] like an ancient god for worship' (p. 513). Gardening has taken on
the rituals of agriculture and the language of religion. Flower concludes that
'Neighbours may hate each other. But if they work in their gardens they become
a league of Neighbours. It may take time. There is no record that Eden was ever
divided by a garden fence' (p. 514).

Both Flower's and Butts's gardening borrows from the Edenic myth and
from the vision of a Golden Age long past. It is implicitly a backward looking
spiritual and pastoral ideal searching for a return to a time before modern war,
machines and the city. But, while Flower would see the fences come down, and
gardeners unite - perhaps in the style of the Garden City - Butts, though living
peaceably with her neighbours, was keener to keep her garden to herself. It was to
be a small plot of one's own, with its boundaries secure - a sacred place of peace
and stillness. Butts claimed it to be ahistorical, and continued to develop the 'out

137 Mary Butts, 'On Gardens: Gardens and Gardening', rev. of Gardens and Gardening: Studio
Gardening Annual (1932), The Bookman, 82, 487 (April 1932), 40.
138 Flower, 'Through my Garden Gate', in The English Garden, ed. by Charlesworth, III, pp. 510-
14 (p. 512).
of time' qualities of the garden as a shelter from history in her other gardening articles. In the 'The Pleasures of Gardening' (1933) she explains:

A garden, gardening – the two words stand for the most straightforward and also the most mysterious of the occupations of mankind. A garden is the ‘purest of human pleasures’; gardening is the perfect cure for sickness of body or mind. It is the way to certain basic contacts and knowledge; the entrance to the workshop of Nature and to her altar.\footnote{Mary Butts, 'The Pleasures of Gardening', rev. of A Short History of Gardens, by H. N. Wethered. The Sunday Times, 3 December 1933, p. 15.}

Butts echoes the sentiments expressed by Victorian writers and moralists, repeating the words of Francis Bacon, who wrote ‘God Almighty first planted a garden; and, indeed it is the purest of human pleasures; it is the greatest refreshment to the spirits of man’.\footnote{Francis Bacon, 'Of Gardens', in The English Gardens, ed. by Charlesworth, I, pp. 141-145 (p. 141).} The discussion is once again Edenic and backward looking, and one glimpses the rites of creating such an ageless, ‘out of time’ location. The space of the garden and the act of gardening are here interchangeable; the garden performance is ‘mysterious’, pleasurable, and healing. It is a performance in and of Nature’s ‘workshop’ – a place defined by its liminality, and by a duality of God in nature and nature as God.

Like the agriculture of Hardy’s Wessex, Butts’s garden experience contains the divinities, and boundaries (geographic, seasonal, and geological) that must again be respected: ‘One meets the other halfway. Which is the proper point of contact between civilised man and the holy earth’, Butts explains.\footnote{Mary Butts, rev. of Country, by H. J. Massingham, The Bookman 86, 514 (July 1934), 189.} Butts’s gardener must be measured and thoughtful, and respectful of nature. ‘You cannot hurry trees’ she writes; man and nature must ‘work together in perfect harmony, variety and stillness’.\footnote{Mary Butts, ‘Gardens and Gardening’, rev. of Gardens and Gardening: The Studio Gardening Annual (1934), ed. F. A. Mercer, The Bookman 86, 513 (June 1934), 161.} Like those creative but now vanished acts of agriculture in Hardy’s Far from the Madding Crowd, the garden must combine building and dwelling – a performance that will make ‘geographical space [...] essentially sacred’.\footnote{Relph, place and placelessness p. 18.}

In another of Butts’s articles this sacred space is given more religious connotations:

143 Relph, place and placelessness p. 18.
It would seem that in gardens there is all that we have of a nature religion left to us. Once we worshipped, feared and propitiated, but also adored everything there is out of doors. The classic religions show it and the cults of our ancestors. When Christianity turned out the gods it kept the garden; left a hole in the wall for patron saints to creep in, attend to departments, under strict regulations ('On Gardens', p. 40).

Butts writes of a religion of gardening that maintains a historical continuity, but appears paradoxically to take the garden out of history. This paradox, indeed, allows a continuity to exist where, inside the incongruities of history, it would not. Like the bonfire on Egdon Heath at the beginning of Hardy's *Native*, different mythologies are here offered alongside the ritual act. Gardens are associated with the Pagans, Greeks and Christians; one group turns out the last set of myths but keeps the garden. Like Butts's Cornish landscape, the map of the garden is blurred, its sacred and profane boundaries subject to change. But the garden remains. In and out of history, explained by multiple myths, Butts's garden’s liminal status reflects that of greater Wessex. Like the pilgrimage, the act of ploughing, the lighting of a fire, the actions and processes of gardening are more essential than any supporting story.

Butts calls this performance of the land ‘Garden faith’. Like many ritual traditions it is replete with ‘ancestral devotions’ and older survivals, where humankind must ‘appease’ nature, work with nature, and where

the final reward is the same for any other of the faiths and occupations of man: that he, by long service and association, will become a part of what he loves, of what he has made to be. Part of the earth and the sap and the scent and the petals and the fruit; of ‘the light and the night and the half light.’ It is then that the gods who used to be found in the gardens will be found in him. ('On Gardens', p. 40)

Butts's 'faith' connects to the divine through a relationship with the soil. The physical and spiritual meld as the performed space and the performer enter a sacred, symbiotic relationship. In the garden, Butts positions herself as part of her beloved landscape, an element of its history and its myth that in turn becomes an aspect of her and her family's heritage. Only in the borderland of the physical and written landscape can this relationship evolve, where acts of gardening (like acts
of writing) reshape Butts's small plot of land, in her attempt to re-enter and re-consecrate the larger Wessex landscape.
The country house: a theatre of life and death
in the homeland at war

Origin and decline: an Englishman’s home is his castle

‘Why is this house called a “Castle”? ’
‘It used to be one until they moved it.’
‘What can you mean?’
‘Just that. We had a castle a mile away, down by the village. Then in Inigo Jones’s time we took a fancy to the valley and pulled the castle down, carted the stones up here and built a new house. I’m glad they did, aren’t you?’
‘If it was mine I’d never live anywhere else.’
‘But you see, Charles, it isn’t mine. Just at the moment it is, but usually it’s full of ravening beasts. If it could only be like this always – always summer, always alone, the fruit always ripe and Aloysius in a good temper’. 1

Aloysius is Lord Sebastian Flyte’s teddy bear; Sebastian carries him around Oxford University in Evelyn Waugh’s Brideshead Revisited: The Sacred and Profane Memories of Captain Charles Ryder (1945), and perhaps more iconically in the 1981 ITV television adaptation. The bear is a symbol of both a playful decadence and of a young man obsessed with, and mourning the loss of, his childhood. Aloysius is modelled on the teddy bear Archibald Ormsby-Gore (better known as Archie), who was carried about Oxford by Waugh’s friend, John Betjeman; though, Paula Byrne writes that Waugh’s friend Hugh, of the Lygon family, whom Waugh based Sebastian on, was likewise seen carrying a teddy. 2

Betjeman died holding his bear in 1984. 3 In Brideshead, Sebastian’s attachment


Like the Wessex authors discussed in this study, Betjeman also held an interest in, and wrote of the England of Wessex and Dorset. His poem ‘The Village Inn’ examines the decline of the traditional English pub. ‘The Heart of Thomas Hardy’, and ‘Dorset’, celebrate the region, while the latter also plays with Dorset place names: ‘Rime Intrinsica, Fontmell Magna, Sturminster Newton and Melbury Bubb’, the poem begins (John Betjeman, ‘Dorset’, in John Betjeman’s Collected Poems, ed. by The Earl of Birkenhead (London: John Murray, 1960), pp. 38-39. This parodies Hardy’s poem ‘Friends Beyond’, which begins ‘William Dewy, Tranter Reuben, Farmer Ledlow late at plough’ (Thomas Hardy, ‘Friends Beyond’, in The Complete Poetical Works of...
to Aloysius and childhood foreshadow his greater escape from reality through a decline into alcoholism; this, in turn, parallels a greater decay within the novel. Waugh explores the shifting patterns of English society, the waning power of the upper classes, and a perceived loss of England’s heritage, innocence and traditions in the interwar years.

Yet, one is never sure if Waugh’s is a sincere grief or if the satirical aggression of his earlier work, like the mocking of country house and the aristocratic-led war effort in *Put Out More Flags* (1942), has become an occasional nuance in his ‘Sacred and Profane Memories’ of a family and house. This duality of memory in the novel’s subtitle functions as an introduction to a work concerned with the blurring of boundaries. Despite the house’s ambiguous nature, and despite (perhaps because of) the uncertain sincerity of praise and loss, Brideshead becomes the quintessence of the English country house—continuing a culturally established representation of the estate as a hated and loved image. It is an image both Powys and Butts explore in their country house novels, *Ducadme* (1925), and *Ashe of Rings* (also 1925) respectively. They explore what Kari Boyd McBride calls the ‘sign system’ of the English country house, which continues to function today as a marker of England’s history and myth. Estate is a microcosm of nation, enduring as a ‘mystical process of identification’ (intensely touristic in manifestation today) where the house, as Robert Hewison argues, ‘becomes the nation, and love of one’s country makes obligatory a love of the country house’.

At the same time, the house has been an exclusive locale of class privilege and wealth. Like the manor itself, the visitor remains on the border of this uncertain space, not only because the house is a half real, half dream place, but because like many of the characters of country house literature, the tourist becomes, as Hewison argues, ‘a lover locked out’ from ‘the erotic object of desire’, while being ‘unaware of his exclusion’ (p. 53). Charles Ryder is, though, conscious of his exclusion, while contemporary with *Brideshead*, Robert

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Hammer’s 1949 Ealing comedy *Kind Hearts and Coronets* suggests a similar awareness. In the film, Alec Guinness (very conscious of his lower position) murders his aristocratic relatives to avenge his disinherited and now deceased mother, and acquire a hereditary dukedom.

Barbara Bender claims that the problem of modern-day exclusion is partly overcome with the assistance of organisations like The National Trust and English Heritage, who focus on ‘landmarks of those with power and wealth’, and imbue them ‘with an aesthetic that bypasses’ their exclusivity and the memories of the labour that built them. Contemporary film and television often functions in a similar way. *Upstairs, Downstairs* (1971-1975) portrays the relationship of master and servant in a town house, and depicts the changes taking place within the household at the beginning of the twentieth century. Robert Altman’s *Gosford Park* (2001) uses the country house murder mystery to explore the darker side of class relationships in the same period. While trying to examine life in the house in an original way, both film and television series still enable a nostalgic view of the house and its traditions, thereby contributing to an aesthetic which diminishes the quality of exclusion the house otherwise retains.

The nation’s ambiguous relationship with the country house helps render it a location Raphael Samuel calls a ‘memory place’. These, he argues, act as mnemonic devices – just as a church’s stained glass, shrines and pilgrimage sites once did in the Middle Ages. Samuel’s examples can also be noted for their exclusionary qualities as bounded sacred places. The country house today functions as a location of historical memory, and Samuel points to the National Trust as an exemplary body concerned with collecting and maintaining such places in an ‘expanding historical culture’ (pp. 39, 25). These locations are part of what he calls the ‘Theatres of Memory’ – an art of memory, influenced by romantic poetry and painting, and based in place. Memory, then, takes part in the creation of history – ‘history’ for Samuel being an ‘organic form of knowledge’, drawing from ‘experience’ but also from ‘memory and myth, fantasy and desire’ (p. x). Today, the country house can be read as an archetypal theatre of memory,  

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a nostalgic microcosm of England the rural idyll as anticipated by visiting tourists. Malcolm Kelsell acknowledges the ceremonial nature of this visit to the country house as a ‘national pastime’ of filing in ‘ritual line through state rooms’ — an occupation that is itself exclusionary and somewhat esoteric (it would puzzle an ‘observer from a foreign planet’, Kelsall claims). 8

The house becomes a site of ritualised performance, allowing an acquisition of cultural capital by the participant, who is also active in continuing the positioning of the house as a place of culture, holding the nation’s memory. Like Wessex, the house is a cultural ‘icon’ which can be read for its many meanings. 9 It embodies the layered narrative of nation, which, Homi K. Bhabha writes, strides across the boundaries of the present and the past, of history, progress and a ‘“timeless” discourse of irrationality’ that sees England both making history and as a mythic realm outside of it, defined by a ‘repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative’. 10 Samuel’s organic definition of history through memory would account for both sides of this discourse — history being prone to nostalgic and mythic colouring. 11 Samuel, Bhabha and Kelsall, then, all individually reject history as a science; rather, it is an organic tradition and rite. It is from this interaction between the often seemingly opposing but associated forces of history and timelessness that Wessex and nation exist.

Previous chapters have explored this relationship, establishing a ‘repetitious’, cyclical performance of Wessex in husbandry and its seasons, from which a mythical rural scene is manifested. The idealized, harmonious paradise is in reality a site of conflict, where agricultural processes have always been a series of actions that violate nature and the idyll they claim to represent: nature is

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9 Kelsall, The Great Good Place, p. 7.
11 In his discussion of landscape and memory, Tadhg O’Keeffe sees history in a similar way to Samuel, but writes that history is ‘always about memory’ (Tadhg O’Keeffe, ‘Landscape and Memory: Histography, Theory, Methodology’, in Heritage, Memory and the Politics of Identity: New Perspectives on the Cultural Landscape, ed. by Niamh Moore and Yvonne Whelan (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 3-18, p. 5). This reading makes history an act of storytelling, both creative and destructive. In application it would form the country house from, and in-between, processes of remembering and forgetting — a practice allowing the house’s continued place as a much loved part of English culture.
repeatedly torn, scarred and reshaped. Similarly, chapter one explored the development of Corfe in the Wessex milieu and revealed how a place of war, on the margins of Hardy’s Wessex, became a key site in the guidebook and tourist performance of the pastoral vision of the West Country. To complicate matters, Butts utilises the site’s historical significance to re-perform Corfe as a location of ritual and myth outside the ravages of modern history.

The country house inhabits a similarly discordant space on the margins of history and fiction, its creation caught between the historical narrative of the country house and the voices of literature that have proved a powerful force in re-affirming its historicity, while simultaneously claiming its timelessness and its transcendent qualities. In the above extract, Brideshead observes this duality, matching castle origins (a place of history, war, and family and national lineage) with a mythical (ahistorical and pastoral) imagining of the site: ‘If it could only be like this always – always summer, always alone, the fruit always ripe and Aloysius in a good temper’, Sebastian laments (BR, p. 70).

For Waugh, reflecting in the preface to the revised 1960 edition of the novel, this precarious existence of the country house seemed to be at an end. World War One, and the social changes it partly engendered, ‘seemed’ to ‘doom to decay and spoliation like the monasteries in the sixteenth century’, the ‘chief national artistic achievement’ of the English county house.¹² Yet, Waugh continues, explaining that in 1944 it was ‘impossible to foresee [...] the present cult of the English country house’, and that ‘[m]uch of this book therefore is a panegyric preached over an empty coffin’ (p. x).

Even the violence of the Second World War, infringing upon the home of Brideshead (billeted troops destroy items, while priceless furniture and art are packed away in upper rooms, BR, p. 300) might be read as strengthening its myth and further enabling its cult status. During the Second World War, estates proved their patriotic worth, functioning as military headquarters, barracks, schools for evacuees, secure locations to store the nation’s art, and even as prison camps. Damage from these uses, as John Martin explains, has become part of the

'folklore' of the English country house; war becomes ‘heritage’, assimilated into the house’s myth and performance. For instance, Castle Howard, an eighteenth-century manor, designed by Sir John Vanbrugh, who later created Blenheim Palace (Churchill’s family home), was burnt while operating as a school during the Second World War. Restored, it is today a key Yorkshire tourist attraction, and it has been the set for the television series and the 2008 film of *Brideshead*. Each production, though differing in thematic emphasis, continues to revel in a narrative of nostalgia.

To borrow a word from Samuel, this chapter reads the country house as a ‘theatre’ of history and timelessness in the changing society and literature of the interwar years, located in the dualities of war and the pastoral, death and life. Just as Waugh aligns the country house with ‘monasteries’ and art, the stage of the country house is explored here as a site of ritual and artistic performance in the representation of Wessex and England.

**Homeland: Butts’s and Powys’s house, and Hardy’s Wessex**

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14 See Castle Howard, on line, <www.castlehoward.co.uk> [accessed on 15 January 2011]. The web site explains that the house (not a castle, as the name suggests) boasts ‘stunning architecture’, ‘idyllic gardens’, a ‘lakeside holiday park’ for camping and caravans. It also has its own farm and farm shop where you can buy ‘Castle Howard home baking’. Rurality and history are sold in one tourist package. If you search the site for ‘Brideshead’ you find that events, and Castle Howard’s history, are connected to Waugh’s fictional manor. There is even a locally produced ‘Brideshead Bitter’. At the same time, the web site for The Elmley [art] Foundation, which is associated with and assists with conservation of Madresfield Court in Worcester, claims in its online guide that Madresfield’s ‘most celebrated connection is with Brideshead Revisited’: ‘Waugh’s imaginary house (especially the Chapel) was partly modelled on Madresfield, and most of his main characters are drawn from members of the Lygon family’ (John de la Cour, ‘Madresfield Court’, p8; see The Elmley Foundation, on line: Madresfield Court, <www.elmley.org.uk/pages/madresfield_court.asp> [accessed on 15 January 2011]). The relationship between real and fictional country house locations becomes more complex as owners and publicists seek cultural authority from fiction originally inspired by the house.
15 There are a growing number of film and television adaptations of nineteenth-century novels that are nostalgic in tone. The BBC production of *Pride and Prejudice* (1995), starring Colin Firth, had particular influence in romanticising the country house in the form of Mr Darcy’s Pemberley estate. The exterior of the National Trust property Lyme Park was used as Pemberley. The National Trust web site for the house describes it as ‘the backdrop to where Darcy meets Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*’. We are also told that the house has a connection to *Upstairs, Downstairs* (See National Trust, on line: Lyme Park, <www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-vh/w-visits/w-findaplace/w-lymepark/> [accessed on 15 January 2011]). Script editor for *Upstairs, Downstairs*, Alfred James Shaughnessy, whose stepfather once owned Lyme Park, used to holiday there.
Akin to Mircea Eliade's description of a ceremonial house at the centre of a village, the country house is a sacred centre of cosmology, reflective of the gods' work in its organisation of space. Like Kirsten Hastrup's reading of the theatre, the house acts as 'society's spiritual "double"', and is able to show 'what is not' as well as what is, so becoming, in the literary tradition of the house, a 'magic space beyond the ordinary'. Consequently, it is a space conforming to the traditions of sacred time. Like Waugh, Butts and Powys examine inter-war concerns of the decay of the traditions and power that help define the country home's timeless qualities. It is a decline noted much earlier by Wessex author Richard Jefferies in *Round About the Great Estate* (1880), as he observes the passing of the ways of 'Olden Times', when the estate was allied with agricultural dwelling and nature. Expressing sentiment similar to Butts, he warns the new generation that the 'clock should be read by the sunshine, not the sun timed by the clock'.

The Great War was to accelerate many changes to the estate and its manor. Considering the effects of the War, Butts's *Ashe* extends the agricultural, literary and mythic properties of the house, further ritualising its nature, art and culture, so that the estate becomes a sacred space overseen by a squire who is its chief priest. The estate is threatened by a young, dark witch who embodies the Great War, but who also stimulates the regenerative feminine ritual that re-empowers the house and ensures its continuance as an 'out of time' location.

In contrast, Powys rejects the cyclical sacred feminine that Butts locates in the customs and traditions of country and aristocracy. He observes a decline and

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20 Butts's choice of a gothic country house novel follows a tradition of writing, such as Charlotte Smith's *The Old Manor House* (1793), Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1817), and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), and can again be seen as a response to the historical 'crisis point' of the era. Kelly Hurley writes that the gothic is an 'instrumental genre, reemerging cyclically, at periods of cultural stress, to negotiate the anxieties that accompany social and epistemological transformations and crises' (Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, materialism, and degeneration at the Fin de siècle*, Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture, 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 5).
death in their repetition, not dissimilar to Hewison’s view that England’s contemporaneous production of itself, as a place of heritage, threatens to leave it ‘frozen in a dead moment of stopped time’. In response to this living death, Powys is drawn to another kind of death in order that he might escape – one clearly influenced by psychoanalysis and Sigmund Freud. The methods of psychoanalysis inspired Powys to proclaim rather extravagantly in his booklet *Psychoanalysis and Morality* (1923) that ‘Psychoanalytical research sets free such creative and destructive powers in the abysses of our own souls that we pause on the precipice-edge of the gulfs which are ourselves’. Ducdame’s main protagonist, Rook Ashover (a similar name to the Ashe family of Butts’s novel), does indeed peer into his own soul, as Powysian heroes frequently do. Here, the self-analysis seems to draw from Freud’s theory of the death drive, explored in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) – a theory Powys would have been familiar with, and which expounded that the ‘aim of all life is death’, a desire to return to the inanimate state from which we all began.

Walter Benjamin writes that the storyteller’s use of death sanctions ‘everything that the storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death’. In many ways, death is the main preoccupation of *Ashe of Rings* and *Ducdame*: the death of the country house, death of (or for Powys the deathly ways of) tradition and lineage, and the death that war brings. These bestow meaning on the country house even as they promise destruction. They assist in the construction of its boundaries, and confer authority upon the authors, and upon the modern languages of psychoanalysis and anthropology, which they continue to utilise.

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23 Butts and Powys are both possibly alluding to the sacred Ash tree of Norse mythology, where the tree represents life, but its roots are found in death. For more information see E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964). Butts in particular had a love of Norse mythology.
Death, or rather Powys's growing interest in inanimate objects, coloured with a language of occultism, almost gives him a power reserved for the preacher or prophet who proposes a way out of the physical world into a spiritual existence beyond. The borderland position of the country house in this quest is accentuated through these transcendental interests, but always remains located in the physical, in the house, its grounds and the soil. As Eliade explains, 'A sacred stone remains a stone'. Butts and Powys's narratives also stay grounded in, and continue to draw from, the traditions embodied in Hardy's landscape.

Though Hardy's Wessex appears to downplay the importance of the country house, the historical Wessex region has 'traditionally been dominated by great landowners and large estates'. Arthur Oswald identifies the manor as an important site in our image of both Dorset and Wessex, 'along with the camps and earthworks'—those other ceremonial sites that marry a past of war with a contemporary pastoralizing of their boundaries. McBride establishes the house in relation to agricultural work, which embodies the cyclical performative of the mythical pastoral, giving a power to the house that is 'engendered by the right relationship of human being to land that has been mapped, tilled, and walled.' This 'right relationship' is reminiscent of Butts's view that the aristocracy, like the peasants who worked the land, had always belonged there. The house, however, represents a 'rank and power' found in this relationship with the soil that the labourer does not receive. The estate, as Peter Mandler reminds us, has not only been a site of 'taste' but is an 'economic unit', its lands once containing and reliant upon agriculture.

These symbols of power and wealth remain, for the most part, a ghostly presence of privilege and economy in Hardy's farming communities, but they can still be matched to their physical doubles. Oswald identifies Waterson Manor near Puddletown as Bathsheba's home in *Far from the Madding Crowd*; Wolston House near Dorchester as a location in *A Group of Noble Dames* (1891); and Woolbridge Manor as belonging to Tess's d'Urberville ancestors in *Tess*.\(^{33}\)

Like the house, and Butts's and Powys's narrative of it, Hardy's story of Wessex is lent an authority, and given structure, by death, in the guise of war. Today, the Wessex landscape is littered with Martello towers built in anticipation of Napoleon's invasion, and with fortified bunkers, popularly known as pillboxes, built in World War Two. Napoleon and the threat of invasion repeatedly test the borders of Hardy's pastoral scene. *The Trumpet Major* (1879), the short story 'A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four' (1880), and Hardy's poetic epic *The Dynasts* (1904-08) all address this issue. Ralph Pite notes Hardy's use of a military protagonist in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, and the deceitfulness of this character, Troy, in the story.\(^{34}\) We might read Troy as a smaller embodiment of the larger threat of war encroaching upon Hardy's pastoral scene. While the main military characters of *The Trumpet Major*, as Pite observes, do not conform to this reading, they continue to represent a danger to Wessex in their associations with war, even as they reside as part of the local community. At the same time, the war and risk of invasion helps give definition to the rural landscape which is traditionally its antithesis.

**Wessex at war: from history to heritage**

Wessex inhabits a similarly contested space of privilege, history and imagination. It too is part of the nations' heritage, a both hated and loved ideal. In his travel

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\(^{33}\) Oswald, *Country Houses of Dorset*, pp. 89, 60, 104.

\(^{34}\) Ralph Pite, "'Graver Things...Braver Things': Hardy's War Poetry", in *The Oxford Handbook of British and Irish War Poetry*, ed. by Tim Kendall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 34-50 (p. 34).
book, *Labels* (1930), Evelyn Waugh detects in the English traveller's 'detestation of “quaintness” and “picturesque bits”' when abroad, the development of a 'self defence' against a twee vision of England, the 'arts and crafts, and the preservation of rural England'. He also finds fault with 'Wessex worship, village signs, local customs, heraldry'. However, many continue to love, and seek out, these signifiers of English heritage. Kelsall asks if they play a part in a 'ritual act of folk memory', often 'performed by the tribe without knowing why' - performed only because the 'ritual defines the tribe?'. A rite can certainly take on such an unconscious or subconscious existence, as Bourdieu's theory of *habitas* illustrates. Such rites, performed in the larger structuring of society, and evident in the creation of Wessex and country house, reinvent exclusive history as a more (though often only in appearance) inclusive heritage. The house becomes a paradise of the past – a site of a nostalgia that grows in times of crisis. Laurence Lerner suggests that at these times people need 'to believe that things were once better'. He continues, 'If the wars, the hatreds, the concentration camps of our time are not signs of civilisation's collapse then they may seem less fearful'. Though Hardy's Wessex does not prioritise the cultural symbol of the house, it too is active in creating heritage from the threat of history. Pite recognises this transition in Dorset itself, where 'distinctive ways of life' are 'turned into heritage'. Hardy seems intent on a similar process when mapping the boundaries and threats of war.

On 20 October 1899, Hardy cycled to Southampton to the watch the British fleet leave for the second of two Boer wars (1880-1902). Hardy's actions anticipate those of soldiers in his poems. The Colonel in 'The Colonel's Soliloquy' must leave the home he has become 'accustomed to', while in 'The Drummer Hodge', Hodge is described as being 'Fresh from his Wessex home' (I, p. 122, l. 8): war and ultimately death deny a return. 'A Wife in London' relates

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36 Kelsall, *The Great Good Place*, p. 4.
the story of a soldier’s wife who hears of her husband’s death, only to receive a delayed letter, in which he writes of his desire to return home (I, p.123). War is juxtaposed to Wessex and homeland. Yet, in ‘Embarcation’, departing soldiers reveal a developing relationship between home and war:

Here, where Vespasian’s legions struck the sands,  
And Cerdric with his Saxons entered in,  
And Henry’s army leapt afloat to win  
Convincing triumphs over neighbour lands,

Vaster battalions press for further strands,  
To argue in the selfsame bloody mode  
Which this late age of thought, and pact, and code,  
Still fails to mend  
(I, p. 116, ll. 1-8)

Contemporary soldiers leave, unconsciously mimicking the actions of those of England past. Roman legions, the Saxons, and Henry V’s victory over the French make Wessex borders a place of invasion and defence. Here, war is internalized as a history constructive of nation, where it begins to metamorphosize into myth and legend. The battles are of a glorious past taught in schools – similar to those of Ancient Greece, and the British Empire in ‘Gallipoli, Balaclava, Quebec’ that Charles recalls in Brideshead (BR, p. 12). Through a distance of time, war is no longer a threat; it has become heritage and thus a building block of the nation.

In his crafting of Wessex, Hardy utilises one of the greatest wars in England’s heritage, the Napoleonic. R. J. White explains that ‘Hardy’s lifelong fascination with history’ climaxed with The Dynasts. 41 Though concerned with the Napoleonic Wars, it seems quite probable that the contemporary conflict of the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871), and the Boer Wars, had been a motivating factor in its writing. Florence Hardy’s The Life of Hardy can almost be read as a paean to The Dynasts. Hardy tells us that the ‘train of ideas that led to The Trumpet Major and The Dynasts’ began when, as a child, he discovered amidst his grandfather’s belongings, an old periodical describing uniforms and ranks of

that war. The Life is filled with references to the war, and the first ideas for the epic poem are recorded in an entry for May 1875 (p. 106). The poem’s supposed development is related in the accounts of the next 30 years; it is as if the history of war developed alongside his pastoral Wessex landscape.

In researching The Dynasts, Hardy visited the sites of battle on the continent, and consulted a plethora of historical texts. White claims that Hardy lived in a time that ‘thought everything was to be understood in historical terms’—through the recorded past (p. 131), and, at first, this approach seems to offer a greater understanding of The Dynasts. Soldiers from Wessex are amongst those fighting in Europe; Hardy claims his ancestor is on the Victory; and the menace to the Wessex coast—though not the major incident of the piece—is ever present. Most tellingly, the action begins not in Europe or in battle but in England, on a ‘Ridge in Wessex’, where a ‘highway crosses the ridge, which is near the sea, and the south coast is seen bounding the landscape below, the open Channel extending beyond’ (my italics). Hardy’s choice of language creates a boundary of the coast. Wessex and England are protected by it, yet still threatened by the occurrences on the other side of that ominous ‘open Channel extending beyond’. Roberto M. Dainotto argues that in Hardy’s short story ‘A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four’ (1880), ‘Bonaparte in the regional “Wessex” threatens to annihilate a whole folk culture and supplant it with that very universal history that France was meant to embody’. At points the threat seems real in The Dynasts: Hardy’s Nelson warns ‘they [the French] make the Wessex shore’ (IV, p. 60, II. 1. 48).

In The Trumpet Major, invasion seems more imminent still, where a constant fear of attack climaxes in chapter 26 when residents believe an incursion from the sea has begun. Napoleon’s building of flotilla barges to cross the

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43 These included C. H. Gifford’s History of Wars of the French Revolution (1917), Sir Archibald’s History of Europe (1833-1842), William Napier’s The History of the War in the Peninsula (1828-1940) and G. R. Gleig’s The Story of the Battle of Waterloo (1847) (White, Thomas Hardy and History, pp. 62. 88).
channel in 1803 did indeed cause invasion panic: defences were intensified and Martello towers were constructed along the coast.

Zoe Kinsley discusses the liminality of this coastline – a border of identity at its most permeable – and considers how this has been viewed negatively. Referencing the Napoleonic menace, she writes that people ‘imagined their physical, political, and national selves to be under threat’. But, as the threat of invasion might be seen to have strengthened fortifications and the nation’s sense of its borders, Hardy’s use of this historical threat appears to give greater definition to his Wessex. In the same way that the French blockade ‘made English agriculture a patriotic act’ during the war, so adding meaning and worth to its productions, war here gives greater definition to Hardy’s rural scene.

Characters in The Trumpet Major – like those on Egdon heath – appear to map the area with their movement. This is more specifically a performance enacted by movements associated with war and military personnel, including two of the main protagonists, the brothers John and Bob Loveday, who move between home and barracks and home and sea. Their physical performance is also a historical one. Ultimately joining the British Navy, Bob leaves on the HMS Victory, heading for what will be the Battle of Trafalgar. Anne Garland, the romantic interest of the tale, watches his ship leave from Portland, just as Hardy would watch the leaving troops from Southampton some years later. An old seaman, also viewing the ship on which his son leaves, gives a description of the vessel, while Hardy acknowledges the ‘admiral who was not to return alive’.

With hindsight, the departing ship fails to signify an impending threat to Wessex; history, like the Victory, ‘pass[es] like a phantom’ (TM, p. 309), transformed from a threat into a constructive nation-creating heritage. White argues that Hardy is ‘ill-equipped’ to write history, that he is a poet concerned not

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46 Zoe Kinsley, “In moody sadness, on the giddy brink”: Liminality and Home Tour Travel’, in Mapping Liminalities: Thresholds in Cultural and Literary Texts, ed. by Lucy Kay and others (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 41-65 (p. 45).
with history's 'mutation[s]' but poetry's immutability. The argument appears convincing, but for Hardy's possible intention to achieve such a shift. J. Hillis Miller detects, a 'repetition or representation of history', that makes outside forces the performance of the author. Hardy gains more control over history in the form of the leaving ship, and heightens the poignancy and ritual significance of the departing by turning to a liturgical form of comfort and structure in the Bible. Anne recites a passage from the Book of Psalms: 'They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters'. John arrives behind her and continues the recitation: 'These see the works of the LORD, and His wonders in the deep' (TM, p. 310). In Psalms the passage continues:

For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heavens, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end. Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven.

To the weeping Anne, the passage, remaining half recited, offers little comfort, so Hardy continues a ceremonial calming, moving Anne to a scene of natural beauty, containing a spring known for its healing properties. The scene is preternaturally still, reflecting God's calming of the storm in Psalms. Anne, though, is unaffected; the location appears 'as hollow and faded as a theatre' to her. But then the King himself arrives, offering some comfort, and asking for Bob's name (TM, pp. 311-12). Though her spirits are only momentarily revived, we sense that the hollow theatre is not to be found in the scenes of nature around Anne but in the historical events played out before her. The ship, the king, and the Biblical text are a ghostly re-enactment of the nation's past. Just as the Biblical passage tells of the calming of the sea, Hardy's storytelling, by bringing into one passage key events and personages involved in the immanent triumph at Trafalgar, transforms a threat into a reassuring

49 White, Thomas Hardy and History, p. 11,
51 Psalms 107. 23-30.
national past: England’s heritage, and one of its most famous victories. Hardy is complicit in the heritage repositioning of history, but is also perhaps critical of a process that diminishes the sufferings of such conflicts. Therefore, while Dainotto argues that the ‘survival of cultural identities against universal history means [...] that the region is a bounded space’, Hardy’s use of history as a heritage theatre of war, to reassure his boundaries, results in the construction of a problematic regional space, that necessarily sacrifices the greater meanings of history and conflict so that it might exist.

Performance: Hardy’s sham theatre of war

War, as Paul Fussell discusses, has its theatrical qualities. Traces of the theatre can be found in military costumes (uniforms), and in the emergence of character types (the ‘hapless private’, the ‘sadistic sergeant’). Fussell also writes of the reported feeling that one is both actor and spectator in moments of battle, and that one is convinced that ‘real life’ is to be found back home in England. Fussell is writing of the experiences of World War One, but his comments are equally applicable to conflict more generally.

His reading exposes the fictions and theatrics of war. The Trumpet Major participates in this process; events become theatrical, almost farcical, and so diminish the menace of conflict to the Wessex borders and communities. Festus Derriman and the actress Matilda Johnson, who eventually becomes his wife, are at the centre of the novel’s theatrical events. Festus is part of the Yeoman Cavalry, a greedy and cowardly character, who functions as a parody of Napoleon and of the threat to homeland he poses. Festus’s paranoid and eccentric uncle, Squire Derriman, of the dilapidated Oxwell Hall, believes Napoleon will steal his house once the invasion begins; they are fears transferred to Festus, who does indeed attempt to steal from his uncle. Festus not only wants his uncle’s house and money; in desiring Anne – the love interest of both Bob and John – he

52 Dainotto, Place in Literature, p. 15.
represents the threat French forces might be seen to pose to home and its civilians, particularly women.

In the midst of the invasion panic, Festus fails to fulfil his duties as a soldier of protecting his homeland, instead trying to flee the coastal region rather than defend it (TM, p. 229). Only when learning that the invasion is a false alarm does he charge towards the sea in mock heroic act, merely mimicking the actions of defence that are more sincerely performed by others who still believe the French have arrived (p. 231). Fleeing, when his men realise his pretence, Festus goes in pursuit of a retreating Anne, who has barricaded herself into a deserted farmhouse in fear of invasion. Again, Festus attacks the home, brandishing his sword in an attempt to enter the house. Anne eludes the assault, the pair scuffle, and she escapes on his horse. The episode is marginally more comedic than it is dramatic, and the reader is left to ponder Festus’s embarrassment, his horse gone, and his sword broken – a symbolic castration of a sexual aggressor (pp. 240-43).

The staged quality of another threat to the home is emphasised by a preceding trip to the theatre. Bob and Anne believe John has a romantic interest in one of the actresses. None of them expect the presence of Matilda (TM, p. 265), who was engaged to Bob at the beginning of the novel, but persuaded to leave by John, who recognised her as an actress known to the soldiers, and so unworthy of his brother (p. 153). Again the theatrical nature of war is hinted at in the king’s attendance at the performance, and in the announcement inside the theatre of the capture of Spanish ships and a retreat to Villeneuve. The news is received in a patriotic spirit, but the ‘importance of the event was far from being recognised at this time’, Hardy explains (p. 267). It was the beginning of the complete destruction of Spanish and French fleets that would ensure Wessex’s and England’s safety from invasion.

The theatre seemingly at counterpoint to the war, in fact helps shape the narrative of home and war, and we find that the drama is quickly transferred from stage to John and Bob’s home at the mill. After the performance, Festus, with Matilda’s knowledge, informs a pressgang of Bob’s naval experience. The danger to nation is again transferred to an invasion of the home when the mill is breached by the pressgang. The chase begins as soldiers ‘scramble’ up a ladder after Bob;
Bob jumps from the mill into an apple tree (p. 278); the men arrive ‘just in time to see Captain Bob’s legs and shoe-buckles vanishing through the trap-door in the joist overhead’ (p. 278). Again, the chase seems somewhat farcical. Matilda, knowing of the risk to Bob, arrives to warn him too late, but helps Anne hide the now injured Bob under a bridge, where the dramatic sequence ends with the sound of water ‘reflected in a musical tinkle’ on the arch of the bridge (p. 285). The mirrored sound of water seems to pronounce the risk of the chase, and the impending threat of ship and sea, to be no more than a reflection, an unreal drama. Just as Hardy finds the mumming in The Native tired and unconvincing, mechanically rather than passionately performed, so the reader derives amusement rather than concern from what amounts to the mock plight of characters under threat of war.

World War One: the ultimate anti-pastoral?

Though enamoured with the events of the Napoleonic Wars, Hardy’s writing never commits to a glorification of conflict. In December 1899, the Daily Chronicle even labelled him a pacifist. In the poem ‘The Sick Battle-God’, Hardy again references, in the names of Nelson and Wolfe, the great wars of England past, but he applauds the decline of the once worshipped Battle God, and the spread of a ‘new light’, writing,

That modern meditation broke  
His spell, that penmen’s pleadings dealt a stroke,  
Say some; and some that crimes too dire  
Did much to mire his crimson cloak.  
[...]  
Let men rejoice, let men deplore.  
The lurid Deity of heretofore  
Succumbs to one of saner nod;  
The Battle-god is god no more.  

The poet too is praised for his part in this downfall, as are the atrocities of wars past for disillusioning humankind with its pursuit. But the atrocities of

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World War One were yet to come. On 9 December 1916, *The Times* printed a prologue written by Hardy and spoken at the beginning of the theatrical production of the *Wessex Scenes from the Dynasts*. The introduction laments the Great War and its ‘barbarities’ far greater than ‘any of those the much abused Bonaparte ever put in force against us’. 

This new type of un-heroic war horrified Hardy, but his poetical answer to the conflict again turns to a pastoral homeland. What might be read as a mode of defence or resistance has not changed from his response to earlier conflicts. Hardy maps the boundaries of home in the soldier’s movement, writing of men ‘who march away’ (‘Men Who March Away’, II, pp. 289-90 (p. 289), 1.2), and who ‘[journey] from [their] native spot’ (‘His Country’, II, pp. 290-91 (p. 290), l. 1). Yet, he also mourns the disconnection from Germany. In ‘The Pity of It’, similarities to the German language are found in the local dialect of the ‘loamy Wessex lanes’ (II, p. 294, l. 1). While war appears to threaten pastoral England, Hardy seems assured of Wessex’s continuance, writing that man farming the soil, ‘harrowing the clods’ will go on doing so, even as ‘War’s annals will cloud into night’ (‘In the Time of the Breaking of Nations’, II, pp. 295-96 9 (p. 296), 1.11).

Nevertheless, ‘Channel Firing’ (1914) tells of gunnery practice that shakes the English soil, waking the dead buried in the church yard who believe Judgement Day has arrived. God reassures them that it is not the end, and that ‘Just as before you went below; | The world is as it used to be’ (II, pp. 9-10 (p. 10), ll. 11-12). Hardy tells us that war is nothing new. But war had not yet begun when Hardy wrote the poem, despite the guns already ‘Roaring their readiness to avenge, | As far inland as Stourton Tower, | And Camelot, and starlit Stonehenge’ (II, p. 10, ll. 34-36). That which is under attack is mythic, timeless Wessex – imaginary Camelot, and the now World Heritage site of Stonehenge. Stourton (Stourhead) holds Alfred’s Tower, another place constructed in patriotic spirit, and again reminding us of England’s legendary origins.

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A new mode of war seemed to threaten this nostalgic image more than ever before, and a generation of war poets began to write, like Hardy, of a pastoral homeland contrasted to the ‘horrors of war’ (a phrase that comes to construct the modern idea of war, and the image of home in opposition). In Siegfried’s Journey, 1916-1920, Siegfried Sassoon writes of a vision from ‘the borderland of sleep’, where ‘swarming figures on some battle-ravaged region’ are ‘an idea derived, perhaps, from the scenic directions in Hardy’s Dynasts’. Sassoon acknowledges the ghostly theatrics of war and Hardy’s influence on his writing of it.57

Like Hardy, many poets of the Great War continued to contrast a pastoral image of home to the battlefield. In Robert Graves’ ‘Limbo’ (1916) the soldier goes from the bombs and gunfire of the trenches to the ‘sunny cornland’ where babies, horses and the plough are seen once more when leave comes.58 In Graves’ ‘The Morning Before the Battle’ (1916), death encroaches upon the home, blowing through a deserted garden before the writer leaves to war (p. 16).59 The poetry of Edward Thomas, who was killed in the Battle of Arras in 1917, also offers a vision of pre-war pastoral England. In ‘The Manor Farm’, nation is of the ‘farm and church’, ‘Old already’, and called ‘Merry’.60 Edna Longley notes that the poem was written ‘to counter wartime rhetoric that took England’s name in vain’.61 War often seems absent from the pastoral poems, but ‘A Private’ (beginning as pastoral, but rewritten to account for the war) demonstrates a ‘developing sense of the war’s impact on rural England’.62 Longley observes that in the poem, ‘As the team’s head-brass’, Thomas, unlike Hardy with ‘In the Time of the Breaking of Nations’ ‘situates his persona’ in war and history (p. 301). As

57 Siegfried Sassoon, Siegfried’s Journey, 1916-1920 (London: Faber and Faber, 1945), pp. 70. Sassoon specifically cites the ‘influence of Hardy’s Satires of Circumstance’ on some of his poems (p. 29).
59 For other examples of this movement between a pastoral representation of home and war see Isaac Rosenberg’s ‘On Receiving News of the War’ and ‘Home-thoughts from France’, and D. H. Lawrence’s ‘Tommies on the Train’. These poems are also collected in the appropriately titled Men who March Away: Poems of the First World War, ed. by I. M. Parsons, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1965).
62 Longley, in Thomas, Collected Poems, ed. by Longley p. 175.
the narrator of the poem explains ‘Only two teams work on the farm this year. | One of my mates is dead’. 63

Influenced by Hardy and psychoanalysis, Thomas’s poems, on closer scrutiny, seem aware of a war that had become, as Freud explains, bloodier than anything that had been seen before, thanks to technology. It was a war that now blurred the distinction between the military and civilian too.64 The war could no longer be romanticised by those contemporary to its horrors. Bombs were dropped on England for the first time, and even Hardy’s Wessex, thus far impervious – but now manifested in the physical landscape thanks to guidebook and tourist – could be struck from air and sea.

A pastoral vision of England as an icon to hold against battle must have seemed absurd to some in the trenches. It appeared ridiculous to Graves in his poem ‘A Letter from Wales’ (1925), which tells of a soldier wildly charging into empty enemy trenches – a madness only matched by his sitting for an hour once there, reading ‘A book of pastoral poems’ (pp. 72-76 (p. 73)). As ridiculous as this account appears to be, a pastoral vision of England seems to have been relished by soldiers longing for home, many of whom read Country Life or even Hardy (as Sassoon claimed he did) in the trenches.65

Butts plays with this contrast of war to pastoral homeland in her journals and fiction. In Ashe of Rings, Judy’s threat to report the Russian refugee, Serge, to the authorities for avoiding conscription, echoes Butts’s old lover, Eleanor Rogers’, apparent threat to do the same to Butts’s new lover, John Rodker. Rodker – a conscientious objector – was hiding in Surrey,66 while Butts remained in London, working for the National Council Against Conscription.67 She writes of bombing in the city and the ‘Hampstead gun barking over head’, inducing Butts to find solace in the literary and pastoral, reciting, as if a liturgy, lines from

65 See Sassoon, Siegfried’s Journey, p. 13. Sassoon claims he carried a couple of Hardy’s novels with him during the Battle of the Somme.
Shelley, while longing for the countryside once more (JMB, pp. 84-85). When she travelled to the country to see Rodker, the pastoral scene Butts writes of is striking: ‘A month of sleep and fine air & sufficient food have increased his beauty past recognition. I never knew how beautiful he was before, now he’s brown with haymaking, supple with swimming and dear past understanding’ (JMB, pp. 47-48). The pure rites of country living are profaned when Butts describes Eleanor’s influence as being ‘like a filthy word shrieked across fine music’ (p. 48); hers is the voice of war and the bombed-out city.

As it is for the pressgang-pursued Robert in The Trumpet Major, the threat to home for Rodker comes from one’s own military – an incursion into pastoral England that Butts is very conscious of. In her poem ‘Corfe’, one of the interlopers to Wessex is not one of her hated tourists but a soldier, dressed in khaki uniform, from a nearby base:

A man crosses the rough grass  
Up the wild hill;  
Strong graceless kharki [sic] legs in silhouette  
Tired and tough, treading the hill down.

He will not wear it down  
Let him try!

Like Hardy’s ‘In the time of the Breaking of Nations’, Butts’s ‘Corfe’ claims the soil will go on as it has done before, even after war has passed. Yet, published in 1932, the poem reveals the military incursion into Wessex to be a prolonged ordeal. Patrick Wright explains that after the tank’s secret development for use at the battle of the Somme, the new machine was brought to the Lulworth Cove area of the Tyneham valley for training exercises. After the war the military fought to keep the area for use as a tank range. Its continuance engendered much protest. Even Hardy commented in a response to the editor of the Observer, on 5 August 1923:

I join in the protest against such a foolish proceeding as establishing a gunnery
school that will ruin a beautiful holiday spot enjoyed by millions since the reign of
George the III., that monarch included.  

Hardy's objection turns from contemporary concerns to England's ruling monarch
during the Napoleonic Wars. George III is allied with tourism rather than war,
and it seems appropriate that in spite of Hardy's objections the tanks were
becoming a popular tourist destination in Wessex. 

In the emotively entitled The Village that Died for England, Wright
examines the Tyneham area and village in relation to the tank range, using this to
structure a discussion of the surrounding rural landscape, its myths, writers and
activists, including Butts. Wright points out the Butts's Taverners, like the Bond
family, own two significant properties in Butts's novels Armed with Madness and
Death of Felicity Taverner. The main house, owned by brother and sister, Scylla
and Felix, is based on South Egliston Manor, today just a shell, located next to
woodland called 'The Spinney'. This was Butts's sacred wood in the Taverner
novels—a place of magic and tree spirits.

William Bond was the squire of Tyneham; his family had owned the
Elizabethan mansion there for over 500 years (p. 33). They also owned much of
the surrounding land, including the properties of the village, which were leased
from them by Tyneham's residents. After the war, Bond was forced to sell some
of his land (p. 115). Previously, he had resisted change in the area, even buying
empty cottages and knocking them down so they could not be used by holiday
makers (p. 96). Butts would have approved. But with fire gutting the manor, and
more general decline (much of it agricultural) in the 1930s, this old squire-led
rural pocket was fast disappearing. However, it was the military that bought an
end to manor and village on 19 December 1943 (pp. 116, 122). All residents,
including the new squire, William's son, Ralph Bond, had been given a month's
notice to leave. The area was to be used for preparations for the Normandy

70 Hardy, 'Tanks at Lulworth Cove' in Public Voice, ed. by Millgate, p. 425.
73 Nathanael Bond had purchased Tyneham along with Creech Grange, also in the Purbeck area.
The Bond's association with the region dates back to the time of Henry VI (Oswald, Country
Houses of Dorset, pp. 84-86).
landings of June 1944. Villagers were told they could return after the war (p. 34). Ralph spent the remainder of the war living in the grounds of Corfe Castle – the location his ancestor, Thomas Bond, had written of in his 1883 *History and Description of Corfe Castle in the Isle of Purbeck, Dorset*. At the end of the Second World War, the military retained Tyneham, denying its residents a return home. Butts’s friend and vocal pacifist, Douglas Goldring, wrote letters – as did many others – in objection, convinced this proved war with Russia was soon to follow (p. 258). To date the area remains part of the MOD’s gunnery range. Wright suggests that for many this became a wound made by the state in the national character (p. 269).

Butts’s novelistic response to the wound of war – an incursion into pastoral England – came a little time after the conflict, with the publication of *Ashe of Rings* in 1925. In an earlier journal entry dated 29 February 1920, Butts notes an idea for an essay:

> The War is not to be considered in this case as a producer of literature except in the sense of moeurs contemporains. The significant literature produced by the War – having any quality of permanency – will appear in ten or more years’ time. (*JMB*, p. 142)

In 1917, Virginia Woolf wrote that the war was too close to be put into fiction; and earlier, in 1915, Freud claimed that, with all the confusion of war, he was ‘too close to the changes’ taking place to see them properly. Kathy Phillips seems to bear out these predictions, claiming there was a ‘spurt of creativity ten years after the armistice’. Hugh Cecil supports this, drawing attention to what Samuel Hynes calls the ‘myth’ of the Great War, explaining that it was, indeed, a ‘decade after the conflict that the trend of disillusionment became a flood’.

Hynes’s ‘myth’ is an imaginative ‘tale that confirms a set of attitudes, an idea of what the war was and what it meant’. The myth includes ‘a sense of

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discontinuity of present from the past'; the idea of the 'lost generation'; a belief that the young survivors of both sexes eventually 'rejected the values of the society that had sent them to war'; and that those who survived, often lived 'disengaged from life' and society after the conflict. This is a rejection of the old England and its rites and customs that Butts's writing often seems to honour. Yet Butts subscribes to this myth. In The Crystal Cabinet, she writes of a post-war world where all 'standards seemed gone, all values discredited', where anything seemed possible (CC, p. 178). A generation was 'disenchanted' (p. 179), and Butts's own ideas of religion destroyed (p.133). Powys too refers to the aftermath, but is critical of the response, writing of the post-war years 'literary gang' (Butts, her acquaintances, and her characters were part of this gang) as a group epitomising what he called the 'Hell! Let's have another drink' 'attitude to existence'. This 'myth' of the Great War is all-consuming, and seems to dismiss any response that could come from the old ways of England and its ruling peoples. They had been found responsible. Perhaps the time lag in a literary response was time to consider a new space between homeland and war. It appears to have allowed Butts time to re-imagine a country house living and ethos that for many had been made repugnant by the Great War.

A house like Wessex: theatre of a troubled and doubled paradise

The roots of the country house are as firmly planted in war as those of the borders of Wessex and nation. Allusion to battles past are found in the traces of the once great halls that, as Mark Girouard discusses, held troops more often than they did families. These residences exhibited a greater resemblance to the mead halls of Beowulf than to our present understanding of a country estate. A suggestion of

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79 Butts friend, Douglas Goldring, published a pamphlet in 1932, which is written according to this 'myth' of war. The pamphlet accuses the older generation of having 'betrayed, swindled, exploited and decimated' the younger generation, and urges the new youth to refuse to be treated in the same way ('Pacifists in Peace and War', The Here & Now Pamphlets, 1 (Letchworth: Wishart, 1932), p. 46).
80 John Cowper Powys, Mortal Strife (London: Jonathan Cape, 1942), p. 73.
this castle-type architecture still lingered in the houses of the sixteenth century (pp. 87-88), while its symbolic power remained until the popularisation of country house and garden visiting of the nineteenth century. The Tyneham area, invaded by the military during the interwar period, is, in a sense, a location already shaped by war. The lands owned by the ruling families were probably once won or given as rewards by a grateful king, and the houses can be read as the descendents of once fortified strategic locations.

In the extract at the opening of this chapter, Brideshead’s reassembly as house, from castle, illustrates this historical shift, and the estate’s war-like heritage. This quite literal move is dated by Sebastian to the time of Inigo Jones (1573-1652), an architect credited with introducing Renaissance architecture to England, and a pioneer of stage design, creating sets, costumes and effects for masques staged by Ben Jonson. The masque was a more exclusive version of the pageant play that included acting, dancing and singing, often performed for royalty. Jonson can be seen to signal the beginnings of an early modern view of the country house as an ideal representative of the nation. It is an ‘English System’ that is even embodied in country house architecture—a ‘language’ that can still be read in city, and in suburban, house construction today.

The house was ‘invented’ from a ‘selective memory’, McBride explains, and became the ‘symbol of good housekeeping: a moral economy wherein all classes and peoples lived in right relationship with each other and with the rest of creation’. This reading is analogous to the popular reading of harmony in Hardy’s Wessex. It is a tradition of place representation that Butts subscribes to in the construction of her family home as a childhood Eden in The Crystal Cabinet, and which Waugh alludes to when almost incidentally mentioning Inigo Jones. Interestingly, Powys too cites Jones as a past contributor to the

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82 Mandler, The Fall and Rise, pp. 4, 7.
84 Kelsall writes that the country house ‘enters English literature at a specific place and time’: the early seventeenth century, and most notably in Jonson’s work. The house at this point is already an ‘archaic symbol’ though (Kelsall, The Great Good Place, pp. 32, 44).
85 Kelsall, The Great Good Place, p. 3.
architecture of Ashover House in *Ducdame*, thereby establishing an idea of the theatre and grand architecture, but also tacitly suggesting a link to Ben Jonson.

In 1616, Jonson published the celebrated country house poem ‘To Penshurst’. Conceived as a paean to Robert Sidney, the poem alludes to Horace’s pastoral odes, and positions Penshurst as a praised monument, representative of the Sidney family. Jonson claims that though the walls are built of stone, ‘[t]hey’re reared with no man’s ruin, no man’s groan’, and ‘none that dwell about them wish them down’. Its master and mistress offer hospitality to all, and the ‘painted partridge lies in every field, | And for thy mess is willing to be killed’. While made of stone the house is also part of nature – a mediator between natural world and artifice. It connects the physical to the spiritual in grounds that contain a ‘Mount, to which the dryads do resort, | Where Pan and Bacchus their high feasts have made’. Classical lineage and legitimacy are conferred on a house of goodness and bounty, where even gods and spirits dwell.

Butts’s Salterns and its literary companion Rings, in *Ashe of Rings*, become, like Brideshead, ‘memory places’, embodying a literary and cultural heritage of the country house. Just as the ancient gods gave a classical legitimacy to Jonson’s Penshurst, so they appear at Salterns, Butts claiming Pan was in the garden, and dryads amongst the trees (*CC*, pp. 221, 145). Vitta Sackville-West (Butts was friends with her brother Edward), composed a slightly later paean to her own family estate of Knole in Kent. She writes that ‘It is, above all, an English house. It has a tone of England; it melts into the green of the garden turf, into the tawnier green of the park beyond, into the blue of the pale English sky’. The house flows through the garden into nature, and into the sky and the divinities. It is a dwelling bringing together Heidegger’s fourfold. A once Roman building on the site, browsing deer, and a visit from Ann Radcliff imbue it with a ‘permanence’ and ‘tradition’.

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Butts’s Salterns is formed from a similar stately mould, and *Ashe* is in part its fictional retelling. The estate of Rings borrows much from Salterns’s Splendour (see Figure 21 and 22), but also from the Kingston Lacy estate in Dorset, owned by the Bankes family (who also owned Corfe). Salterns, in the tradition of such country houses, is a place of heirlooms and antiquities (some of which can be seen in Figure 22). A store of the nation’s heritage, the house was filled with the works of Blake and the Pre-Raphaelites (*CC*, pp. 13, 142). Kingston Lacy held similar treasures, and Viola Bankes’s memories of her childhood reveal comparable recollections to those of Butts’s: visiting dignitaries, idyllic summers, and an enjoyment of an extensive collection of paintings. Kingston Lacy was a little grander though, and Viola even recalls one occasion when Thomas Hardy came to tea.

Viola also mentions her family’s association with Corfe, and the legend of Edward who was once murdered there (p. 112). After the Bankes were forced from Corfe in the civil war, they relocated to their estate where John’s son, Ralph, finished building the house. Restoration begun in 1835 was ordered by John Bankes’s great grandson, William. William filled the house with antiquities from his travels in the orient. In 1981, Ralph Bankes bequeathed the house to the National Trust, ensuring its position as a shrine to heritage.

In her reimagining of her family’s house, Butts writes within the tradition of country house literature, so drawing from a custom, begun in Jonson’s poem, of a house defined by dualities: material/spirit, nature/artifice, history/timelessness. Problematically, like the rites that justify agriculture’s violence to the land, Jonson’s poem can be read as troubling validation of aristocratic exploitation, and its position of privilege – a house likely built and maintained from others’ ‘groan’ and poverty. The poem itself is a rite in favour of the ‘great man’ of the estate, who though ‘less sacred’ than the king, was constantly surrounded by such affirming ‘ceremony’.

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90 See the previous chapter’s discussion of Butts’s similar descriptive positioning of the house, garden and grounds of Salterns and Rings, pp. 125-29.
Figure 21. 'Salterns', in *The Crystal Cabinet*, p. 172 (Due to copyright this image must not be copied)

22. 'The dining room' at Salterns, in *The Crystal Cabinet*, p. 272 (Due to copyright this image must not be copied)
Once more, we find a doubled image of the house in the eighteenth-century novel. Mr Allworthy’s Paradise Hall in Fielding’s *Tom Jones* (1749) is, as the name suggests, emblematic of an Edenic realm. The manors of Jane Austen’s novels might be read in the same way (idyllic locations for high society). But again the vision of paradise is troubled. In both examples the house is a place of exclusionary and often misguided privilege (even when Mr Allworthy’s motives, as his name suggests, are well-intended). Just as Austen’s heroines are hampered by lack of money, or a house being entailed to a distant relative, so Tom Jones is expelled from paradise and struggles to gain re-admittance to its hallowed boundaries. Butts’s heroine, Vanna, follows in this tradition of expulsion and return in her own quest.

Country house visiting in the eighteenth century reflected these problems of the page. Access was ‘physically restricted’ and limited to elite clientele. This changed in the nineteenth century as transportation routes and political and class freedoms increased, but again patrons were already being taught to appreciate society’s old order, encouraged to enjoy traditional estates, which remained untouched and un-modernised, and were still owned by the original family. 94

The Arts and Crafts movement, resenting the power and privilege of the aristocracy, resisted this continuing idealized country house ethos. 95 Yet, for one of the main proponents of the movement, William Morris, the manor remains an ideal, just of a different kind. In his nineteenth-century home of Kelmscott, Morris’s is a rural vision of anti-privilege. *News from Nowhere* (1890) develops this into a Middle-Ages-based feudal utopia; though, here too, realisation is restricted: the future of equality and rurality envisioned only as a dream of the main protagonist.

Despite (and indeed because of) problems of imagination, corruptibility, privilege, development, decay, history and literature, the house has become what Kelsall calls ‘The Great Good Place’, the ‘essential expressive sign of England’. 96 Kelsall’s naming is taken from Henry James’s short story, published in 1900, in which again a dream takes the protagonist, George Dane, away from the ‘rising

95 Mandler, *The Fall and Rise*, p. 144.
96 Kelsall, *The Great Good Place*, p. 5.
tide' of work and stress to a vision of what might be a country house. An ambiguous sanctity is established in its similarity to a monastery, and through the use and repetition of religious language and imagery. The 'dream sweetness of the place becomes' a 'world of reason and order': a duality of dream and reality evident when the dreamer has to pay his bills at the end of his stay.97 The story creates a place not dissimilar to the position the country house maintains today for tourists, as the 'national equivalent [...] of a place of pilgrimage', 98 where rural ideal, heritage, and BBC costume drama are manifested in a site you must pay to enter.

Here, the historical/timeless duality of the country house is reinforced by the visitor's desire to see something 'real' in the form of history when sightseeing, though arguably history is not what the tourist really wants or receives. Closer to Samuel's idea of an organic, socially constructed history (pp. x, 8), the tourist is presented with 'heritage' (one repeatedly shaped by literature and its television and film adaptation). The difference, David Lowenthal argues, being that heritage is coloured by 'legends of origin and endurance' of nation and landscape (which like history and heritage appear to be interchangeable and prime locations and products of the latter pair). This heritage is embodied in great deeds of England's past - often in acts of battle and war - achieved by those who dwell in the house.99 These objects and stories of heritage become 'resources for the present', the building blocks that legitimise a place of cultural importance.100 Butts begins to renegotiate this heritage through another much beloved site in her Dorset landscape - the Iron Age hill fort, Badbury Rings (see Figure 23). Badbury Rings lies on the Kingston Lacy estate, and inspires the name of Butts's novelistic creation.

The borders of the house: Butts's Badbury Rings

98 Kelsall, The Great Good Place, p. 5.
100 G. J. Ashworth and Brian Graham, 'Sense of Place, Senses of Time and Heritage', in Senses of Place: Senses of Time, ed. by G. J. Ashworth and Brain Graham (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 3-12 (p. 4).
We might locate the origins of Butt’s solution to a problematic country house heritage in Salterns’s art collection, specifically in the paintings of William Blake. She writes that she ‘brooded’ on them, until ‘the kind of seeing that there was in William Blake, in the end affected me both unconsciously and profoundly’ (CC, p. 34). This ‘seeing’ sounds a little like Butts’s visionary ‘knight’s move’, and perhaps can be read as a type of appreciation that allows the transformation of Salterns and Ashe into a spiritual realm. In Ashe, rather than military men and politicians, the family comes from a line of illustrious witches and practitioners of magic. Ashe is a priestly family that embodies McBride’s definition of the ideal paternal landlord, ‘a steward of the land and its dependents rather than an owner’. Anthony Ashe grumbles, ‘it’s been a labour following through the centuries your [Rings] eternal caprice’ (AR, p. 7). The three concentric earthen rings of the novel are the estate’s most sacred region, representative of the house, its history and lineage. In Ashe, Butts repositions Badbury so that the Ashe family home nestles against it.

A site of battles past now offers a path to a spiritual dimension, reached through ritual practice upon its soil. It is a place of ‘evocation. Where the word is made flesh’ (AR, p. 150). Its model, Badbury Rings, was considered by Butts a sacred place in the Wessex landscape. Butts made many visits to the site during her lifetime. She describes Badbury as a holy place, a location for ‘initiation’, for magic, for rituals linking the seen and the unseen (CC, p. 266). Her poem ‘On Badbury Rings’ reveals something of the magic and power she saw there:

Broad be the girdles of the Holy Wood

103 Hardy seems to have enjoyed Badbury Rings too. According to Hardy’s ‘favourite’ driver, it was a preferred place for Hardy to go picnicking (Harold Lionel Voss, ‘Motoring with Thomas Hardy’, J. Stevens Cox, ed., Monographs on the Life, Times and Works of Thomas Hardy: nos. 1-72 (Beaminster: The Toucan Press, 1963-71), no. 7, p. 9. Badbury Rings is also a site in defence, and so in definition, of the home landscape in The Trumpet Major. When many villagers have gone up onto the downs to gain a view of the king’s arrival, the accompanying vista reveals Badbury and the warning beacon it now holds (TM, p. 104). It is a defensive reuse of a much older defensive site.
Bare ramparts of lean grass close menacing,
That all but trembles on our sight, who made
Some passion of dim Gods therein out played
Or the vast act of a forgotten King
The imminent wonder, nameless luminous

On Badbury Rings. 104

Figure 23. Badbury Rings on the Kingston Lacy Estate. National Trust web site. Under the section heading ‘Lord of the Rings’ (Due to copyright this image must not be copied).

Gods were present; kings of old lived and fought there; magic and history were to be found in one place, creating that place, sanctifying it for Butts. A journal entry dated 12 March 1922, echoes this interpretation:

Enchanted – technically – concretely – if there is such a thing – by reputation, by experience, by tradition. I have felt them – but I have never seen anything but trees & grass & wind & their accompaniments. (JMB, p. 194)

Here, the magic of nature exists alongside that of history, story and myth, which enchant place by ‘reputation, by experience, by tradition’ (p. 194). These acts of history and tradition are themselves rites sanctifying the soil before Butts’s writing, just as nature sanctifies place apart from the influence of humankind.

However, there is another side to this. Butts's visits and storytelling continue the performances, appropriating the histories and tales as forms of magic. Butts's journal entry explains, 'We went up the hill to them. I walked first saying it is I who have given them life'. She continues:

I lay stretched out on the ground, and understood that Rings' signature is written in its quiet. Its quiet is made audible by the sound in the grove.\(^{105}\)

There is a paradox of place: the quiet is made audible by the sound present. One is necessary for the other; the sound is necessary for the silence; the physical and profane world is necessary to enter the spiritual and sacred one. History is necessary to instil meaning, but as it does for Hardy, history becomes a heritage that eventually removes place from time, through processes of ritual reimagining, re-performance and memory. Like Butts's previously discussed imagining of Corfe, Badbury's timelessness is simultaneously a power outside of human influence; the Rings, and so the house, is holy without us. *Brideshead*'s Charles recognises this process in the country house, which 'at the moment of consummation' is taken from someone and 'perfected, without his intention, by other means' (*BR*, p. 208). Like Butts, Charles admires the traditions and heritage that allow such places to grow, 'silently with the centuries, catching and keeping the best of each generation' (p. 208). For Waugh, development is linked to religion – the Catholicism of family and house. For Butts this growth is magic.

**Hospital: healing in the homeland**

As a mythical place outside of time, Rings becomes a place of healing, amid the turmoil of war and change – a sort of modern Avalon, where a cure is not administered by the enchantresses of the Island to Arthur, but by Butts, and by Vanna, to the injured Serge, who is taken there after Judy's vicious attack on her lover:

\(^{105}\) Butts, journal entry, cited by Blondel, in *SFL*, p. 114. Also see *JMB*, p. 194.
There rose over the back of his head a distorted face, crimson, the mouth open and wet. It closed down on him snatching at his eyelids. The teeth bit down between eyes and nose. Fingers raked his throat. He was sobbing as he tore her off, his tears meeting blood, blinding him. (AR, p. 119)

This is Judy as a ‘microcosm’ of war (p. 67). Her violence then extends to the manipulation of Vanna’s cousin, the shell-shocked Amburton, who is denied the healing attempts of Vanna and Rings. For Serge and Vanna, though, Rings becomes a site of pilgrimage, their suffering a test, creating their passage as a religious or spiritual journey, and thus enabling healing to take place. It is a journey Vanna feels compelled to make: Rings calls to her, telling her to ‘come’ (AR, p. 94).

Their Lourdes-like pilgrimage finds a parallel in the experience of returning troops, for whom the country house might not only be an embodiment of a rural homeland, as it is in Ashe, but also the site to which they were sent to recover from injury. Though houses were not requisitioned as they would be in the Second World War, many owners volunteered their properties for use; often they became hospitals for the wounded. Like Kitty, in Rebecca West’s The Return of the Soldier (1918) (Kitty attempts to heal her war-wounded husband in her Edenic home of Baldry Court), the Countess of Lichfield ‘recalls’ how the houses helped the ‘healing of men in mind, body and soul, when they came out of hell and found themselves in heaven’. Though the Countess subscribes to a myth of place that secures and justifies her property and role, no doubt many of the soldiers found themselves in the England they had been imagining in the trenches, even if it was not really theirs.

Robinson reports that the magazine Country Life (Robinson was a contributor to its pages, as was Aslet, cited above) ran a series of articles on ‘what the Country Gentleman has Done for the War’. The weekly Country Life, launched in 1897, is concerned with the country house, its architecture, gardens

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108 Robinson, The Country House at War, p. 75.
109 Robinson, The Country House at War, p. 11.
and its supportive country pursuits such as hunting and horse riding—a publication aimed at the upper and aspiring classes. It continues to render a house and rural idyll present in England even today, and to some extent justifies a position of privilege by reinforcing the house’s cultural and national associations. While the ‘Country Life’ view of house and garden (and wife?) fails the recovering Captain Baldry in The Return of the Soldier (he must turn to an older love, and to an older memory of isolated countryside for help), the magazine found its way into the First World War trenches to comfort and remind soldiers of home. Home was again the pastoral ideal, war its antithesis. Sassoon’s Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man (1928) tries to capture ‘England’s [pre-war] green and pleasant land’. As well as the quotation from Blake’s Milton, now the popular hymn Jerusalem, Sassoon fills his England with cricket, sea-side trips, horse riding and hunting. It is an ‘examination of his past’ that as Patrick Quinn (with reference to Sassoon’s later The Old Century (1938)) suggests, becomes a ‘recreation’—one that occupied much of his writing, and ‘offered him a successful method of giving “the modern world the slip”’.

The world that Memoirs seeks to recreate is that of the English Country Home, functioning as an imaginary place of healing for Sassoon.

It was a world that others returning from the war were searching for, and that a few arguably found in Hardy’s house of Max Gate—a sanctuary surrounded by trees that Hardy had planted so as to hide from those seeking a peep of the famous writer. It also became a place of pilgrimage for other authors, many trying to escape the effects of the Great War. Sassoon, Graves and T. E. Lawrence were regular visitors. J. M. Barrie, John Galsworthy, John Masefield, George Bernard Shaw, and Eden Philpotts were all guests. Powys had also called many times over a period of thirty years, but it was the war poets that

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Hardy had a greater friendship with, and sympathy for.\footnote{Knight, \textit{T. E. Lawrence and the Max Gate Circle}, pp. 41, 19.} In an essay written in January 1928, Virginia Wolf suggests that Hardy’s death ‘leaves English fiction without a leader’ and with no one to ‘pay homage to’.\footnote{Virginia Woolf, ‘The Novels of Thomas Hardy’, in \textit{Collected Essays}, 4 vols (London: The Hogarth Press, 1966-1969), I (1966), pp. 256-66 (p. 256).} Hardy had become a mentor to a younger generation of writers, and soldiers, and his house a refuge — a place in which Pite sees Hardy ‘discretely counselling’ some of those affected by the war.\footnote{Pite, ‘Graver Things...Braver Things’, in \textit{The Oxford Handbook of British and Irish War Poetry}, ed. by Kendall, pp. 34-50 (p. 50).} In a letter to Graves, dated 8 September 1923, Lawrence tries to explain this place:

‘You said ‘Tell me about Max Gate’ — and I can’t!

The truth seems to be that Max Gate is very difficult to seize upon. I go there as often as I decently can, and hope to go on going there so long as it is within reach [...] When I come back I feel as if I’d woken up from a sleep: not an exciting sleep, but a restful one [...] They use to call this man a pessimist. While really he is full of fancy expectations.

Then he is so far-away. Napoleon is a real man to him, and the county of Dorchester echoes that name everywhere in Hardy’s ears. He lives in his period, and thinks of it as the great war: whereas to me that nightmare through the fringe of which I passed has dwarfed all memories of other wars, so they seem trivial, half-amusing incidents [...] Perhaps that’s partly the secret of the strange house hidden behind its thicket of trees. It’s because there are no strangers there. Anyone who does pierce through is accepted by Hardy and by Mrs. Hardy as one whom they have known always and from whom nothing need be hid.

For the ticket which gained me access to T. H. I’m grateful to you — probably will be grateful always. Max Gate is a place apart: and I feel it all the more poignantly for the contrast of life in this squalid camp.\footnote{T. E. Lawrence, letter dated 8 September 1923, in \textit{Selected Letters of T. E. Lawrence}, ed. by David Garnett, new edn (London: World Books, 1941), pp. 192-93.}

Hardy’s house, like his Wessex, straddles reality and myth for Lawrence. The house becomes a ‘place apart’, a place of ‘rest’, not dissimilar to a country house in the guise of a hospital. Hardy’s home is (as it is today as a tourist destination) a place one can little differentiate from Hardy’s fiction. Modern war had no place there, though Hardy takes in those affected by it. Lawrence notes that it has been usurped by Napoleon, who has become a reality to Hardy. Again war helps construct the house, but it is war from the past — war at a safe distance, as heritage, not the recent horrors of the trenches.
After the War, the country house more generally began to be envisaged as Lawrence saw Max Gate and as Butts constructs both Salterns and Rings – a place of pre-war, ageless purity, contrasted to the new century of corruption, pollution and conflict. But for country house owners in the interwar years this image was now of a lost era. Lady Phyllis explains that at the time ‘everyone was trying to return to the old days before 1914’. By everyone she means owners of country houses – a rather exclusive set. Both Lady Phyllis and another house owner, Marcus Wickham-Boynton, point to all the changes in taxes, agriculture, technology, and wages, and of course the war that made such a return impossible. For Butts the decline of her family’s country estate was part of a ‘defilement’ and ‘desolation’ of England. She writes, at ‘some time about the end of the war, there came a point I suddenly recognised as spiritual saturation. The thing had won. It could not be stopped’ (CC, p. 92).

The country house: a theatre of declining rites

Even as Vanna takes Serge to heal at her family estate, its magic and ‘out of time’ qualities appear threatened. The English Manor during this period became a useful symbol for many to represent all that was threatened by the Great War and the other social changes in part engendered by it. Butts’s makes use of this symbol in Ashe, where Judy is the mouthpiece for the threat to home, tradition and lineage. She boasts: ‘We’re going to clean you out of the world. That’s what the war’s been for’ (AR, p. 162).

Many estate owners of the time might have seen a similar threat embodied in David Lloyd George. Though a critic of the second Boer war and of the armament build up that preceded the First World War, Lloyd George ousted Herbert Henry Asquith in 1916 to become Prime Minister and that same year introduced conscription, so assuring the futile death of thousands more men in the trenches. Those who died on the battlefields were not only the cannon fodder

120 McBride positions the country house as a symbol in opposition to the modern city (McBride, Country House Discourse, p. 6).
provided by the lower classes, but were also the sons of high society who should have inherited their family's country estates. Aslet tells of the Scottish Architect, John Kinross, whose profitable pre-war business designing country houses was only able to continue after 1918 through the design of war memorials, some, Aslet adds, built, rather 'poignantly, to the sons of former clients'.

In 1894, death duties were imposed by the government for the first time, greatly threatening the traditional entailment of a country property from father to son. In 1909, Lloyd George, only a cabinet minister at the time, raised these duties in an attempt to attack the inequalities he saw existing within the landed classes. The Rent Restriction Act of 1915 further impeded the income of those with larger estates. And while the First World War seemed to stop the government's bombardment of the ruling elite, death duties were raised once again in 1919. Coupled with an unrelentingly rising income tax, the continued existence of the country estate seemed to be threatened.

Butts's family home of Salterns was affected; her mother sold, amongst other heirlooms, their large collection of William Blake paintings to cover her father's death duties. Butts saw this event as contributing to 'a story of an unmaking, the undoing in less than half a lifetime of the work of centuries' that had built her family and home (CC, p. 13).

During the interwar years, the traditional family existence of the estate was threatened. Developments of technology and machinery contributed to the decline of household practices and rites, as they had done to traditional farming methods. New household appliances required the employment of fewer staff, so changing the structure of the household. Acquiring servants became more difficult as opportunities and expectations of the working classes increased; and, the steady rise of pay made the employment of servants prohibitive. Larger houses and estates became impractical and expensive. In Brideshead, this change

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125 This view is reflective of a wider middle-class perception at the time of the 'arrogance, immorality and inefficiency' of the upper classes (Girouard, Life in the English Country House, p. 270).
is reflected in the declining rituals of the hunt (traditional costume in no longer worn by many, *BR*, p. 141), and in the longer closed periods of the house. In *Ashe*, the estate declines until the return of its rightful heir, Vanna. We find a religious echo of this general decay in the closing of Brideshead's chapel.

Almost in mourning for this shift, Charles paints what appears to be a series of death-mask house portraits for the owners of manors scheduled to be sold or demolished, including a commission of Brideshead shortly before its planned demolition and replacement with modern flats (*BR*, p. 192). Similarly, Butts claimed that after its sale Salterns became two houses, one of them used for boarding (*CC*, p. 92).

Mandler writes that this decline of the house was partly due to the 'owners' detachment from their historic roots'. In *Brideshead*, Waugh utilises the family's Catholic beliefs to emphasise this failure of family roots, and their secular ceremonial incarnations. As if to illustrate Harrison's idea of a society's modernizing movement from ritual to theatre, Brideshead becomes more associated with theatrical performance. Like Hardy's representation of war and home in *The Trumpet Major*, the house increasingly resembles the heritage of a tourist attraction rather than a working house: more like Jones's movable scenery than Brideshead's solid castle origins. Charles (the house's artist and narrator) even paints murals on its walls; and, his role as stage set designer is further established by his wife's attempt to secure Hollywood set design work for him (*BR*, p. 211).

In *Ashe*, the breakdown of family history is embodied in Vanna's mother's failure to respect the sanctity of Rings. It is a ritual and spiritual decline—pagan rather than Catholic. It begins with an act of adultery committed by her mother, followed by a series of events that lead to the sale of the estate and the descent into a state of decay.

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128 Ceremony could be found in the Victorian country house in its daily upkeep—cleaning, lighting fires, meals, and in the family's actions: visiting the poor, morning visiting and afternoon tea. The house was a series of performances (*Girouard, Life in the English Country House*, pp. 310, 270). Girouard notes that many of these rites created by the Victorian upper classes were to keep undesirable people out (p. 268). They were a form of social control.

129 Girouard recognises that household rites had been 'religious as well as secular', establishing the site as a place of intense ritual performance (*Life in the English Country House*, p. 22).


131 This use of Catholicism reflects Waugh's own beliefs. On 29 September 1930, Waugh converted to the Catholic faith after years of interest in the church (*Byrne, Mad World*, p. 127). A similar conversion takes place for Charles in *Brideshead*, at the deathbed of Lord Marchmain (p.300).
Melitta, on the Rings when Vanna is still a child (p. 39), and continues after her father’s death with her mother’s failure to observe the rites of the place. Vanna is forced to leave, and while no one performs its ceremonies, the land becomes dormant (p. 53). Twelve years later, an Odyssean return to an Ithaca-like state of decline finds a ghostly mirroring in the ‘female Odyssey’ Serge imagines when hearing of Melitta’s crossing of the English Channel to return home to meet them (AR, p. 181). Melitta has arrived in time to witness the revival of Rings, a place where imaginings ‘find a body’ (p. 150), and enable Butts to complete a literary rite that could not be achieved with her home Salterns.

Here, the loss of the house engenders its survival. In Brideshead, Charles realises a possible end to the old order of the country house, suggesting ‘Englishmen seemed for the first time to become conscious of what before was taken for granted, and to salute their achievements at the moment of extinction’ (BR, p. 198). A sense of loss establishes a sense of the sacred. The house dies but its mystical position is assured. Elizabeth Bowen, writing of home, locates this epiphany of sanctity in ‘War’, which ‘makes us more conscious, anxiously conscious, of the value of everything that is dear and old’. 132 Waugh saw this in the same era’s ‘craze for cottages’ that ‘began as soon as they had ceased to represent a significant part of English life’. 133 Today’s ‘cult of the country house’ is, in part, a protracted response to this sense of loss. For Butts, loss becomes a performance of the home.

Performing the gap: from violence to homeland

Though Butts had claimed that perhaps gardening could bring an end to war (‘Man the gardener is kept very busy and behaves himself’, she writes, ‘At the only cost – a high cost but a fair one – that he makes less history), 134 pastoral pastimes are not enough to defend the shrine of the house in Ashe. But then, if

133 Waugh, Labels, p. 56.
Sassoon is to be believed, Winston Churchill thought that gardening and war complemented each other, commenting that war and gardening were the ‘normal occupation of man’.  

Many of the war poets compared a pastoral home to war, but, in a process of defence and control of their home, the government had tried to separate the two. Allyson Booth writes that the British government, through regulation, attempted to ‘wipe the home front clean of corpses’. But in doing this, they unwittingly wiped away [...] the British Soldier’s sense of home’. Booth explains that soldiers’ war writing helped ‘mend the representational gap between front and home front by articulating that gap’ (p. 22). For Butts, the writing of this gap brings war and death into the home, allowing her loss of home to be overcome. Being aware of death (a realisation Freud thought the war had allowed, forcing people to reconsider their subscription to a myth of self-immortality) enables Butts to ritually move beyond death.

However, Freud was concerned that in modern society this revelation of the murderous primeval in each of us was now without its proper ritualistic recognition, and soldiers would return undisturbed by what they had done in war. The return for many was not so easy, and post-traumatic stress, amongst other sufferings, might be interpreted as ritual penance enough. Butts examines the homecoming of such traumatised figures in Ashe of Rings, and in her short story ‘Speed the Plough’ (1921). Virginia Woolf’s Septimus kills himself, in Mrs Dalloway, because he is unable to adjust and recover – no ritual will purify. Many more examples of Modernist literature exist as testament to this returning home, many of them like West’s The Return of the Soldier unclear as to how successful a homecoming can be.

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135 Sassoon, Siegfried’s Journey, p. 79.
138 Comparably, Charles’s conversion (or spiritual enlightenment) in Brideshead takes place at a deathbed, and in spite of, but perhaps due to, the destruction of the house and family, and the failure of his relationship with Julia.
We can locate in the writing of such experiences an attempted act of purification. War writing brings the necessary blood into existence, where it had not been before, though never wholly into the home or sanctuary itself. War is left on the margins, in the pages of the book or in the soldier’s memories. David Jones examines this idea of in-betweenness in his *Waste Land*-inspired poem, *In Parenthesis* (1937), which details life and war in the trenches just before the Battle of the Somme. He has chosen this particular title for his work, he writes, ‘because I have written it in a kind of space between – I don’t know quite what – but as you turn aside to do something; and because for us amateur soldiers [...] the war itself was a parenthesis’. 140

Reading the ritual of writing on a much larger scale, the Great War can be seen as a boundary of (or at least a component of) literary Modernism – in part a rite of passage from the Victorian era into something new, a ‘spectacular manifestation’ of a ‘wider social crisis’. 141 Again, a sense of loss produces something new. Booth notes that the ‘dislocations’ of war become part of the ‘modernist form [taking on characteristics of the perceived problem], even when war itself seems peripheral to modernist content’. 142 War seems to operate in a ‘liminal and subliminal’ way – qualities Alan Roughly suggests ‘play an integral role in the aesthetics of modernity’. 143 Booth’s ‘dislocation’ suggests a marginal site in-between, and we are again reminded of the boundaries of place and homeland threatened by conflict and change, but also of Derrida’s ‘The Double Session’, where dislocation is found in the act of writing, where meaning is located in the space between words. 144 Butts suggested the War had left everybody living in ‘two ages’ (CC, p. 54). This displacement of nation and culture is reflected in the dislocation of modernist writing – in part a lingering literary subconscious and subliminal mimesis of war, which strives for some sort

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142 Booth, *Postcards from the Trenches*, p. 4.
of purification through representation. With reference to Arnold van Gennep, Solon Kimball explains that such rites are regenerative. Acts of death and rebirth allow the needed regeneration on a universal level, where ‘energy which is found in any system gradually becomes spent and must be renewed at intervals’.145 As Kathy Phillips writes, the media during the First World War greeted the war as a similar rite of ‘purity and abstinence’ – one much needed by a decadent society, that some associated with the country house and the ruling classes who dwelt within.146 War was justified as a rather drastic rebirth ceremony.

However, more usefully here, the Great War can be read as a rite in definition of home, allowing the returning soldier to move from a state of profanity to purity. The crossing of the border, and the defining of the border through the physical crossing or the process of writing, can be read as an act of purification and creation. In ‘Thoughts for the Times on War and Death’, Freud writes that the ‘savage’ must ‘atone for murders’ before he can enter the village or even touch his wife.147 Freud was influenced by current anthropological works, likely amongst them William Roberts Smith’s seminal study of ‘primitive’ tribal rites, Lectures on the Religion of the Semites (1889), which was in its third edition in the inter-war years.148 Smith explains that upon entering a sanctuary one is required to abide by the taboos of the place, such as the prohibition of the spilling of blood.149 While this site is pure, one can see that the spilling of blood must have taken place, and needs to take place in some form, so the purity of the sanctuary might be defined. Reading the violence against the enemy during the war (and perhaps the endurance of it oneself) as being what René Girard terms ‘sacrificial violence’ (sanctioned violence to ‘protect the community from its own violence’), allows the war to ‘serve as an agent of purification’, necessitating

146 Phillips, Manipulating Masculinity, p 19.
‘those who perform the rites’ to ‘purify themselves at the conclusion of the sacrifice’. 150

In Butts’s Ashe, the threat of war, embodied in Judy, offers violence to the site of Rings. A blood pollution takes places when Judy kills and bleeds a dog onto its soil (AR, p. 186). Judy’s black magic is all about blood, and this feeds into sexual violence. Judy’s earlier attack on Serge also combines blood and sex (pp. 124-25), so functioning as a blood ceremony.151 On the site of Rings, the shell-shocked Amburton is manipulated by Judy into the attempted rape of Vanna. Alluding to the media’s reports of rape committed by German soldiers, Amburton’s threat of sexual violence feminises the victim, the estate and house, but also confers a power on that femininity. Butts matches this sexual violence with Vanna’s more pure sexuality. Stripping naked, as a means of defence, Vanna confronts Amburton, who cannot bear the sight. Vanna’s sexuality is stronger. It is pure, and it also heals; it is offered to the wounded Serge.152 While sex is used by Vanna, Butts maintains that she is still pure, just as Felicity in Death of Felicity Taverner remains a figure of purity despite her various relationships.153

Andrew Radford argues that the fertility god Persephone ‘imbues’ Butts’ female protagonists, allowing them a ‘procreative potential and capacity for renewal’.154 They must revive the land, its history, and its rites. They have the power to ‘refresh [their] generation’ (JMB, p. 249). But, as with the story of Persephone, they represent a duality in that this rejuvenation comes from the underworld – from death. This need of death and suffering to maintain the sanctity of home, might also be usefully examined through Butts’s love of the Promethean myth. In The Crystal Cabinet, Butts writes that ‘in the hero Prometheus the meaning of human life was to be found – Prometheus, the rebel, the fire-bearer; who told people they might do the things they had not been allowed to do – that was why he was called Saviour’ (CC, p. 115). Vanna and her

151 See Foy, Ritual, Myth and Mysticism, p. 43.
152 Reading Butts’s journals, it seems Butts believed she had something of this healing sexuality herself, found in her own love of ‘finding someone psychically sick, & hearing about it, & seeing if there is a way out’, often through the use of sex (JMB, p. 248).
family are endowed with Promethean traits. An ancestor, Florian Ashe, is nailed, like Christ, to the wall of the building’s tower for his beliefs and practices (AR, p. 20-21). Vanna too, becomes Christ-like/Promethean-like – told in her scratched wounds, delivered by Judy whirling thorns at her head, after the attempted rape (p.192). Laying naked on a rock, ‘corpse’-like, threatened with rape, she resembles Prometheus chained to the rock (p. 188). In this suffering, the estate of Rings is reclaimed, and her mother made aware of the risks posed to house and family (p. 202).155

Girard argues that as sacrificial rites disappear from a society the ‘difference between impure violence and pure violence’ also vanishes, so that purification cannot take place.156 Even in the triumphant conclusion to Ashe, Butts suggests there is confusion between what is sacred and what is profane.

After victory over Judy, Vanna reveals her similarity to her defeated foe. Having to let Serge leave, Vanna, like Judy, is momentarily possessive and destructive:

I want that [Serge]. I shall die if I don’t get that. She rolled over, biting her wrists. Be quiet, Van. You will feel this for other men. Oh yes, you will. You will meet him when you are both famous and rag each other. In the years to come. Not now. Not now.

She sat up, sucking the needles she had bitten. Her senses came back. She smelt the earth, the smoky air sucked by the first strong sun. She thought of Melitta in the garden, cutting hyacinths; Valentine and Morice in a cool pantry, making cup; that they were going to dance that night. (AR, pp. 209-10)

Blood and death are countered with soil, sun and air – we are reminded of the power of the pastoral and of life in the country house, which is the embodiment of a more subtle blood magic located in family lineage. At the testing moment, Vanna’s thoughts appear like a repetitive soothing chant: ‘In years to come. Not now. Not now’. It is a last cleansing rite of the self and family, her mother’s presence is now welcome, lingering in the garden with cut flowers. One is

155 Butts’s short story, ‘The Saint’, explores a similar idea of the necessity of the profane to produce the sacred. In the tale, a woman steals and then sells a communion chalice from her church. The priest at the close of the story laments to the woman of its theft (not knowing she has taken it), not of its materiality, but of the ‘sacred use’ it was put to. She then offers the priest the money from the sale to set up a school for mothers, and so puts the cup to a, perhaps, more sacred use still, of helping others (Mary Butts, ‘The Saint’, in Speed the Plough and other Stories (London: Chapman & Hall, 1923), pp. 103-116.

156 Girard, Violence and the Sacred, p. 49.
reminded of the closing scene of Howards End, where the dangers of change are for a moment abated, where the garden and the freshly harvested fields are coloured with the continuing presence of the spirit of Mrs Wilcox. There too the persisting processes of life and death are in balance, renewal still a possibility (HE, pp. 342-43).

Vanna completes a rebirth ceremony that is, though reliant on magic and ancestral witches, a narrative of conservatism and heritage based in the country house. Alison Light’s claim in Forever England that the period between the wars witnesses a ‘dominant mood’ that ‘could be conservative in effect and yet was often modern in form’ can be applied to Butts’s magic. Light locates this modern conservatism in a female writing which models itself on an ‘Imperial masculinity’ (p. 211). This is evident in Butts’s concerns of estate and heritage. Butts’s brand of Englishness, like that of the mid-war Englishness written on by Light, ‘feminise[s] the idea of nation as a whole’ (p. 211). Like Graves’s The White Goddess (1948), Butts locates power in the feminine, connecting to what Garrity identifies as ‘ancestral memory’, ‘aristocratic continuity [and] spiritual mysticism’. This in turn is reflected in the land, a blood connection to place, that would lead Butts to claim ‘in the woman is the race’ (CC, p. 171). This assertion, its conservatism and its feminine rites, are quite different from the struggle Powys was set to develop in his country house narrative, Ducdame.

Dance of fools: Powys’s rejection of feminine ritual

Life and death are the concerns of Powys’s Ducdame. Their duality and performativity in the novel are first approached in both the novel’s dedication and opening quotation. The book is dedicated to the 4th century BCE Taoist philosopher Kwang-Tse (Powys had a keen interest in Taoism) and advocates respect for one’s ancestors, so introducing a novel concerned with the family and

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158 Radford notes this conservatism and privilege in Ashe, observing that the story of ‘Persephone who resuscitates a “real England” becomes the salvaging of a social clique whose most precocious members have been unfairly deprived of their time-honoured role and status’ (Radford, The Lost Girls, p. 283).
a ‘dominating emphasis on ancestry powers’. But then the individual is introduced, who, Powys suggests, ‘like the protagonist [Rook Ashover] of this book’,

Go where they are pushed,
Follow where they are led,
Like a whirling wind,
Like a feather tossed about,
Like a revolving grindstone.

Rook is indeed such a character, though he might be seen to fight a little more against the not entirely indifferent forces of the tale. In this introduction we find a cyclical movement (‘whirling’, ‘revolving’) that is connected to nature. In Ducdame this repeating force is of ritual significance – representative of the power of the feminine, nature and its ceremonies.

Rook is a man surrounded by women. He lives in his ancestral Dorset home of Ashover with his mistress, Netta, and his mother. Rook’s consumptive brother, Lexie (modelled on Powys’s brother Llelywn) lives in a nearby cottage. Figure 24 shows a map of Ashover, which appeared on the front and back boards of the US first edition of Ducdame. The map shows locations essential to the movement of characters, who, at times behave as if ‘pushed’ and ‘whirled’ by some other force. Their actions can be read as a dance or stage performance – an idea introduced in the opening Shakespearean quotation, included in explanation of the novel’s title:

\[\textbf{Ami.} \quad \text{What’s that “duc dame?”} \]
\[\textbf{Jaq.} \quad \text{’Tis a Greek invocation, to call}
\quad \text{fools into a circle....} \]
\[\text{ACT II, Scene VI, As You Like It.} \]


The reader is made aware that a theatrical performance is about to take place, the stage-like set ready for a dance of fools, though one with a classical heritage. This dance is concerned with estate and family lineage. Lexie Ashover has no children and is slowly dying of consumption, while Rook’s mistress Netta is unable to have children. The family line seems doomed. In fear of this, Rook’s mother invites Rook’s cousin, Lady Ann Wentworth, to visit, in the hope that he will marry her and produce an heir. This is the dance of fools, and as with other Powys novels it is structured around a battling duality, here between life (the family line) and death (its extinction). There are notable similarities to the concerns of lineage found within Butts’s *Ashe*. Powys’s *Ducdame*, though, complicates the cycle and the conflict of life and death necessarily performed in Butts’s *Ashe*, while reconsidering its merits.

As with the houses of Rings and Brideshead, we can read in Ashover’s ‘mediaeval buttresses’, ‘Tudor staircase’ and ‘Jacobean doorway’ a heritage of war and evolution (*D*, p. 5). Yet, to Rook, the trees nearby look ‘more
monumental than the house itself; (p. 5); these appropriately obscure the house on the map of Ashover.

The house and the nearing end of the family line is the first type of death the novel presents; it is echoed in a decaying landscape, of ‘leaf mould’, of days so still they seem ‘stone dead’ (D, p. 46), where nature appears to be ‘consciously holding its breath’ (p. 47). Powys allies a dying nature, and its hint of regeneration, with the feminine and childbirth:

It was the sort of day that has an especial appeal to the nerves of women, perhaps because the passivity, the inertness, the lethargy of the earth at these times, its preparturient fallowness, moribund and yet magnetic, self-absorbed and yet germinative, has something in it that answers to one of their own profound and secret moods. (D, p. 74)

Fallowness is emphasised, land and body are joined, ready for the planting of seed. In Ashe, Butts similarly connects the rites of female body and land to awaken Rings, but Powys rejects the feminine power and the heir it would produce, so craved by his mother and Ann. Morine Krissdóttir suggests that Powys infuses the story with the battle of the son against the Mother-Goddess figure (DM, p. 194). For Rook, the continuance of the historical family line is a different kind of death – a stilted decay mirrored in the rotting images of nature and women, and in the voices that demand he guard his ‘historic name’ (D, p. 195). Not only do living family members tell him to do this, his ancestors do too. Visiting the church, where the ‘Ashovers of Ashover’ lay (p. 16) Rook and his barren mistress embrace, aware of

an angry menace rising from all that human dust under his feet, threatening him if he did not open the gates of the future to their race, cursing him if he barred and locked those gates in the selfish enjoyment of uncreative, unproductive emotion. (D, p. 85).

Though ‘threatened’, they defy his family’s wishes, where glaring down at the pair a marble portrait seems to know Rook’s scheme. Rook feels the burden of his ancestors in a way reminiscent of Sue’s reading of her husband’s home in Hardy’s Jude:
It is so antique and dismal that it depresses me dreadfully. Such houses are very well to visit, but not to live in – I feel crushed into the earth by the weight of so many previous lives there spent.\(^{162}\)

For Rook, the portraits in the house continue to function in a similar capacity. One of a cavalier ancestor, Sir Robert Ashover, victim of Cromwell (\(D\), p. 17), looks with sympathy on Ann who might provide an heir (p. 22). The family portraits hang like those in Hardy's Stancy Castle in *A Laodicean* – a fading past that is now more of a museum piece than someone's family. As in Hardy's novel, some desperately desire to be a part of this lineage, while others demand escape.

Sir Robert's picture tells of a family and house that survived Cromwell, where other places, such as Corfe, did not. Cromwell's name is part of larger language of war and battle that Powys uses to mould a landscape around the house, marked where ditches made by the 'wagon wheels of Cromwell' remain (p. 25). The surrounding area of 'rough sloping pasture, thick with mysterious knolls and hollows' is suitably reminiscent of a land scarred with trenches (p. 6), and which now contains another conflict for the old family. The land contiguous to the house is even popularly known as 'Battlefield' (p. 6); characters cross and recross its boundaries, pursuing their own schemes like those on Hardy's desolate Egdon Heath.

Characters too are associated with war. Rook's brother is compared to Caesar (\(D\), p. 55), while in Rook's uncle, Corporal Dick, one finds the tradition and honour of war often associated with England's old families. Powys makes fun of this by making Dick a bastard, not a legitimate Ashover (pp. 38, 71). Nevertheless, he is incensed at Rook's mistress and her bareness, and in a fit of madness shoots at her (p. 109). The act taking place on Christmas morning (a ritual celebration of birth), illustrates the paradoxically deathly reading of the desire to procreate. At the site of the shooting, the ground is covered in snow as if the 'moon, virginal and immaculate had actually collided [...] with our motley guilt-stained earth' (p. 107). Powys introduces the earth-goddess motif. From this ritually associated event we can trace a path to the successful conception so

desired by many of the characters. Though Netta survives the attack, Dick becomes very ill, drawing Rook and Ann to his bedside in a house made remote by the snow. Alone at night, and while Dick dies in another room, Ann conceives Rook’s heir (p. 126). He has been tricked, seduced, and the cyclical path of nature is allowed to continue. The death of the uncle, and the winter scene, give birth to a child, and to life.

From ritual to Freud: instincts towards the inanimate

The house and family is for Rook a consumptive entity; like Rook’s brother Lexie it is seemingly dying. Lexie and house, however, continue after Rook’s death. The novel’s final scene is troubled by the seeming victory of nature and the feminine. Lexie feels stronger – he is the only one left drawing power from their ancestors now (D, p. 447). The regenerative cycle finds embodiment in the merry-go-round that has come to the village late in the year, and on which Lexie sits (pp. 452-3). Powys alludes to the problems of this successful regeneration, observing in Lexie’s horse a loss of ‘most of its individual character in that whirling revolution’. Lexie’s face becomes a ‘smiling mask of infantile complacence’, as he hears the sound of nature around him (pp. 453-4). He is happy to be alive but identity, meaning and purpose seem lost in these revolutions.

The house’s consumption from which Rook tries to escape might not only be seen as a deathly decline but also as a consuming entity. With the birth of the baby, and with Ann established at the house, Rook feels he becomes ‘more of a lean, lifeless, motiveless shadow of the man he had formerly been’. The infant draws upon all available ‘vitality’, and the house exists ‘for no other purpose than for nourishing this insatiable intruder’ (D, p. 359). Powys locates the uncreative force in this new life, and not in Rook’s desire for death. In the continuation of life, family and house only consume.

It is a reading that holds similarities to Lewis Mumford’s dismissal of the country house at the beginning of the twentieth century as a misguided utopia. The house had been a place of privilege and exclusion, and its owners no longer
had an ‘active communion with their environment’. Activities of the house serve no function, they are, like hunting, imitative of once more ‘vital’ actions.\(^{163}\)

In *Ducdame*, it is perversely Rooks’s desire to escape life embodied in the house which brings him closer to his environment and nature. This escape is itself a transcendentally imaginative activity on the part of author and character, in opposition to baby and house. Mumford argues the country house is incapable of being an imaginative place — the house, like the baby in *Ducdame*, only ever being a consuming entity, its ‘insatiability [...] to possess art [...] only equalled by its inability to create it’. This imitative, consuming entity, he argues, gave rise to the modern capitalist order (pp. 204, 210). It is an order and fear that can be traced to Hewison’s concern that England is in danger of producing heritage instead of anything tangible. He argues that this pursuit will lead to a loss of all ‘creative energies’, leaving the nation ‘frozen in a dead moment of stopped time’.\(^{164}\) England becomes one large museumized country house.

Powys and Rook want to escape. Rook rejects the false life of the house and family and makes an ‘alliance with emptiness, with nothingness, with the eternal No of the abyss!’ (*D*, p. 85). ‘It’s like death to make love to you’, Rook tells the barren Netta, pleased with the sensation (p. 87). Rook’s movement away from life is an urge towards the inanimate. Like Freud’s death instinct (the ‘first instinct’), Rook’s desire is the ‘instinct to return to the inanimate state’. The ‘aim of all life is death’ Freud argues — a state that came before life, and to which we must return.\(^{165}\) For Rook the continuance of the family is an attempted escape from the natural path, and produces something worse than death.

Powys veers away from the cliche of the cyclical feminine and the earth goddess motif that Butts finds so productive. In contrast, Butts sees Freud as part of a modern death of society. Theories like Freud’s, as David Matless suggests, though ‘drawing on myth’ were a ‘symptom of rather than the solution for modern dilemmas’ for Butts. ‘Butts upheld Jane Harrison against Freud’: ritual against psychoanalysis (practice against theory).\(^{166}\) Matless, citing Butts (‘without the

\(^{164}\) Hewison, *The Heritage Industry*, pp. 9, 10-11.
\(^{165}\) Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principal*, in *On Metapsychology*, pp. 269-338 (p. 311).
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, Pavlov, Julian Huxley and Bertrand Russell, in all the consciousness of my group', CC, p. 265; my italics), argues that ritual, here found in one of Butts's sacred sites, Badbury Rings, is a response to the ‘supposed repetitious circularities in modern thought’. Yet Matless fails to acknowledge the similar cyclical design of the three concentric earthen rings on the Kingston Lacy estate, and their reimagining and repositioning in Butts’s Ashe, where they become the centre for repetitive and cyclical rites that assure the continual rebirth of the house and estate. For Butts the ‘repeating earth, the beginning of all natural religion, its sacrament’ was the ‘pattern on which all life was strung’ (CC, p. 5). Even Powys, in a letter to Ichiro Hara, urges young people to worship nature, worship the ‘Earth-Mother—the one real true great Mother of us all’. Yet, in contrast to this, Powys Ducdame re-imagines Freud’s theories on death as a ritual to achieve escape from the endless cyclical recurrence of nature’s regeneration. Powys draws a straight line with the death instinct away from life and the feminine into something beyond—a death that is no longer just the other side of life. Rook believes that the ‘reality we wake up to when we die, is so completely different from life and death that it is a mere waste of time to argue about it’ (D, p. 289). This other place, glimpsed by Rook in dream and vision, is Powys’s ‘Fourth Dimension’.

The Forth Dimension: a battle of death against death

Rook touches something of the Fourth Dimension through Netta’s closeness to non-being, due to her barrenness (D, p. 86), but Rook sees much more of this other realm in a dream. In a moment of vision while walking a country path, Rook meets a boy on a horse, who appears to be his unborn son, though ‘the boy’s face, so unmistakably resembling his own’ also suggests Rook’s spiritual double (p. 310). This place seems to be the land the village witch, Betsy Cooper, calls

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167 Matless, ‘a geography of ghosts’, p. 344.
'Cimmery Land' (a name possibly related to Cimmerium in Italy, where the Apollonian Oracle, the Cimmerian Sybil, made her prophesies). For Betsy it is, The land where folks do live like unborn babes. They don’t see nothink, nor hear nothink, in thik place, except what be like the smoke of this 'ere pipe (D, p. 264).

Rook translates this into,

Some unearthly Limbo – some Elysian Fourth Dimension – out of Space and out of Time – where everything was, as it were, painted with gray upon gray; and where large and liberating thoughts moved to and fro over cool, wet grass like enormous swallows, easily, naturally, without any effort (p. 264).

It sounds like a description of William Morris’s Hollow Land (an ethereal demi-paradise), that Butts uses in defining Wessex. We are reminded of Sybil, and of Powys’s Betsy who peers into this dimension with the aid of a crystal ball (p. 262). Butts called this kind of seeing ‘the knight’s move’, which we might see as another movement of escape.169 Alison Light identifies matching interest in the later work of Daphne du Maurier. Also an interwar writer of West Country places, her later stories like The Scapegoat (1959) and the short story ‘Don’t Look Now’ (1971) search for a ‘metaphysical escape’ into ‘the “Fourth Dimension”’.170

In Ducedame, Rook’s attempt at such a flight both parallels and contrasts that of Butts’s ‘knight’s move’. Rook also has a connection to the chess piece of the same name, only the Rook moves in a straight line. In a letter to Wilson Knight, Powys considers the spatial implications of this move, referencing a book written by Knight:

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In Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy* his Dionysian element may be equated with our spatial element. They are both dynamic with a thrust to be regarded as *Vertical* rather than *Horizontal*. 171

‘Nietzsche’s system’ brings in the ‘vertical or spiritual dimension’ (p. 102), as does Rook’s escape from the physical, and Powys’s writing of it, which like the Dionysian element, is equated with a destructive force in the process of re-creation. This suggests a troubling association with the cyclical processes from which Powys wants to escape. If we return to a consideration of Heideggerean dwelling, the vertical remains a spiritual dimension in building too. Christian Norberg-Schulz calls it the *axis mundi* which unites earth and sky (a ‘sacred dimension of space’). Here, a house is a ‘microcosmos’, ‘the floor is the earth, the ceiling the sky, and the walls the encircling horizon’. 172 The vertical is at the centre of Heidegger’s fourfold. As an encircled area, containing and gathering place, we might endow it with the cyclical properties that Butts locates in the country house. However, the vertical is also, Norberg-Schulz continues, ‘where all horizontal movements come to an end’ (p. 23). It might be seen as where dwelling ends, the point by which Powys escapes into, or creates, some kind of Nirvana. This release is similar to the desire for rest that Freud locates in the death drive – a troubling and unstable unity of aggression and Nirvana, argues Havi Carel. 173 Yet, perhaps it is this conflict which enables the Nirvana-like sacred sphere or dimension to exist: the battle of Ashover is necessary for Rook to glimpse the Fourth Dimension, just as the profane and physical define the spiritual part of Butts’s Badbury Rings.

Returning to the map of Ashover (Figure 24), we see that Ashover Manor is not only obscured by a tree but is – like all of the other buildings on the map – positioned outside of the map’s centre. Central is the river, or rather the two bridges, which might be read as a symbol of crossing beyond this world. The bridge for Heidegger is a centring of the fourfold. For Powys, it is the site of

much action, and of Rook’s final escape through drowning. Water is a sign of the spiritual throughout Powys’s writing, and offers a similar release for Geard in *A Glastonbury Romance*, when he too drowns at the novel’s climax. Following the Ashover map vertically we arrive at a tree ridge and then Antiger Woods containing Titty’s Ring. The trees stretch from the earth to the sky and beyond. Powys writes that the trees had been the ‘background of [Rook’s] ‘imagination as long as [Rook] could remember’ (*D*, p. 6). The design of Ashover seems to privilege nature over the manmade, suggesting the location and events of the narrative offer a map through which one might glimpse Powys’s sought after Fourth Dimension.

Rook’s desired escape is finally realised when the war-like, death-obsessed vicar, Hastings, attacks Rook with a rake and pushes him off Foulden Bridge into the water during a storm. Reminiscent of the death of Eustacia and Wildeve at the end of Hardy’s *The Return of the Native*, Rook drowns. Hastings later dies from a fever (p. 442). Binnory, an idiot child who wanders the village, recovers the rake, with the words ‘Lovejoy’ written upon it. He hides it away so that he might go and talk with the inanimate object. It becomes ‘a kind of living fetish’. Powys concludes:

> Thus it happened that while the Squire of Ashover and the Priest of Ashover became less and less endowed with the illusion of personality, the rake ‘Lovejoy’ gathered to itself more and more of this ambiguous value. (*D*, p. 444)

Thus Powys and Rook find their escape through a garden rake. In *Mortal Strife*, Powys writes that it is the inanimate which is closest to the next dimension (p. 204). Powys’s Fourth Dimension is here not directly located in nature, but found in an object that might arguably be seen to induce nature’s fecundity – a tool of husbandry, that has also shaped (though its importance is forgotten) the lands and gardens of the great estates. Its inducement of the land to vitality is an act of violence, a violation of nature that occurs through cultivation. Powys is mindful of the materiality of all human routes towards the transcendental, and so Rook and Powys remained trapped within the deathly rites of renewal.
The Waste Land: the sympathetic
topography of the grail

A dead land: the mimesis of a multiple waste land

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.¹

These lines need little introduction. They open T. S. Eliot’s seminal poem *The Waste Land* (1922) — an exploration into the heart of Eliot’s darker vision of modernity. Like the poem, the concept of the waste land is frequently cited, by writer and critic alike, in definition of a generation of writers and the period in which they wrote at the beginning of the twentieth century. Like many other critics, Clive Bloom lists and assesses the impact of key events of this era,

A period which begins with the end of Victorianism and ends with the beginning of the modern world — including the rise of organized labour, world conflict, new technological innovation, the aggressive appearance of mass consumption, the giving of votes to [...] women, the disasters of repeated strikes, the ominous rise of American economic might, European communism and fascism and the domestic collapse of liberal politics.²

Listing ‘mass communication’; ‘mass social movements of people’; and an expanding ‘capitalist world market’, Marshal Berman creates a similar definition from modern events, adding the significant impact made by mechanisation and industrialisation.³ We might locate within these lists of modernity, concerns of previous chapters: decline in agriculture, change in class structures, the rise of tourism, and developments in modern warfare. As anthropologists and historians have done, Bloom interprets this time as a crisis point, reading ‘ambivalence and

contradiction' in the events he describes, just as Berman reads a 'terror of disorientation and disintegration'. In this understanding, both critics are repeating the views of society and culture promulgated by many modernist literary figures, including Butts, who summed-up modernity in the word 'dis-ease' — combining the threat of illness with an awareness of mental and spatial reconfiguration. She explains:

Hitherto God had fed his sparrows, and as good fish had come out of the sea. But everywhere there was a sense of broken continuity, a dis-ease. The end of an age, the beginning of another. Revaluation of values. Phrases that meant something if you could mean them. The meaning of meaning? Discovery of a new value, a different way of apprehending everything.

Others saw a similar 'dis-ease', or reconfiguration, of society, including F. R Leavis and Denys Thompson, who lamented the loss of the organic community and its 'living culture'. Traditional societal form and meaning is lost when advertising, mass-production, standardisation and industry are seen to homogenise and spoil. Though this development might equally be read as strengthening society's coherent shape as dismantling it, literary modernism frequently favours the latter interpretation, while almost conflictingly mourning the loss of variety this shift produces. As Berman writes:

Modern environments and experiences cut across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology: in this sense, modernity can be said to unite all mankind. But it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish.

Berman is describing a process of creative destruction — a force that Friedrich Nietzsche, amongst others, read in modernity. Exemplified in his figure of Dionysus, Nietzsche proclaims the poet to be central to this movement: though the world might 'perish through his [the poet's] actions, his actions also produce a

4 Bloom, Literature and Culture, p. 5.
5 Berman, All that Is Solid, p. 13.
8 Berman, All that Is Solid, p. 15.
higher magical circle of effects which found a new world on the ruins of the old one. Critics like David Harvey place this ‘image of “creative destruction”’ at the centre of the ‘practical dilemmas that faced the implementation of the modernist project’, just as modernist writers positioned such concerns as essential to their own work. Butts calls the new approach ‘a different way of apprehending everything’ (AWM, p. 9); this becomes a different way of creating something new, through language. Similarly, Stan Smith cites modernism as ‘making the transformative act of translation, adaption, repetition its real content’ and form. In other words, this new way is a rite of passage, concerned with rejuvenation.

This mode of creative destruction might be found in the concept of the waste land itself. While capitalism, mechanism, and urbanisation are seen to destroy religious, national, regional and geographical boundaries, literary modernism offers another structure, or boundary, in definition of the problem, naming it ‘the waste land’. This shared negative vision of modern life not only takes form under Eliot’s poetic title, the concept allows a structuring of a crisis that is by definition unstructured and chaotic, where, as William Butler Yeats writes, ‘the centre cannot hold’.

Arguably, so successful has this paradoxical modernist definition of crisis been that critics like Bloom still interpret the era in a similarly negative way. While Richard Sheppard defines modernism as a range of responses to a

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11 In the same passage, Butts writes of the ‘Revaluation of values’ and of the ‘meaning of meaning’ (AWM, p. 9), referencing, as Butts repeatedly does in her work, Nietzsche, who discusses a revaluation and shifting meaning of morality in On the Genealogy of Morals (1887). Butts might also be alluding to the still influential C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards Meaning of Meaning (1923), in which the role and meaning of language in society and its practices is discussed. The study acknowledges the occult power of words in ‘every age’ as ‘instruments for the control of objects’ (C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, Meaning of Meaning: A Study of The Influence of Language upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism, 2nd rev. edn (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927), p. 24.
perceived crisis, so emphasising its jumbled diversity, David Ayers recognises
the popular use of the ‘waste land’ term to express the ‘modern malaise’ and to
define modernism, and modernist literature. Yet, he argues (with Leavis in mind)
that readings of Eliot’s poem as a critique of the ‘machine age’, and as a lament
for a lost ‘way of life rooted in the soil’, are ‘strained’. At the same time, it is
such a reading of the poem, and the concept, that defines the waste land for many,
where all problems seem embodied in the mechanically spoiled land of old
England, to the extent that this definition – this wasted land – has become a kind
of ‘truth’ of that time, as has the movement of creative destruction which helps
define it.

Like Nietzsche’s ‘truth’, the waste land is a ‘mobile army of metaphors
[...] which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and
rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory’. The
process has similarities with the rural ideal of Wessex and England, which is,
as Elizabeth Helsinger observes, ‘a metaphor for original, essential national
identity’. The waste land exists, as rural England exists, in a place where
metaphor and literature leak into reality, becoming antithetical ‘truths’ in
England’s construction.

The barren representation of modernity offers a solution of sorts in its
naming of the problem. The structuring and ordering of the threat, begun in
Eliot’s poem, directs the reader towards the grail mythology from which the
problem gains its name. In the tradition of the story of the waste land and the
Fisher King, the grail vessel must be quested for so that the wasted land and its

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Mullin calls modernism ‘an art of crisis’, perpetuating a reading of the period as a crisis point, but
also offering an interesting perspective from which to read Butts’s reaction as a proto-ecofeminist,
responding to the ‘crisis’ in terms of domesticated space and nature (Katherine Mullin,
‘Modernism and feminisms’, in The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory, ed. by
15 David Ayers, Modernism: A Short Introduction, Blackwell Introduction to Literature, 9 (Oxford: 
17 Elizabeth K. Helsinger, Rural Scenes and National Representations: Britain, 1815-1850
leader might be healed. For many writers at the beginning of the twentieth century, the grail became a symbolic literary and cultural means to resist modernity. Art and literature’s interest in a medieval period associated with Arthurian myth is, as Veronica Ortenberg explains, an interest in a ‘Golden Age’; ‘Medieval’ is what ‘Modern’ is not. ‘The Grail’, Richard Barber writes, ‘becomes a mirror, reflecting the preoccupations of the individual writer and their intellectual milieu’. Literary modernism was particularly concerned with multiple reflective processes. Ayers’s analysis privileges these techniques, maintaining that

high modernist authors were not intent simply on producing an art which in its forms and languages was the reflection of technological and social changes, but one which reflected on a changing society and gave account of it. (p. 108)

Suggesting a form and language that reflects ritual and acts of mimesis, Eliot’s poem, as Ayers comments, reflects modernity and reflects on it — a method, for Eliot, aided by the symbol and mythology of the grail. Barbara Myerhoff writes that this ‘reflexive’ concern is one of modernism more generally, allowing the reader or audience to become more self-aware. The reflecting processes of The Waste Land allow a realisation of the negative side of modernity to take place. Though Eliot’s poem seems trapped, like Narcissus

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18 The myth of the waste land endures through a form of ritualised collective remembering and reinvention — a kind of liturgical order passed from writer to writer — not unlike a combination of Kierkegaard’s reading of ‘Repetition and recollection’ as the ‘same movement, except in opposite directions’ (Søren Aabye Kierkegaard, ‘Repetition’, in Fear and Trembling: Repetition, ed. and trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Kierkegaard’s Writings, 26 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983-2000), VI (1983), pp. 125-231 (p.131)). This ensures that later literary waste lands hold similar qualities to Eliot’s poem, and to the grail literature that influenced it. More recent works concerned with representations of a waste land include (and these are just a few of many examples) Philip K. Dick’s Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep (1968), Salman Rushdie’s Fury (2001), and Cormac McCarthy’s The Road (2006). Imagery, the use of extensive intertextuality, and their narratives are comparable to Eliot’s poem in two key ways: firstly, their concerns are manifested in place, often in the city and in technological devastation of the environment; secondly, they follow a quest narrative that can be seen to draw from grail mythology, which pursues some kind of revelation or rejuvenation.


(like the lady in Eliot's poem who gazes in the mirror, 'Hardly aware of her departed lover', WL, p. 70, l. 250) – though in the horror, not beauty of its own image – it places modern concerns (they become a wasted land). This I suggest, enables others to continue a quest where Eliot fails. The organisation of modern anxieties offered by Eliot's poem is the same as that located by Eliot in James Joyce's *Ulysses* – what Eliot calls the 'mythical method'. This was a 'way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history'. 22 Eliot might be describing a ritual; it is a method of creation and ordering begun in his poem. And, despite Ayers claim that the main concern of the poem is a sense of entrapment in an 'existence given over to reproduction and death', where it is a 'torment to be caught in such a cycle' (as it is for Powys in *Ducdame*), 23 the structure and rites of the waste land still engender the possibilities of a regenerative solution. Eliot's use of grail mythology allows a ritual search for healing to begin, and thus create an alterity from the wasted land of his vision.

Butts's *Armed with Madness* (1928) and Powys's *A Glastonbury Romance* (1933) are, like Eliot's poem, reflections of, and on, a negative modernity. Butts half-jokingly writes that *Armed with Madness* 'might have well been called “the Waste Land.” Eliot always anticipates my titles!'. 24 In a later entry, she explains that Eliot is 'working on the Sanc-Grail, on its negative side, the Waste Land' (*JMB*, p. 275). As Jennifer Kroll observes, Butts's *Armed with Madness* is not a repetition of Eliot; it forms a critique of Eliot, focussing on the rejuvenation rather than the barrenness of the land. 25

Unlike Eliot's poem, Butts and Powys actively seek the grail in their novels, and the rites of this search are transformative when *placed* in the Wessex landscape, inspiring a rejuvenating storytelling that helps re-enchant the land. This performance offers another structuring practice in the creation

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25 Jennifer Kroll, 'Mary Butts' "Unrest Cure" for the Waste Land', *Twentieth Century Literature* 45, 2 (Summer 1999), 159-173 (p. 159).
of Wessex, but begins, like Eliot’s poem, with the creation of the ‘truth’ of a mechanical and urban-spoiled landscape. This can be read as a first stage in a ritual re-performance of place, which continues, not with the discovery of the grail object, but with its creation as place itself.26

Concrete not grass: the modern waste and Wessex

Ever since I can remember the shadow of this defilement and this desolation rose on my life, lengthening with it. Until, some time about the end of the war, there came a point I suddenly recognised as spiritual saturation. The thing had won. It could not be stopped.27

Butts is, amongst other things, lamenting the effect of the Great War, an event that created its own waste lands both physically on the battle fields and psychologically in those returning home. Eliot’s poem, too, makes use of this other waste, perhaps acknowledging in the seasonal rain of the opening lines that spring was a time to begin new offences from the trenches.28

Yet, for Butts, this passage also encompasses the numerous other changes engendered by modernity. The war as a sign of greater upheaval also helped to accelerate technical and mechanical development.29 The recurring lament for a vanishing countryside under attack from industrialisation and urbanisation was a

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26 Wesley Kort suggests that one finds ‘two contrary sites for articulating and defining modernity’ — one being the ‘modern in its massive and [...] complex’ form, its ‘centre [...] in vast urbanization’; the other, ‘contrary to the massive modern, namely the self [...] and the personal’. Urban space is imagined as ‘profane’, the ‘internal, utopian, or sacred space are projected as contraries’ (Wesley A. Kort, Place and Space in Modern Fiction (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004), pp. 207, 208, 210. Modernity for Butts and Powys is a conflict between the two, their position voiced from the ‘internal’, and from the ‘sacred’ space of Wessex.


28 Ezra Pound’s Cathay poems reveal a similar coupling of spring time and war, in such poems as the ‘Song of the Bowmen of Shu’, where ‘picking the fern-shoots’, Chinese warriors wonder ‘when shall we get back to our country’ (Ezra Pound, ‘Song of the Bowmen of Shu’, in Selected Poems, ed. by T. S. Eliot (London: Faber & Faber, 1928; repr. 1934), p. 105. Other poems in the collection, ‘Four Poems of Departure’ and ‘Exiles Letters’ pick up on other themes of the literature of the Great War of departing from, and returning to, home, as discussed in the previous chapter.

29 For example, Ayers notes that the war ‘brought about an acceleration of the rate of automation in factories’ (David Ayers, English Literature of the 1920s (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 100.
fear frequently given precedence over the threat posed by war. In *Brideshead Revisited*, Waugh describes a military camp standing where only recently a farm and ploughed land had been. But the area is ‘mutilated’ and already ‘marked for destruction before the army came’:

Already half a mile of concrete road lay between bare clay banks, and on either side a checker of open ditches showed where the municipal contractors had designed a system of drainage. Another year of peace would have made the place part of the neighbouring suburb.

War, it seems, had momentarily redirected some of the development. Butts, however, observed this urbanisation in Wessex, long before the war, as an eradicator of nature, of family home, and of her childhood. She describes the changes:

Its moderate beginnings threw my parents into despair. A work that has since been completed [...] and now a garage and a cinema overlook the graves of the village people, my father and my step-brother’s graves.

We do not live there now. Where Saltens once stood in its tranquillity there are two houses; [...] red and white houses [run] along a road that was once our drive. Of the garden and the orchard in the woods, of the woods themselves and the silver path over the moor to the church, I have not dared ask. (CC, p. 92)

A personal connection to place is destroyed, ‘our drive’ becomes just another road, ‘our house’ becomes other people’s houses, and even the dead (Butts’s ancestors) are disturbed from their rest in the land. All Butts can see is a line of ‘butcher-coloured scum of little houses’ encroaching upon her world (CC, p. 112). Butts’s *Death of Felicity Taverner* (1932) continues to define the danger of modernity as an urbanizing threat: the ruthless husband of the Taverners’

30 The loss of countryside still is, and seems to have always been, a concern of the English. Lawrence Buell writes that anxiety about its loss can be traced back to Anglo-Saxon times (Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1995), p. 161). This lament for lost countryside is perhaps then as essential to the image and performance of England as the countryside is itself.


32 Patrick Wright examines the British Army’s claim that their enclosure of the Tyneham area preserved the countryside from the deep ploughing and pesticides that would have otherwise destroyed it. Wright notes that because of this intervention the landscape has escaped from other problems such as road development, BSE and foot and mouth (Patrick Wright, *The Village that Died for England*, rev. edn (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), pp. 38, 43).
dead cousin, Felicity, wants to develop the area around their home as a holiday resort.  

Butts’s anger seems matched in Morine Krissdóttir’s claim that ‘much of what John Cowper did, thought, and wrote [...] represented a revulsion, which at times amounted to a mania, against a world controlled by science and machine’. As it is for Butts, this misery for Powys is centred in the modern society of the city. Powys’s *Wolf Solent* (1929) begins with the loss of Wolf’s teaching job in London and a subsequent flight to his ancestral and childhood home in Dorset. During a school lesson Wolf has poured ‘forth a torrent of wild, indecent invectives upon every aspect of modern civilization’ – an eruption in response to the ‘appalling misery of so many of his fellow Londoners’. Even in the countryside, the image of a man he has seen at Waterloo Station continues to haunt him: a face of ‘inert despair’ and ‘woe’ that ‘no conceivable social readjustments or ameliorative revolutions could ever atone for’ (p. 4). Glen Cavaliero acknowledges Wolf’s flight as a rejection of a ‘collectivist and materialistic civilization’ – a recurring theme throughout Powys’s work.

For both Powys and Butts, the waste land is marked by a modern, concrete, urbanised area. Leavis and Thompson argue that ‘[i]nstead of the community, urban or rural, we have, almost universally, suburbanism’. Powys’s and Butts’s regional and idiosyncratic Wessex would be the kind of place that Keith Halfacree suggests has much to lose. Wessex could become ‘stripped of its meaning’, becoming ‘an abstraction, readily emptiable and (potentially) easily reconfigured’. E. Relph calls this loss of meaning ‘placelessness’ (non-place), and claims that this ‘weakening of distinct and diverse experiences and identities of place’ is now a ‘dominant force’ in

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37 Leavis and Thompson, *Culture and Environment*, p. 2.
society. Butts’s and Powys’s Wessex is at risk of being ‘diminished and perhaps eradicated’ under capitalism’s homogenising influences. What is left Norberg-Schulz calls a ‘flatscape’, which, as Relph describes, is ‘lacking intentional depth and providing possibilities only for commonplaces and mediocre experiences’ (p.6). It is the place equivalent to Yeats’s middleclass banality; it is the locations in which such people live, shop and work (airports, shops and offices). As James McFarlane puts it, under modernity ‘dimensions of time and space had begun to alter’. As a consequence, artistic spaces had to adapt in response.

For Butts, Powys, and many others, the reply might be identified in the spaces under threat. While Ayres denies the centrality of technological threats to an organic sense of place in Eliot’s poem, and though William Carlos Williams accuses the poem of hindering the ‘rediscovery of a primary impetus, the elementary principles of all art, in the local condition’ (and the scope, intertextuality and modern form of the poem supports Williams’s argument), The Waste Land can also be read as a search in the local and the immediate. Eliot’s own experience of the city and his mental breakdown that preceded the poem’s composition are two examples of this. Though the poem fails to find rejuvenation, and utilise the ‘local condition’ to do it, Eliot’s later work offers local place as a panacea.

Jed Esty writes that ‘Little Gidding’, in the Four Quartets, ‘stakes itself to the idea that culture and belief proceed from the ground beneath your feet’. It might be read as a reconnecting to homeland and to the particulars of place threatened by a homogenizing modern society. In Eliot’s words, ‘the end of our exploring | Will be to arrive where we started | And know the place for the

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40 Relph, place and placelessness, p.79.
43 Ayers, Modernism, pp. 25-6.
first time).\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Four Quartets} seem to express a unity of place and culture. In ‘Little Gidding’, place is transformed; it is no longer a solitary waste of broken images as imagined in earlier poems, but is now a knowable site of history in which one belongs. It is a sacred place – a place, ‘where you are here to kneel | Where prayer has been valid’: here, ritual has had an effect (‘Little Gidding’, p. 36, I). ‘Little Gidding’, Steve Ellis writes, ‘represents the exemplary community of agricultural labour and prayer’.\textsuperscript{47} It holds, then, similarities to the ritualised agricultural performance of place discussed in chapter 2.

For Eliot, this ritual performance is also a journey homeward, in a countryside in which he located his family’s origins, and in the poems where pilgrimage is comparable to the story of Ulysses, who, as Simon Coleman and John Elsner explain, journeys on a pilgrimage in ‘search of his place of origin’. This ritual marks home as sacred.\textsuperscript{48} This search for homeland, or, reconstruction of England is frequently located by critics in literary modernism, including the work of authors Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster, and Eliot.\textsuperscript{49} English revival works to combat what Peter Berger identifies as a ‘deepening condition of “homelessness”’ in society.\textsuperscript{50} This ‘homelessness’ threatens the ‘at-homeness’ (a connection to place – what Relph calls, ‘rootlessness’).\textsuperscript{51} It is placelessness by a different name: only in meaningful places can we feel at home. David Seamon suggests this feeling is integral to humankind’s well being, and even claims that because ‘at-homeness is an essential aspect of human existence, ‘homeness’ should be at the core of literature itself.\textsuperscript{52}

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{46} T. S. Eliot, ‘Little Gidding’, in \textit{Four Quartets} (London: Faber and Faber, 1944), pp. 35-44 (p. 43, IV).
\item \textsuperscript{47} Steve Ellis, \textit{The English Eliot: Design, Language and Landscape in ‘Four Quartets’} (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 84.
\item \textsuperscript{49} See Andrew John Miller, \textit{Modernism and the Crisis of Sovereignty} (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. vii, xxvi.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Relph, \textit{place and placelessness}, p. 6.
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Esty, amongst others, identifies this quest for home in the modernists who ‘participate’ in the ‘rise of an Anglocentric cultural paradigm’: a mode of perceiving and constructing the world that shifts cultural and environmental construction of place away from ‘British decline to English revival’. Butts notes signs of this ‘revival’ in the ‘far too many books about England’ being written at the time. This nostalgic turn, looking back to organic communities, is a response to what Miller identifies as an ‘eroding’ of the boundary between “‘public” and “private”’ and simultaneously [...] between “world” and “nation”’. Consequently, homeland is re-imagined in what Andrea Zemgulys calls a ‘self-consciously new literature’ of ‘heritage, and literary heritage’. It is a movement like that which has imagined the country house as a similar site of tradition and nationhood, or finds in the enclosures of England’s agricultural land, security and familiarity. Like house and field, nation is rewritten as ‘possessing [a] kind of cultural boundedness, unity, and knowability’. Esty argues that this boundedness, ‘previously restricted to peripheral regions like Hardy’s Wessex’, regionalizes England. It is a place John Rennie Short calls an ‘Imagined Country’. While national identity can, as A. D. Smith argues, be ‘the most fundamental and inclusive’ of group identities, it too can have a homogenizing effect akin to the waste land. Regionalising nation might attempt to remove this problem, but it too might be seen to homogenise, just in a different way. Though Butts’s and Powys’s search for home is complicit in this form of nation building, they also strive for a more knowable landscape removed from other parts of the nation. However, like this emerging

53 Esty, A Shrinking Island, pp. 2, 5.
54 Mary Butts, ‘Our Native Land’, The Bookman, 84, 503 (August 1933), 252.
55 Miller, Modernism and the Crisis of Sovereignty, p. vii.
58 Esty, A Shrinking Island, pp. 12, 46.
reconstruction of nation, their region is also caught between moving towards
the restrictive boundaries of home and an escape from them.61

Butts’s *Ashe of Rings* and her two Taverner novels all begin with
characters’ movement homeward. It is a ritualised action of pilgrimage that
initiates the creation of homeland, attempting to leave the modern world
behind. Butts’s grail novel, *Armed with Madness*, can be read as a search for
homeland through the grail. Powys’s *A Glastonbury Romance* tells of a similar
quest, and also begins with a journey, taken by John Crow to Glastonbury.
Another journeying movement takes place in *Wolf Solent*, which Powys, in a
later introduction to the novel, calls a ‘book of nostalgia, written in a foreign
country with the pen of a traveller and the ink-blood of his home’.62 As it is for
Butts, writing for Powys is a backward journey. Jeremy Robinson recognises
this in a novelistic Wessex that is not contemporary, but closer to that of
Powys’s childhood.63 In *Wolf Solent*, Powys and Wolf strive for a reunion with
place – Powys through writing, Wolf through a pilgrimage of self-discovery
back to his childhood home. Both authors wrote many of the Wessex novels in
a kind of self-imposed exile – Butts in France, and Powys in New York State.
Memory and a desire for home aid their written quests.

Alan Morinis calls the destination of pilgrimage an image of
‘perfection’.64 Butts and Powys’s Wessex landscapes unite the concepts of home
( origins) and perfection, in place. It is a spiritual quest. David George writes that
religion’s search is often obsessed with origins, but that perfection is an equally, if
not more important aim.65 This dual search is embodied in the grail narrative,

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61 Ellis makes a similar observation about Eliot’s *Four Quartets*, where nation is simultaneously
moved towards and away from, in its construction – ‘where England seems to be both found and
dismissed’, its creation ‘both constructive and destructive’ (Ellis, *The English Eliot*, pp. 80, 91).
This approach recalls the creative destructive processes often associated with modernity and
modernism.
63 Jeremy Mark Robinson, *Thomas Hardy and John Cowper Powys: Wessex Revisited* (Maidstone:
64 Alan Morinis, ‘Introduction’, in *Sacred Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage*, ed. by Alan
65 David George, ‘On Origins: Behind the Rituals’, *Performance Research: A Journal of
where the quest for the cup can also be read as a search for paradise. 66 Like the grail knight, and Ulysses searching for his home of Ithaca, Butts and Powys negotiate the modern waste land in a performative and questing creation of home, as paradise. 67

Beginning the search: defining the problem/creating the problem

In the backward, nostalgic glance of literature, modernism is ‘engaging in an aesthetic embrace of the fragmented metropolis’. 68 Coupled with a search for home/paradise (origin/perfection), this modern but nostalgic approach parallels the construction/destruction concerns of Eliot’s quest-initiating poem, and the later Four Quartets. More broadly, it echoes Eliot’s and Ezra Pound’s proposition that the use of ‘origin’ and ‘originality’ were a prerequisite for the production of great modern literature. In his essay ‘The Tradition’ (1913) Pound writes:

A return to origins invigorates because it is a return to nature and reason. The man who returns to origins does so because he wishes to behave in the eternally sensible manner. That is to say, naturally, reasonably, intuitively [...] He wishes not pedagogy but harmony, the fitting thing. 69

Something organic emerges here – something whole, and untaught: a natural tradition that seems slightly mystical. In his essay ‘War Paint and Feathers’ (1919), Eliot agrees with Pound that ‘the maxim, Return to the source, is a good

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66 John Matthews argues that due to this imagery associated with the grail, the ‘quest for the Grail is also the quest for Paradise’ (John Matthews, the grail: Quest for the eternal (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), p. 25).
67 Sheppard observes that many modernist texts are “‘travelling narratives’ which work to destabilize the identity of the protagonist” (Giles, Sheppard, “The Problematics of European Modernism”, in Theorizing Modernism, pp. 1-51 (p. 24)). Butts's and Powys's novels, like Ulysses, conform to this observation, but in searching for home and healing they are also a search for the identity already destabilised in a modern world.
68 Esty, A Shrinking Island, p. 12. Nostalgia is in itself already a fragmented process, like the society of the metropolis it is positioned in counterpoint to. As Dylan Trigg suggests, ‘Nostalgia presupposes something that is fundamentally incompatible with the ontology of decline: namely, that there can be a homecoming whereof the home is absent’ (Dylan Trigg, The Aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness, Nostalgia, and the Absence of Reason, New Studies in Aesthetics, 37 (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), p. 249). The search then must remain an uncompleted quest, where Englishness might replace Britishness, and replace the fragmentation of modernity, but can only do so by looking back to another unreachable time or place.
one': one could see what had been achieved before in poetry, so that one might 'know what he is doing himself'. 70 Origins give knowledge, structure and meaning to the present, and like a rite or myth they reassure in an ever changing environment.

However, for Eliot and Pound, the search for origins must be tempered with the new, or 'originality' — what we might call a search for perfection. 'Make It New!' was a phrase repeatedly used by Pound, and the title of his 1934 collection of essays. 71 Like many others, Butts joined in the cry, writing 'What we want now is a new way of seeing — a complete new attitude of approach. In fact a new imagination. The analysis has been made, now for a new synthesis. Joyce, Eliot, Lewis?' (JMB, p. 95). Smith defines these demands as Modernism's 'double edged promise': 'a total up-to-dateness has to be combined with a training in the classics. Originality must be matched by a sense of origins'. 72 It is from these demands that the Waste Land and the waste land concept first emerge within modernism.

For Marianne Thormählen the 'key notes' of The Waste Land are memory and desire. 73 They haunt Eliot's spectral landscape from the opening lines where, mixed, the pair stir 'Dull roots with spring rain' (WL, p. 61, ll. 3-4). The origin of the root desiring the rain, though growth might be painful, is not unlike Berman's observation of the conflict in 'our desire to be rooted in a stable and coherent personal and social past, and our insatiable desire for growth'. 74 We create our own suffering, in searching for something better.

I argue that the first stage in an evolution of the waste land, read as ritual, achieves something similar. So that literature could address the perceived problems it faced, it had to, in a sense, create those problems in the act of writing. Eliot begins the mimicry of modern barren place by using literary roots, or origins, appropriating past words from Virgil, Wagner, Shakespeare, Dante,

70 T. S. Eliot, 'War Paint and Feathers', The Athenaeum, 4668 (October 1919), 1036.
71 Eliot also warns that two types of modern literature attempt to do this badly; firstly, there is writing that 'attempts to do what has already been done perfectly', and which is wrongly called 'traditional'; secondly, there is another that trying to be original only achieves 'exaggerated novelty' (T. S. Eliot, After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy (London: Faber and Faber, 1934), pp. 23, 24.
72 Stan Smith, The Origins of Modernism, p. 3.
74 Berman, All that Is Solid, p. 35.
Middleton, Ovid, Milton, Webster, Spencer, Verlaine and Homer. Their effect is twofold, indicating a historical and literary lineage and continuity that might reassure and explain the present, but that might simultaneously cause confusion. A ‘collective memory’ — which as Joseph Roach writes is composed of social memory figured around rites, social performances and participation; and a written history of more critical solitary remembering — is represented in the multiple literary and street/pub/office voices of Eliot’s poem. But, as Roach argues, collective memory is also a means of forgetting; ‘cultures select what they transmit’.75 In *The Waste Land*, this memory appears as nothing more than ‘A heap of broken images’ (*WL*, p. 61, l. 22). Thomählen explains that memory can be a ‘source of bitter nostalgia’, which ‘sharpen[s] the awareness of present distress’.76 If one understands the loss depicted in Eliot’s literary genealogy of references, memory heightens the distress of modern living. Forgetting might be preferable. Yet, for many, these memories are meaningless because understanding has been lost, and this too becomes a source of distress and confusion. *The Waste Land*, then, mimics the perceived problems of modernity by using the very thing modernity is accused of destroying: meaning, knowledge and memory. Eliot is at once resisting and parodying the contemporary condition, but also creating it and giving it substance.77

Destruction and death are then the original creations of the waste land.

This itself might be read as a type of ritual response to modernity. Taussig’s observation of a modern Columbian ceremony — a performance communing with

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77 The philosopher René Girard writes that imitation is so important to humankind that if we stopped, ‘all forms of culture would vanish’ (René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, trans. by Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 1987), p. 7). This is one of the central fears of *The Waste Land* — that culture was indeed in decline. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer discuss the idea that the mimetic faculty has declined in the west due to the rise of capitalism. From the very beginning, mimicry in magic — as in the use of a sacrifice as a substitution for something — is already moving towards ‘discursive logic’, away from the simple mimetic act that brings someone closer to that which is mimicked (Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. by Schmid Noerr, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 6-7). For Adorno and Horkheimer, modernity exacerbates this decline. Literary Modernism in turning to origins might be seen to advocate a revival of mimetic practices in its art, even as a distance from these origins was increasing through its literary productions.
the dead – makes an interesting comparison. This rite takes place in front of a portal-like structure, which doubles as a door beyond this world; Taussig describes the site as a ‘stage’. Here, as in the poem The Waste Land, art is metaphor, but here too (with reference to Nietzsche) metaphor leaks from the portal, becoming real, becoming part of history and nation. It becomes ‘truth’. Death is continually explored within these rites: individuals lie on the ground for hours, mimicking death, hoping to channel voices of the departed. Taussig writes that they are ‘miming death as a form of defence’ – against death. A similar strategy of resistance can be seen in The Waste Land’s channelling of the voices of dead writers in the creation of the ‘dead’ modern society.

Walter Benjamin proposes that literature is a ‘medium into which the earlier powers of [occult] mimetic production [...] have passed’. Taussig agrees that writing is ‘a form of sympathetic magic’, ‘where ideas become forceful presence using correspondences in order to outwit and even dominate reality’. Applied to The Waste Land we can read a mimicry of death in defence of death, but also in the creation of modernist literature. Taussig writes that it seems one cannot exist without that which is feared. Just as the threat of war can give definition to a nation or to a region’s borders, so the concept of the waste land, and non-place, helps clarify meaning in its opposite. Perhaps Berman is right when he proposes that ‘to be fully modern is to be anti-modern’.

However, Eliot’s poem does not only address contemporary issues; the modern crisis point, given form in modernist literature, has its counterparts in other periods – as identified by anthropologists, and frequently by writers of those times. The myth of the waste land could just as effectively be applied to the Romantic period and its literature – to its revolutions, terrors and multiple cultural and economic changes. Equally, today’s postmodern/posthuman environment – one that has become a place and dialogue consumed with thoughts of environment

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79 Taussig, The Magic of the State, p. 77.
and ecocide – similarly embodies the same unstable characteristics of ‘modernity’, in what is perhaps now a more pronounced loss of agreed meaning. Therefore, Eliot indicts (seemingly recognising an unlinearity of place and time) not only his own time but a society of a past and future in constant upheaval and struggle.

In *The Nervous System* (1992), Taussig posits that society, existing in the incarnation of the modern state (inclusive of the culture aiding its construction), is, in fact, a ‘nervous system’ – a societal system that contrary to popular belief is always in a state of crisis (nervous reaction). It is ruled by terror rather than destabilised by it; therefore, any social analysis of this system can only be ‘revealed as montage’. 84 Given his presuppositions, this must be so, for there can be no flowing line of history and culture in an unstable nervous environment. There is only event and counter-event, action and reaction. Eliot’s waste land is such a place: a milieu of montage and non-linear meaning.

Acknowledging society to be in a perpetual state of crisis, one might still, however, identify peaks, though not so much in the crisis itself but rather in the perception and representation of the crisis point. Here, literature and later commentators serve to identify and in identifying create, or heighten, what would otherwise be any other random and equally unstable moment of history’s montage. Indeed, Taussig writes that in our attempts to stabilize the ‘nervous system’, through ‘a little ritual or a little science’, we actually make the system more nervous. 85 *The Waste Land* and waste land, as art and ritual, might be seen to do just this, helping to initiate a ‘regularly engineered crisis’, one of society’s ‘created occasions for reflecting upon themselves’. In other words: a rite of passage. 86 The death of place, then, begins a process of *separation, transition,* and *incorporation*, as examined by Victor Turner as the three stages of a rite of passage. 87 This *placing* of the waste land also conforms to Arnold van Gennep’s

linking of the rite to a ‘territorial passage’ – a movement through place. In the literary grail quest which follows, we find the second stage of this rite: transition.

Origins of the grail: a response to the waste land, when art continues as ritual

In *The Waste Land*, Eliot directs the reader to the origins of grail mythology, so making use of another search for origins taking place in anthropology at the time. Eliot pays tribute to *The Golden Bough* in the poem’s footnotes. John Vickery aligns this study with literary modernism, writing that Frazer brings together the two main ‘strands of thought and feeling in the age’: ‘one looking essentially to the future, the other to the past’. Frazer’s study examines an idea held by other scholars at the time that modern religion had evolved from older fertility cults centred on the ritual of the dying and resurrected god/king. In these studies, a process of historical mimesis can be traced from older pagan rites through to the story of Christ (a connotation of the god/king figure).

Jessie L. Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance* (1920) repeatedly references Frazer in her attempt to trace the grail legend, specifically the tale of Fisher King, back to pre-Christian origins. Weston linked the search for the grail, and the need to rejuvenate the land, to older vegetation and fertility cults and rituals, including Hindu, Buddhist, Greek, and Sumerian-Babylonian sources. Personifications of the land explain the earth’s seasonal progression from life to death to resurrection, in such figures as the Sumerian-Babylonian Tamuz, and the Greek Adonis.

Eliot writes in the poem’s footnotes:

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90 Weston also published an earlier Grail study, *The Quest for the Holy Grail* (1913), in which she also writes of searching for grail origins. In this study she neatly sums up the Fisher King tale: 'The object is the cure of the Guardian of the Talisman, an enigmatic personage, generally known as the Fisher, or Maimed, King, who is helpless from the effects of a wound, of extreme old age, or of an illness caused by the failure of the Quester, and with the cure of the ruler the restoration of fertility to his land, which lies waste while the Quest is unfilled' (Jessie L. Weston, *The Quest of the Holy Grail* (London: Bell, 1913; repr. New York: Haskell House, 1965), pp. x, 2.
Not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston's book on the Grail legend: *From Ritual to Romance* (Cambridge). Indeed, so deeply am I indebted, Miss Weston's book will elucidate the difficulties of the poem much better than my notes can do (*WL*, p. 78).

While there is debate as to how serious these footnotes are, Hugh Kenner's suggestion is perhaps best, reporting that Eliot had said 'no doubt I should pay my tribute to the work of Miss Jessie Weston; but I regret having sent so many enquirers off on a wild goose chase after [...] the Holy Grail'. 91 Eliot's linguistic and ritual 'wild goose chase' is, however, entered in to more fully by numerous other writers and artists of the period. Both Powys and Butts were fascinated by the myths and ceremonies of the grail, and they read widely on them.92 Powys's search led him to Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, which he found absorbing and informative (*DM*, p. 253). Butts read and re-read Weston, describing the book as 'fruitful' (*JMB*, p. 263).93

Krissdöttir writes that 'Powys used his novels to transport him on his Grail Hunt',94 his writing acting as a sympathetic magic. Similarly, Blondel identifies the 'Sancgrail' as one of the 'verbal beads' that 'thread' together Butts's thinking in her journal.95 For both authors, the grail hunt can be read as a search for meaning, an illumination through words. Krissdöttir compares Powys's quest to that of the Norse god Odin, hanging upon a tree (*DM*, p. 270) — another fertility figure, and a 'forger of words'. In Norse mythology poetry is the 'precious

92 Though Butts's knowledge of grail texts was not as extensive as Powys's, she had read translations of the older French Grail stories. In a journal entry for 1 November 1927, Butts refers to *The High History of the Holy Grail* (1910), a translation of the early thirteenth-century text *Perlesvaus*, also known as *Li Hauz Livres du Graal* (*JMB*, p. 268). Butts would have gained much from the book concerning the Christian grail and the waste land. Butts and Powys were also familiar with more common grail texts, including Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, and Malory's tales of Arthur and his knights, both of which deal with the waste land and the quest for its renewal. Amongst other books, Powys read John Rhys's *Studies in Arthurian Legend* (1891), which inspired the journal entry: 'I now have got on the track of the mythological Graal far older than the Holy Graal' (John Cowper Powys, journal entry dated 25 August 1929, in *Petrushka and the Dancer: The Diaries of John Cowper Powys, 1929-1939*, ed. by Morine Krissdöttir (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1995), p. 16). Powys also refers to Weston's book in his autobiography (John Cowper Powys, *Autobiography* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1934), p. 270).
93 References to Weston can also be found on pages 30, 32, 263-4, and 311 of Butts's Journals.
95 Nathalie Blondel, in *JMB*, pp. 1-41 (p. 32).
mead', and it is Odin who 'brings it from the Other World and give[s] it to gods and men'. As Prometheus steals fire, Odin steals the mead of poetry. In his quest for knowledge, Odin, pierced with a spear, must hang upon a tree (another fertility god/king cycle) for nine nights, communing with himself. It is a tree Butts envisions herself on, in 'whose boughs I was to pass as many nights as Odin', she writes (CC, p. 42).

Through the symbol of the grail, ritual, for Butts and Powys, is not only a bridge to art from religion, as it was for the Ritualist anthropologists; the grail becomes art and art becomes ritual — ritual becoming a bridge to the other world for the believing performer (or writer), just as contemporary anthropological writing suggested it had done for more 'primitive' societies. G. Wilson Knight positions Powys's writing 'beyond-good-and-evil consciousness on the border between art and doctrine where each interpenetrates the other'.

Wallace Stevens was one of many figures of the period who espouses a belief that poetry would replace religion and bring about a 'freshening of life'. This had all been said before, of course. On the cusp of modernism, Matthew Arnold had already advanced poetry as the 'strongest part of our religion today', and as an eventual replacement for both religion and philosophy. It seemed others, like Butts, saw literature as a rejuvenating ceremony. And though, Eliot warns, in the preface to the 1928 reprinting of his critical essays, The Sacred Wood, that poetry is not 'religion or an equivalent of religion', the essays suggest otherwise. They mourn a loss of tradition, and again highlight the need for origins (the poet's 'ancestors') in a modern world where words have become 'indefinite' in meaning (pp. 48, 9). For Eliot, the present 'began, in a sense, with

[Edward] Tylor and a few German anthropologists’. Coupled with the idea that a writer’s progress relies on ‘continual self-sacrifice’ (pp,75, 53), Eliot might not be seeking God or a replacement for religion, but a search through the ritual of language for a perfection of culture can certainly be read here.

Butts seems to have believed the grail was a means to achieve this crossing-over between art and ceremony, into a ‘Fourth Dimension’. Such revelation was also going to help heal the modern waste land. The grail becomes a nexus of ritual and art for Powys and Butts, as it does for many others of the period. It further ‘crosses the border of fiction and spirituality’. Today, as Inga Bryden points out, Arthur and associated myths are ‘packaged and marketed as cultural heritage’ – a part of England’s heritage industry. Differently, in the late nineteenth century, the beginning of an ‘Arthurian Revival’ was a ‘literary and cultural phenomenon’, where the Victorians used the quest for the grail as a secular rite. This ritual of rejuvenation found new momentum at the turn of the century, when it shifted from poetry (Frederick Faber’s Sir Lancelot (1842); Tennyson’s Lady of Shalot (1832) and the final incarnation of Idylls of the King (1886); Algernon Charles Swinburne’s Tristram of Lyonesse (1882)) to more dramatic work. This shift is a move into a performance of the grail in the earlier twentieth century that connected a number of disciplines, and showed an inter-influence taking between artist, writer, historian, anthropologist and occult practitioner. Butts’s and Powys’s part in this growing group ceremony reveals a plethora of influences on their work.

In 1933, Butts reviewed Arthur Waite’s book, The Holy Grail (1909). In the article she writes,

106 Mark Girouard argues that the Arthurian and Middle Ages myths and legends had had a much more sustained influence on English society from the late eighteenth century up until the First World War - manifested as an idea of what chivalry should be, and how it should be practiced. It is an idea that would greatly influence the British Empire and warfare (Mark Girouard, The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), pp.219-54, 275-293. Such an approach might be seen to have helped produce the disaster of misguided duty and bravery in the trenches of World War One, and thus contributed towards the construction of the modern waste land. A new generation and literature, then, respond to this with an Arthurian-based mythology, which has also helped generate the waste in the first place. The creative destructive rites of a ‘nervous’ society continue.
A long time ago something of the utmost importance happened in the spiritual history of man—an event concerned with the first arrival of Christianity in Britain and the founding of Glastonbury.

Such moments are not isolated, but parts of a sequence in the inner life; times—all more or less secret—of fruitful ecstasy and union with the Divine. Moments of an experience outside our time and space; which began before Christianity; of which, it would seem, another is about due.¹⁰⁷

For Butts, the grail is a spiritual matter—one outside space and time, but firmly rooted in them too, specifically in Britain and Glastonbury: ‘Arthur may be considered as our national epic’—our ‘Iliad’, she explains (p. 72). It appears Butts considers another divine ‘grail moment’ imminent. She notes its recent literary manifestation in the ‘chief, perhaps only, major poem of our time, “The Waste Land”’, but laments that in art the story has still ‘not yet found its final form’ (pp. 73, 72). The grail is a ‘not yet exhausted event’, she writes, referencing its recent scholarly attention (p. 73). Waite was one of many interested in the subject, and was not only a scholar but a mystic. In 1891, he became a member of the Golden Dawn, an occult society that attracted or influenced many writers, including William Butler Yeats, Bram Stoker and Allan Bennett. Aleister Crowley was also a member for a time, until his expulsion.

Waite’s work on the grail was likely influenced by his friend, the Welsh author, Arthur Machen. Machen, also a member of the Golden Dawn, wrote a number of books on the grail, including two short novels, The Great Return (1915) and The Secret Glory (1922).¹⁰⁸ Both contemporize the legend and explore the grail’s Celtic origins. Powys likely read The Great Return when gathering ‘as much material on the Grail and on Glastonbury as he could get his relatives and English friends to send him’. This was in preparation for writing A

Glastonbury Romance.\textsuperscript{109} Butts was an avid reader of Machen’s horror stories \textit{(JMB, p. 140)}, and also records, in August 1935, that she was re-reading his \textit{The Secret of the Sangrael} (1907) \textit{(JMB, p. 449)}. Machen knew Butts’s first husband, John Rodker, but not Butts herself. After Butts’s death, a mutual friend, Colin Summerfield, sent a copy of Butts’s \textit{The Crystal Cabinet} to Machen.\textsuperscript{110}

Another writer of the period, and also a member of the Golden Dawn, was Charles Williams, who had written the novel \textit{War in Heaven} (1930), which explores the contemporary re-appearance of the grail in the British countryside, a theme popular at the time. Williams was associated with those now more popular myth and fantasy quest writers C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien.\textsuperscript{111} Coates compares Powys’s \textit{A Glastonbury Romance} to Williams’ work,\textsuperscript{112} but for Butts the relationship to Williams was a closer one. She came to know Williams, and the pair began a correspondence, eventually meeting towards the end of Butts’ life.\textsuperscript{113} They shared an admiration for each other’s work, and their writing often exhibits similar interests in the grail, mysticism, religion, and detective fiction. Also evident is a comparable liturgical characteristic to their writing, especially their poetry, which embodies the order, rhythm, and mystical/holy concerns of church-like prayer and worship. William’s Arthurian/grail poem ‘The Calling of Taliessin’ is a good example:

\begin{quote}
The abstract gaze of Merlin overlooked
His sister, as time space, the elementals became
The magical continuum, where Merlin saw the place
To prepare, and himself to fare to the preparation.
He lifted the five times cross-incised rod
And began incantation.\textsuperscript{114}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{110} Nathalie Blondel, in \textit{JMB}, p. 394.
\textsuperscript{111} Lewis’s \textit{That Hideous Strength} (1945) also draws from grail mythology, with a story similar to Charles William’s \textit{War in Heaven}. Lewis’s novel explores the battle of demonic and celestial forces here on earth, with a large corporation called N.I.C.E doing the bidding of evil powers. An organisation called St. Annes, led by Dr. Elwin Ransom (who is said to be the heir of King Arthur), fights on the side of good. During the conflict even Merlin (who was never dead, only asleep) makes an appearance (See C. S. Lewis, \textit{That Hideous Strength: a modern fairytale for grown-ups} (London: The Bodley Head, 1945)).
\textsuperscript{112} Coates, \textit{John Cowper Powys in Search of Landscape}, p. 92.
The poem takes up some of the themes of this chapter – a ritual performance (here by Merlin) that alters time and space. In the poem’s form we find a reflection of the actions described (ritual or religious in form): the repetitive meter and rhyme embody the incantation depicted. Butts’s previously discussed ‘Corfe’ is composed in a similar style; the poem becomes an incantation to keep intruders out of Butts’s sacred Wessex, while being worshipful of its soil at the same time. Many of her poems exhibit similar concerns and technique. An unpublished poem, entitled ‘Florence’, praising the city, contains the lines ‘So your sons learned that Art’s as good as prayer | And both are just another name for God’. These sentiments are easily applied to a consideration of the aims of Butts’s writing, which continually fuse art and ritual.

In earlier twentieth-century modernism, occult ceremony and older pagan rites become a source for many writers, but the writer also emerges as a source for the rituals of practicing groups. When Butts stayed with Aleister Crowley at his Abbey in Italy, Crowley was working on his occult treatise Magick. Crowley explains that he ‘wrote essay upon essay to cover every phase of the subject’ that Butts had made suggestions on. Literature was inspiring magic.

The sacred and profane: from Wessex to a failing cup

With the creation of the waste land, and a gathering around the symbol of the grail, Butts’s Armed with Madness and Powys’s A Glastonbury Romance begin a quest for the vessel and the healing it brings. Butts’s novel is a ‘rewriting of the Grail myth set in England in the Long Weekend’. Brother and sister, Felix and Scylla, and Scylla’s lover Picus, meet with friends and a visiting American, Carston, for a weekend at their home in the Dorset countryside. Butts’s naming is

115 For the poem in full see Appendix B.
116 Mary Butts, ‘Florence’, Mary Butts Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, series 1, box 5, fol. 79.
118 Blondel, in JMB, p. 17.
of importance here, introducing ideas of the powerful earth goddess figure that recurs throughout her work; and, she is also alluding to Ulysses’ journey home. In Greek mythology, the earth goddess/witch Circe, turns Scylla into a monster. Scylla and Charybdis (another maiden turned monster by Zeus) guard a narrow strait of water that Ulysses must navigate in order to return to Ithaca. Picus is another transformed figure, whom Circe turns into a woodpecker. Butts mythically establishes the transformative and dualistic qualities of the grail hunt.

A game soon begins with the appearance of a jade cup dragged from a dry well with a spear. Barrenness of place is confirmed, while the cup/spear motif plays upon grail iconography. The spear that pieced Christ’s side, and the cup of the Last Supper, which also caught his blood, both appear as visions in grail quest literature. More phallic interpretations might be associated with Freud or early fertility cults; the possibility of sexual regeneration is immediately recognised. The cup acts as a catalyst to adventure and fighting within the group, which in turn leads to the band’s separation. After individual experiences away from home, the group returns to the house, where Scylla is found to have been attacked by the war-wounded and now crazy Clarence, whom Elizabeth Anderson identifies as the ‘wounded Fisher King’ figure. Foy locates the two grail objects of the cup and spear in Scylla and Picus respectively, tracing in the two objects a symbolism of sexual congress, and so connecting events to Weston’s study, and to Freud. Butts is playing out another ceremonial regeneration, like that in her earlier Ashe of Rings.

Powys’s A Glastonbury Romance is likewise concerned with various forms of rejuvenation, and running to over 1000 pages it contains a multitude of characters and subplots. The two main grail questers are John Geard and Same Decker. Geard, a priest/visionary, searches for an older pre-Christian grail, with the aim of establishing a new world religion and repositioning Glastonbury as a spiritual world centre. Meanwhile, Sam Decker seeks the more traditional

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121 Foy, Ritual, Myth, and Mysticism, p. 65.
Christian grail. While Butts’s novel has no clear villain (all are victims), Powys’s Philip Crow is an embodiment of the modern, mechanical threat.\footnote{The name Crow evokes the bird and its associations with evil and death. But at the same time, John Crow, who might be seen as a hero of the piece and a fellow quester, shares the family name, so hinting at dual process of creation and destruction. This duality is also recognised in another side of the crow symbolism – a connection to something spiritual, or an embodiment of the playful creatively destructive trickster figure, who is found in some Native American cultures (there are a few such figures in the novel, and as in Armed with Madness, where Picus is another bird trickster figure, the search for the grail has a game like quality to it). ‘Crow’ is also reminiscent of ‘Rook’, the name of Powys’s hero in Ducdame – a character also associated with death in his search to become part of the inanimate world and glimpse something of the spiritual existence beyond (what Powys calls the Fourth Dimension).} Philip is a businessman defined by his machinery. From his aeroplane, he looks down on Glastonbury (his ‘conquered land’), planning to plant ‘factory’ and ‘dynamo’ in its soil.\footnote{John Cowper Powys, A Glastonbury Romance (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1932), p. 225.} At the opening of the novel, Crow proclaims, in an excited, stuttering rant, ‘my factories above...my electricity beneath...I...I...Philip Crow...planting my will upon the future...moulding men...dominating Nature’ (GR, pp. 32-33): a mechanistic parody, a perverse mimicry of God’s creative power. Crow aspires to nothing less than absolute dominion over nature, over Glastonbury and over the people who live and work there.

Though Powys concludes his novel with a flood – a Biblical-style cleansing – that washes away the new bridge Philip is building across the river, and, although Sam and Geard gain visions of the grail, the grail itself fails as a regenerative object. In both A Glastonbury Romance and Armed with Madness, the grail, like the modern waste land myth, is a destructive force that only initiates the quest for revival. Like some readings of modernity the cup here holds creative destructive qualities, initiating fights, the breakup of communities and even murder.\footnote{A creative destructive element is traditionally found in grail myth. Dhira B. Mahoney writes that the grail might either ‘break up a society’ or ‘establish a new community, of those who are bound together in the search’ (Dhira B. Mahoney, ‘Introduction’, in The Grail: A Casebook, ed. by Dhira B. Mahoney (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), pp. 1-102 (p. 2)).} The grail captures this dual process when it fails to be an object of sanctity and rejuvenation in both novels. Powys and Butts’s deconstruction of the grail does not destroy the object’s power though, but elicits further strength from the cup by reimagining its meaning.

In Armed with Madness, a single grail object appears at the beginning of the novel in the form of a jade cup. Butts and her characters are aware of the...
significance of its being fished from a well with a spear, while the visiting American, Carston, is not (AWM, p. 16). He lacks the necessary cultural knowledge, and this reconfirms his outsider status. Scylla suggests a game to explore the meaning of the chalice. She claims that ‘the best way to get the story out is for everyone to say what he thinks or feels or remembers’ of the grail. They call this the ‘Freud game’ (AWM, p. 29). Tennyson, the castle at Corbenic, Wagner, the Pre-Raphaelites, Parsival, and the female grail-bearer are all mentioned (pp. 29-30). The game stresses the different ways of seeing, and the different legends concerning, the same object. This retelling of the cup’s myths and stories acts to re-sanctify cup and legend, in anticipation of the same act in the land.

In A Glastonbury Romance, the grail appears in a plethora of physical guises: a silver bowl (GR, p 512), a vision of a cup in John’s dream (p. 790), and as a baby’s christening cup (p. 901). Sam’s vision of the grail is a standard cup, but Geard’s vision links him to Cybele (an ancient incarnation of the earth mother, again linked to fertility rituals). Towards the end of the novel, Powys recalls the legends telling of the grail appearing in ‘five different shapes’ to Arthur, the fifth never being revealed to the reader. Powys wonders if this is what Geard sees as he disappears beneath the flood water at the close of the novel (GR, pp. 1169-70).

While this storytelling reaffirms the grail’s mythology, its multiplicity also suggests fragmentation and a lack of fixed meaning. This is furthered as Powys profanes the different manifestations of his grail. The silver bowl is used to serve punch in a bar and brothel (a place that profanes another name in being called Camelot) (GR, p. 512); John dreams that he urinates in the grail (p. 790); and, the christening cup is used to serve whisky (p. 901). Butts’ grail fares no better.

125 Charles Williams explores this idea of a multiple-narrative grail in War in Heaven. Three of his characters have stolen the vessel from the evil Gregory, who intends to use the cup in satanic rituals to bring about the end of the world. The three (an Archdeacon, a publisher, and a catholic aristocrat) all perceive the cup differently. The Archdeacon sees a vessel for a more important ritual of the church; the publisher sees the romances, the last supper, and the books of Malory; the catholic aristocrat observes the cup’s importance to the Catholic Church and the prestige the vessel would bring to his family (Charles Williams, War in Heaven (London: Faber and Faber, 1930), pp. 135-137).

126 In stories of the grail, the cup has appeared in many guises, amongst them ‘a bowl, a cup, a goblet, a platter, a reliquary that holds the Eucharist, a dish with a severed head, a precious stone’ (Mahoney, ‘Introduction’, in The Grail, ed. by Mahoney, pp. 1-102 (p. 1)).
Picus’s father, the real owner of the vessel, suggests it was once used as an Indian Rajah’s poison cup, and confirms that his consumptive lover used it for spitting (AWM, p. 84). The group use the cup to drink from, and as an ash tray (p. 37). The vessel fails to be an unambiguous sacred object. It becomes both sacred and profane.

This troubling duality is again matched in Butts’s heroine, Scylla, who like her predecessor Vanna, is a character both chaste and sexually adept, good and bad, ‘sometimes a witch and sometimes a bitch’ (AWM, p. 5). As Kroll notes, Scylla, like Vanna, uses sex to attempt healing. This sexual rite stems from the myth of the grail, which Felix confirms is ‘all sexual symbolism’ (AWM, p. 20). A complementary rite occurs with the shift from the homosexual partnership of Picus and Clarence to the heterosexual — so symbolically more regenerative — coupling of Picus and Scylla. Kroll notices a hint of its success in the storm that follows their sexual union (p. 165). The morning after: ‘the freshest earth there is’ (AWM, p. 41).

The renewal, however, is momentary, and by the end of the novel, Clarence’s shell-shock, and his sexual jealousy of Scylla and Picus, forces Scylla into the role of sacrificial scapegoat, in yet another attempt at a regenerative ritual. Clarence fires arrows at a clay statue of Picus, but when Scylla arrives his rage is refocused onto a new flesh and blood sacrifice. He ties Scylla to the statue and shoots her with arrows (AWM, p. 145). She faints in a symbolic death, but Butts’s ritual gesture is not enough. Just as Powys’s drowning (scapegoating) of Geard in place of the capitalist threat of Philip Crow, and the murder of Tom in place of John Crow by the mad witch-like Bet, fail by themselves as sacrifice, the sacrificial act for Butts must be only part of a greater ceremonial rejuvenation of the land (GR, pp. 1100, 1166). By itself, sacrifice fails, ending only in death, and thus remains mere mimicry of the waste land.

Nevertheless, some sort of renewal of the land does still take place in both authors’ work, and for Butts at least, the female figure, Scylla, seemingly remains the most powerful link to the grail. Ross calls her the ‘damsel of the Sanc-Grail’, and Carston sees her as a ‘living cup’ (AWM, pp. 44, 38). Felicity,

127 Kroll, ‘Mary Butts’ “Unrest Cure”’, 159-173 (pp. 163).
in Butts’s sequel, *Death of Felicity Taverner*, is similarly represented. Blondel names her ‘Fisher Queen’, whose death prefigures the imminent destruction of the land – a place Butts calls ‘the country of the Sanc Grail’ (*DFT*, p. 300).\(^{128}\)

Garrity develops this reading, and identifies both women as a ‘kind of living Grail’, recognizing the ‘conjunction of [their] femininity’ with ‘nature’.

Butts writes of Felicity that ‘the hills were her body laid-down, and “Felicity” was said, over and over again, in each bud and leaf’ (*DFT*, p. 191). Butts’s heroines – chaste yet sexually experienced, healing yet harsh and powerful – are embodiments of the landscape, of nature. As we read the grail in them, we can read the grail in nature too – the grail as place, just as Vanna, in *Ashe of Rings*, is one with her family estate of Ashe. It is Carston who hints at this manifestation of the grail in topography, describing, at the beginning of the quest, the area in which they are in as a ‘cup’ (*AWM*, p. 47). The lesser rites of pilgrimage and sacrifice performed in *Armed with Madness* almost obscure the greater rite within the novel, which is the re-performance of place itself.

**Sympathetic space: the duality of two sacred grailscapes**

Despite Powys’s Glastonbury villain, and in spite of Butts’s repeated reference to the popularised image of a concrete, industrialised waste land in her journals, such overbearing presences are noticeably absent from much of the two grail novels. H. P. Collins detects a ‘timelessness’ in Powys’ work associated with technology, in which (even though it is set in contemporary nineteen-twenties England) there is a noticeable absence of modern appliances and machines. Collins writes that in Powys’ work, roads are often ‘virgin of motor-cars’.\(^{130}\) In *Armed with Madness*, Butts writes of ‘gaping tourists, the market-day beasts; the train poking its head suddenly round an angle in the hills’ (*AWM*, p. 8). Their presence is jarring, but strangely absent, for they remain an occurrence prepared for by Scylla that the reader never experiences.

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\(^{128}\) Blondel, in *JMB*, p. 17.


Unlike *The Waste Land*, the placing of modern concerns by Butts and Powys manifests not as death, but as an older grail landscape. Historian, Gerardus Van Der Leeuw calls this type of representation a 'holy action'—where artistic representation is a holy action precisely because there stands before the eyes of the first reality a second, which in spite of its connection with the first, is a different one. Eliot produces a sacred artistic image of the condition, but it is a profane sacred image. Butts and Powys's reimagining goes further, producing a landscape where the waste is no longer a location of placelessness and meaninglessness, but becomes a land of a different kind of non-meaning, traditionally ascribed to 'space'.

Lawrence Buell suggests that world history is a 'history of space becoming place'. It is a process of the unknown becoming the known. It has been written that 'place is space to which meaning has been ascribed'. In the conventions of grail mythology, the waste land is often represented as 'space': an area outside man's control, often of fierce nature. This ungovernable wilderness has been seen to hold less meaning than the places man inhabits, uses, and worships in. It is a wild or infertile space. Nature here is taboo, which as Freud discusses is 'sacred' and consecrated but also 'uncanny' 'dangerous' and 'forbidden'.

Butts writes that '[t]hrough the loveliness [of nature] comes direct, power' (*CC*, p. 22). Butts calls this nature 'visible pan' (*DFT*, p. 354). Pan, Robert Graves writes, is an ugly god who guards the sheep of Arcadia, plays the pipes, but also takes part in Dionysian-like revelry. Pan has both a 'simplicity and love...'

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of riot';\textsuperscript{136} he unites the lighter and darker sides of nature. Butts explains that if this darker part of nature is not faced it becomes ‘Witless Fear. Mindless Fear’: ‘Panic Fear. That old god, waiting in the woods or behind the flower-beds’ (\textit{CC}, p. 23).

This Panic fear is experienced by tourists admiring the Italian countryside in E. M. Forster’s short tale ‘The Story of Panic’. Coming upon a manifestation of Pan in place, overwhelming terror drives them from the spot. A child left behind in their escape assumes the ecstatic qualities of the god; these will not allow him to be parted from nature, to the point of threatening his life when he resides in a manmade hotel.\textsuperscript{137} This nature is taboo, both sacred and profane; it is part of the England Butts’s experiences, and can be found in D. H. Lawrence’s ‘savage England’ layered in ‘patches’: a ‘spirit of place lingering on primeval, as when the Saxons came, so long ago’.\textsuperscript{138} In \textit{Death of Felicity Taverner}, Butts invokes the ‘desolation of loveliness’ of ‘visible pan’ to kill Kralin, and so destroys the threat of urban development (\textit{DFT}, p. 354). In a scapegoat ritual mirroring that played out with Scylla in \textit{Armed with Madness}, Kralin is lured into a cave where he is struck over the head. Falling into water, he drowns (p. 357). Felicity’s ghostly presence at the moment of death ensures her ultimate victory, and completes another rebirth ceremony for the landscape she represents.

Nature as this powerful wilderness was, up until the Romantic period, a ‘barren’ place to be feared.\textsuperscript{139} The grail narratives of Malory and Tennyson operate under these conventions. In the \textit{Idylls of the King}, Lancelot is lost in ‘waste fields far away’, ‘in a land of sand and thorns’,\textsuperscript{140} while knights in Malory’s quest head into the ‘waste forest’, the ‘wylde foreyst’ and the ‘waste londe’.\textsuperscript{141} Even as they battle with man,

\textsuperscript{141} Malory, \textit{Works}, pp. 535 (I. 39), 536 (ll. 20, 22).
they must contend with nature.  

There are moments in *Armed with Madness* where Malory's 'wylde foreyst' or the 'waste londe' are invoked in the landscape. Butts's forest is wild too. It is a place of 'silence' that not 'many nerves could stand' (*AWM*, p. 3). Scylla observes other dangers of the landscape, as the 'earth suddenly look[ed] fragile, as if it was going to start shifting about' (*AWM*, p. 9). Here, nature shows the problems and uncertainties of the modern world and its instabilities, but in this reflection, meaning is instilled into a modern counterpart waste that originally has no meaning. Nature, Machen writes, is a 'paradise in the scent of the green leaves' — a 'secret' language, but only secret because we refuse to recognise it. Butts uses and ritualises a language of nature that allows her characters to re-perform the land, moving through it like grail knights. Picus leads the other men across country, 'troop[s] them through a wood and sweat[s] them over a crest, to drop them again', on a heath, where a creek runs by, with 'yellow grass' (*AWM*, p. 46). Their movement is military, marching; and, the heath is reminiscent of Tennyson's wasted land of 'Wilde flats, where nothing but coarse grasses grew'. The group is lost. Picus has led the group the wrong way 'on purpose' — a ruse to hide his affection for Scylla who bides elsewhere (*AWM*, p. 47). Picus is playing a game with the others, matching Butts, who is playing with the reader. Like Malory's and Tennyson's questing knights, Butts's characters and readers are misled and beguiled.  

The play mimicry of the quest begins a re-mapping and reinvigoration of the land. Kroll calls this stimulation to action by the cup Butts's 'unrest cure', which is a learning to live with modernity's 'chaos, and even sometimes thrive on it'. It might be a learning to live with chaos through a repetition of it, but 'before the eyes of the first reality [stands] a second, which in spite of its

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142 Barber places this waste land as the 'mysterious forest of adventures outside' in contrast to the 'ordered world of [the] castle', where the 'Grail clearly belongs' (Barber, *The Holy Grail*, p. 104). The chaos of the adventure is in contrast to the rites and comforts of the home in its ideal form. Again, the quest is one for home.  
144 Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*, pp. 206-230 (p 227).  
145 We might compare Picus's detour to the story of Percivale, in Tennyson, who is distracted from his quest by the wiles of a beautiful woman (Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*, pp. 283-85).  
146 Kroll, 'Mary Butts' "Unrest Cure"', 159-173 (p. 170).
connection with the first, is a different one.147 Within the chaos lies a landscape in stillness or a landscape as it should be, according to Butts: a place ‘for ever moving, for ever at rest’ (AWM, p. 92).148 Butts’s use of nature is as much a part of this practice as the characters’ performances. Nature can be read as a performance in terms of ‘materiality’ and ‘process’; through action, ‘agency and creativity emerge’.149 Nature is a plethora of performing processes.

Humankind’s mimetic magic then copies these already existing actions through ritual, through art. David Crouch maintains that through such performances we encounter and consider, challenge, and discover nature in a variety of ways. In performance one makes sense of the world.150 Butts’s characters, their home, and landscape all become this playful interconnection of nature, in what might be read as a ‘greening’ of contemporary problems.151 The landscape functions as an organic whole. The house is contiguous to the wood and the sea, and the residents are connected to the forest around it, ‘appeasing it’ — again, with their play (AWM, p. 4). As with much of Butts’ other writing, the landscape is alive: the wood by which they live ‘had all its own way’ (AWM, p. 4), just as Rings does in Ashe. Aware of a unity of home in Wessex, Scylla glimpses the grail in its topography early on. She realises that the ‘the story of the house could not be told without the wood, the house party could not be described without the cup’ (p.118). The visiting American, Carston, glimpses this too, before realising its true significance: ‘the scenery seemed to be the play’, not the backdrop (p. 12). Movement and rest again underpin this unity of place, its

147 Van Der Leeuw, Sacred and Profane Beauty, p. 161.
148 This duality of landscape and character holds similarities to Patrick Wright’s observation that the England of Butts writing is a place formed in a ‘tension’ of ‘flight — intoxication, destabilisation, disruption, an impulse towards the new’ and ‘settlement, with its impulse of return to threatened family, inheritance and predominantly rural nation’ (Patrick Wright, On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain (London: Verso, 1985), pp. 103-04.
151 This greening is more literally found by Wright, who suggests the substantiality of colour in Butts’s work: “‘Green’, for example, is suddenly a world in itself; people walk around and stand on it’; “green” becomes the very ground of an England of the mind’. Wright notes a similar ‘plunge’ into colour by Powys, in Wolf Solent (Wright, On Living in an Old Country, p. 109).
nature, and its performances, and this in turn spreads into the characters’ and author’s movements, and from there back into place.

Nature and culture: Powys between places

Powys, too, develops the importance of nature in his writing; Douglas Robillard stresses that Powys’s fiction is ‘Landscape with Figures’. The importance of the minute detail of nature is illustrated by Jean-Pierre De Waegenaere’s counting of a ‘183 different names for wild flowers and shrubs, and 42 names of trees’ in Powys’s first eight novels alone. The descriptions of nature in *A Glastonbury Romance* retain such detail, and the constituents of the natural world consistently respond to the protagonists and story, much like the symbiotic land/person relationship in Butts’s writing. Again, nature is not passive. When John Crow and his cousin, Mary, have sex for the first time, in the countryside, the ‘old tree against which they leaned was aroused by it and responded to it’ (*GR*, p. 54).

Elsewhere, the vicar of Glastonbury, Mat Dekker, considers the importance of the West Country’s natural landscape in the construction of the individual’s identity:

> The master-current of the man’s passionate West-country nature found in a thousand queer, little, unattractive objects, such as mouldering sticks, casual heaps of stones, discoloured fungus on tree roots, dried-up cattle-droppings, old posts with rusty nailheads, tree stumps with hollow places full of muddy rain-water, an expression of itself that wide-stretching horizons failed to afford (*GR*, p. 118)

Powys again locates most meaning in the inanimate parts of nature – the stick, stone, and animal dung. Jeremy Hooker calls this ‘ditch vision’, where ‘English writers and painters have found’ a ‘humanised nature within which wildness or the non-human is discoverable’, often in the landscape of the home, and associated with childhood:

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154 Powys stresses the superior ritual quality, and awareness, of inanimate things, over humankind, in *A Glastonbury Romance*. Evans reports that John has explained to him that ‘a great many material things had certain little tricks of arranging themselves at certain times, as if they all shared in the process of some secret ritual to which we have all lost the clue’ (*GR*, p. 831).
It is here that they have perceived the boundless in the bounded; found creative power in minute particulars; seen visions in ditches.\textsuperscript{155}

From his ditch, Powys is concerned with universal issues.\textsuperscript{156} The regional and parochial lead to something beyond their boundaries.\textsuperscript{157} This transcendence through nature continues in the trees (also manifested in Powys’s \textit{Ducdame}).

High above a conversation between Sam and his father, the trees ‘appeared to be conversing together’ (\textit{GR}, p. 115). Elsewhere, they ‘moan’ (p. 209), and, not only are they able to speak, they also ‘suffer’, and ‘love’ (p. 820), each feeling affecting the ‘soul’ of the tree, as they would a person (p. 428). A similar sadness is located in other grail/waste-like landscape features: in the ‘desolate marshes of Mark Moor’ (\textit{GR}, p. 419); in the ‘vast, sad’ ‘plain’ (p. 1099); and in the trees that ‘cry’ and seem to come from ‘some underworld of Being’ (p. 821).

From sentient nature, Powys creates a platform from which to tell his grail quest. Yet, unlike Butts’s storytelling, his utilises a specific landscape already


\textsuperscript{156} This reading of Wessex as a place of the local and regional giving way to more universal concerns has become an established performance (reading) of Hardy’s landscape. It helps to create and reaffirm the liminality of Wessex, a space small and large, local and foreign, known and other, physical and spiritual. See Ralph Pite, \textit{Hardy’s Geography: Wessex and the Regional Novel} (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 3-7; Phyllis Bentley, \textit{The English Regional Novel} (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1941), p. 28. Subi Swift continues this reading, alongside the other established reading of hunting Hardy in Powys’s work. Swift contends that a ‘repeated oscillation between long-distance omniscience and microscopic close-up [...] used by Hardy’ is ‘emulated by Powys (Subi Swift, ‘The Pictorial Eye: Thomas Hardy’s Influence on John Cowper Powys, The Thomas Hardy Journal, 6, 1 (February 1990), 35-46 (p. 37). Interestingly, J. Nicholas Entrikin suggests that a search for middle ground between the general and particular is manifested in a betweenness of place (J. Nicholas Entrikin, \textit{The Betweenness of Place: Towards a Geography of Modernity} (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 94.

\textsuperscript{157} This perception is like that described in Blake’s poem ‘Auguries of Innocence’: ‘To see a world in a grain of sand | And a heaven in a wild flower, | Hold infinity in the palm of your hand | And eternity in an hour’ (William Blake, ‘Auguries of Innocence’, in \textit{The Complete Poems}, ed. by W. H. Stevenson, 2\textsuperscript{nd} edn (London: Longman, 1989), pp. 589-92 (p. 589)). Powys reads his ‘ditch vision’ in Blake’s work. He writes that Blake’s Jerusalem is a battle ‘against brutality and materialism’, and of how all Blake needed was the ‘fields of Felpham with their hawthorne hedges, the little woods of Hertfordshire or Surrey with their patches of blue-bells’ to ‘set him among the company of the eternal gods’ (John Cowper Powys, ‘William Blake’, in ‘Essays on Guy De Maupassant, Anatole France, William Blake’ (Girard, KA: Halderman-Julius, 1923), pp. 43-60 (p. 59). Similarities to this ‘ditch-approach’ are found in Walter Benjamin’s concept of ‘profane illumination’, which is not a religious illumination, but something springing from a ‘materialistic, anthropological inspiration’, in smaller things, and in the old, the run down, and the overlooked, everyday objects (Walter Benjamin, ‘Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia’, in \textit{Reflections}, pp. 176-92 (pp. 179, 181)). For Powys this is most successfully achieved through inanimate objects.
rich in grail lore. The shift from modern concerns to grail landscape is complete, as he makes greater uses of a Wessex whose ‘sense of regionalism’ is already partly constructed around the holy artefact.\footnote{Bryden, Reinventing King Arthur, p. 123.} Most of the action of A Glastonbury Romance takes place in or around Glastonbury, a place where Christianity has its legendary introduction to England. R. F. Treharne explains that ‘some thirty years after the crucifixion, St. Joseph of Arimathea and a band of missionary disciples came to Britain and chose Glastonbury to be the first abiding place of Christianity’.\footnote{R. F. Treharne, The Glastonbury Legends: Joseph of Arimathea, the Holy Grail and King Arthur (London: Cresset Press, 1967), p. 4.} According to legend, Joseph, at the crucifixion, caught the blood of Christ in the grail; he then brought the vessel to Glastonbury with him. Weary from their travels, the group arrived in Glastonbury, stopping on one of the hills which has ever since been known as ‘Wearyall Hill’. Praying on his arrival, Joseph pushed his staff into the ground before kneeling, and, ‘the staff immediately took root and budded; it was a sign from heaven that he had reached his Journey’s End’. This tale explains the origin of the thorn that grows in Glastonbury, flowering ‘unseasonably’ at Christmas to this day.\footnote{Treharne, The Glastonbury Legends, pp. 5, 6.} The story continues that the grail remains buried somewhere in Glastonbury. It is yet to be rediscovered by tourists who visit, hoping to experience the healing properties of The Chalice Well. The spring produces red-hued water, reputedly stained like blood by the still-hidden vessel.\footnote{The garden around the spring and well is now a tourist attraction. A leaflet to the site markets the place as the ‘Ancient red spring of Avalon: A timeless place, full of atmosphere, legend and symbolism’ (Bernard Chandler, ‘The Chalice Well: Glastonbury’ ([Glastonbury (?)]; [The Chalice Well Trust (?)], [n.d.])). See Chalice Well Trust, on line, <www.chalicewell.org.uk> [accessed on 15 January 2011] for more information and a map of the small garden.} The legend of Joseph and the grail is an old one. An early literary account of the story was created by Robert de Boron a little after the composition of the earliest grail Romance, Perceval, by Chretien de Troyes, in about 1180.\footnote{Mahoney, ‘Introduction’, in The Grail, ed. by Mahoney, pp. 1-102 (p. 3).} Other versions of the Joseph story followed, and the tale can be found at the opening of Evans’ The High History of the Holy Grail, which Butts was re-reading in 1927.

Glastonbury’s various associations with grail mythology reinforce what we might term the ‘individuality’ of place (every place, Nicholas Entrikin suggests, is
a unique fusion of space and experience in the creation of this individuality).
Experience can be as much about myth and legend as it is about history and personal interaction with location, all of which result in furthering the 'semantic density' of place. Glastonbury’s semantics can be seen to have been enhanced when, in 1191, monks claimed the discovery of the tomb of Arthur and Guinevere within the Abbey grounds. This find occurred during a period in which the monastery was in need of money, and can be read as an early attempt of producing tourism associated with the Arthur and grail myths. Others have gone as far as to identify Glastonbury as Avalon itself – an association in part founded on the knowledge that in prehistoric times, before the marshes were drained, Glastonbury was an island.

Other nearby topographical features are traditionally linked to Arthur too. The bridge over the River Brue is the bridge Perilous from which Arthur throws Excalibur back to the Lady of the Lake, and the slightly further afield (12 miles) Cadbury Castle has been identified as Camelot. Powys also mentions a story that Chalice Hill is the site where Merlin vanished with the grail (GR, p. 543). Sam Smiles suggests the ‘Arthur story invokes a sense of mysticism and timelessness, in an overtly de-historicised narrative’. Powys deliberately locates his tale in this environment, conscious of its timeless qualities, but mindful that this attribute must be renewed if it is not to decline.

A pageant of place: making culture real

Charlene Spretnak writes that the ‘telling of myth is a ritual creation of sacred space’. For Butts and Powys, the grail is almost a toy to be played with, to

163 Entrikin, The Betweenness of Place, pp. 6, 11.
165 Treharne, The Glastonbury Legends, p. 7. Tintagel Castle, on the west coast of Cornwall, has also been identified as Camelot (or alternatively Arthur’s birth place). ‘Merlin’s Cave’ nestles in the rocks beneath it.
encourage the asking of the right question and create this space.\textsuperscript{168} It is a fetish that helps, through the rites it stimulates, to make culture ‘real as a mode of existence’\textsuperscript{169} — in this instance, in place. For Jonathan Goodwin, this ‘re-enchantment’ of place occurs in \textit{A Glastonbury Romance} through a ‘recognition of the imagined past existing in the same space as the eternal present’\textsuperscript{170}. Powys achieves this in a multitude of re-performances of grail myth that reach a climax in the collaborative social form of play, in the Glastonbury Pageant.

Writing on Pageants during this period, Robert Withington identifies Mr Lewis Napoleon Parker’s pageant, which was first staged in 1905 at Sherborne in Dorset, as the originator of the pageant’s rebirth\textsuperscript{171}. Eliot wrote and helped stage a pageant play — \textit{The Rock}. It was performed on behalf of a Christian charity in 1934. E. M. Forster wrote two pageants: \textit{Abinger Pageant} (1934) and \textit{England’s Pleasant Land} (1940), while Virginia Woolf makes use of the subject in her novel, \textit{Between the Acts} (1941), where a small village community stage a play.

The pageant is traditionally a small, unprofessional production of local, national and Biblical history, folk-law and myth. Its ‘main root’ lies in ‘folk custom’, which was then developed by the church\textsuperscript{172}. It was customarily a regional event, not a national one, being a representation and interpretation of a ‘particular English place’, not England itself. Esty argues that modernist re-inventors of the pageant play used it in their attempts at a regionalizing revival of England\textsuperscript{173}. The pageant harks back to an Elizabethan period, seen as a Golden Age, when such a style of play was more popular\textsuperscript{174}. Withington suggests it was

\textsuperscript{168} David Torevell writes that ‘A strong “play” element resides within ritual since it is action that is “played out” within certain limits of time and space (David Torevell, \textit{Losing the Sacred: Ritual, Modernity and Liturgical Reform} (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), p. 34-35). It is an action that creates space, invigorating it, making it a ‘playful’ space, a space of energy, both physically and mentally.


\textsuperscript{173} Esty, \textit{A Shrinking Island}, pp. 58, 61.

\textsuperscript{174} See Withington, \textit{English Pageantry}, I, pp. 98-221.
its modern re-inventors who gave pageantry a serious purpose, and used the performative ‘instinct to higher aims’.

In Forster’s *England’s Pleasant Land*, an area of farm land, its workers, a manor house and its family become symbolic of rural England. Telling the story of a hundred years period, Forster explores acts of England’s creation, like those examined in the previous chapters. In the play, farming, enclosure, and the decline of the country house and family reveal a changing English landscape, reaching a point of modernity, where Forster asks, will we ‘use [our] strength to destroy what [we] have made, and cover the face of England in rubbish?’. Forster envisions a waste land comparable to that imagined by Butts and Powys. It too seeks to warn of the destruction of place threatened by modernity, so as to help instigate change. His pageant as well as warning the reader acts to restate the myth and history of England past, as some kind of defence of place.

Powys’s Glastonbury Pageant attempts something similar. Read according to Turner’s interpretation of the stage, Powys’s play is a theatrical double of Glastonbury and its community, allowing, through performance, what is normally hidden and inaccessible in society to be brought to ‘observation and reason’.

The theatre and the stage show the self to the self, exemplifying everyday cultural performances, which assert our identity – where as ‘heroes in our own dramas’, Myerhoff explains, we are ‘made self aware, conscious of our own consciousness’. Forster tries to show the nation the near disaster that it is failing to observe. In *Between the Acts*, Woof attempts the same trick of showing us ourselves when, in the last act of the village pageant, mirrors are literally turned on the audience and they become the play. ‘Ourselves! Ourselves!’ the audience cries, horrified as they are ‘caught’ by the reflective surfaces. The moment exemplifies Myerhoff’s claim that a stage-induced self-awareness makes

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us both actor and audience. In the tradition of ritual or theatrical time, Woolf writes ‘The hands of the clock stopped at the present moment. It was now. Ourselves’ (Between the Acts, p. 216).

We can read this same reflective positioning of the individual in Butts’s and Powys’s association with the mythical Odin – a figure who hangs upon a tree in pursuit of knowledge, acquiring the power of words – a performance of the self to self. In Woolf’s pageant, though, the priest interprets these various separate reflections to mean that ‘each is part of the whole’ – all are reflected together (Between the Acts, p. 224). Similarly, the pageant of A Glastonbury Romance unites all parts of the community (though not without incident or violence). Powys’s play functions like a mirror within the novel, a microcosm of the different events, characters and quests from the larger narrative, so creating a sort of grail communitas. This performance is also a revelation of place to place, the pageant being a play more importantly about place and its stories and myths than the individuals it tells of (like Forster’s pageant). On the stage, the different stories of Mordred and Arthur, pagan myths and the crucifixion of Christ are performed (GR, pp. 584-630). The crowd is large and international. Off stage, events begin to mirror those on stage, as Communist protestors chant and wave banners, and try to attack the arriving landowner, whom Geard has to rescue from the mob (GR, p. 600). Powys likens the whole event to Bacchanalian orgy, well knowing that Harrison had linked Bacchanalian/Dionysian rituals with the beginnings of theatre.

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181 The Communists make the third group vying for space and power in Powys's novel (the others being a religious movement, led by Geard, and the capitalist, overseen by Philip Crow). As Bloom points out 'European communism and fascism and the domestic collapse of liberal politics' (Bloom, Literature and Culture, p. 4-5) were part of the social crisis/concern in the early twentieth century. The USSR was established in 1922, following the Russian Civil War. In A Glastonbury Romance the Communists want to set up the first functioning English commune in Glastonbury. The same period also witnessed the beginnings of fascism in 1920s Italy - another anxiety for many writers of the time, or, indeed, an influence on some like Ezra Pound, and the Futurist movement. Edward Upward’s later novel, Journey to the Border (1938) - also a quest narrative - expresses its fears of fascism’s influence in England, but from a Communist standpoint.
On stage, the mimetic processes of the novel are drawn together, where symbolic ritual and local art almost become reality in the re-enactment of the crucifixion. Evans (a sadist obsessed with the study of Merlin) plays Christ. He is lifted onto a cross, and tied by ropes. At the foot of the cross stands Persephone, playing the part of the virgin (here, Powys combines an older fertility figure in name with a later Christian one in action). On the cross, Evans starts to feel pain, bleeds, and passes out (GR, pp. 626-27). The play comes close to being a real crucifixion, and, in another reflective transforming process, Evan’s sadistic tendencies are transfigured into more masochistic ones. The crowd panics and a local man, dressed as King Arthur, is forced to calm them with aid of a megaphone, ending proceedings quickly with a jumbled and awkward blessing (p. 629-30).

Like the representation of modernity’s problems in the concept of the waste land, and Powys’s and Butts’s depiction of them, the play within Powys’s novel is a mirror, a rite dealing with crisis. Turner contends that theatre allows society to deal with societal crisis and conflict through different stages of performance. Powys’s pageant can be read according to Turner’s criteria. Firstly, a departing from the norm must take place (a taboo is broken) – this is seen in the protesting communists attacking the landowner, and perhaps in what quickly becomes an irreverent pageant on the stage. Secondly, a crisis occurs – the Landowner is tipped from his carriage, and Evan’s passes out on the cross. Thirdly, a sacrifice, or the leader, ends the issue – again, Evans on the cross, or ‘Arthur’s’ blessing. Finally, society returns to normal – the Glastonbury pageant ends and the crowd disperses. 183

Powys’s pageant could be usefully read as a play within a play, reflecting events of the novels which are themselves pageant-like in their local, rural and folkloric concerns. It also represents a rite of passage ceremony, like that I have identified in the processes of the waste land, the grail quest, and finally its healing.

183 Turner, From Ritual to Theatre, pp. 70-71.
Many within the larger play of the novel seek the grail, but only a few glimpse it. Only the pure may see it. In *A Glastonbury Romance*, only those truly invested by Powys with the mimetic faculty of nature (place) and ritual (culture) gain the sought-for vision. Philip Crow in his plan to dominate nature and ‘beat down this pious Glastonbury legend’ will not see the grail (*GR*, p. 224); neither does the Mayor who locks himself in a cage in his shop while he works, actively disconnecting himself from the community (p. 215). Even Evans, though on a quest for the grail, will not find it because there are ‘endless occasions when [he] loathe[s] Nature’ (p. 264). Geard, Sam and John all glimpse something of the nature of the grail though. Sam secures a vision of the cup that reflects the belief he shares with his father that they are ‘bound together [...] with the fecund Somersetshire soil’ (*GR*, p. 117). Sam’s quest and accompanying austerities lead to an epiphany that causes him to believe that there is a ‘Christ in matter that is nearer the Grail than the Christ of the Church’ (p. 987). This Christ is in the ‘Stones and in the Water’ (p. 986). Geard’s more mystical teachings come to a similar conclusion that even insects have souls, and that (echoing Blake) ‘everything that lived was holy’ (*GR*, p. 1171).

Not being a native to Glastonbury, John is never allowed to fully enter into the community or spirit of place. He never truly dwells. This is not to say he is disconnected from place like many of the other characters though. Esty concludes that during the novel, Crow is ‘made more responsive to the English genius of place’, but Crow comes from East Anglia, and so must return there to complete his quest. As he takes part in the Glastonbury pageant, assisting Geard, John begins to see that East Anglia is his true home. His search for origin (homeland) and perfection (the grail) must end there. East Anglia is where the ‘fen-ditches and fen-water and fen-peat tugged at his soul and pulled it earthward’. He can even smell in the breeze the ‘smell of East Anglia itself’ (*GR*, pp. 67-68).

In his search for the grail, Geard too becomes more aware of place, even gaining the title ‘Geard of Glastonbury’. In hoping to make Glastonbury a spiritual world centre, he knows that the history of the place already makes it sacred. He must enliven its sanctity. He does this by healing a dying woman with

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the help of the Chalice Well waters (GR, p. 735). Powys comments that the fount has ‘been the scene of such a continuous series of mystic rites, going back to the neolithic men [...] that there had come to hang about it a thick aura of magical vibrations’ (GR, pp. 737-38). He continues that ‘[n]o sacred pool, in Rome, or Jerusalem, or Mecca, or Tibet has gathered such an historic continuum of psycho-chemical force about it’ (p. 738). This ‘force’ is the legend that surrounds the place, performed through its many rituals of pilgrimage, tourism, healings, and myths.

Though powerful, it is a force that can be destroyed, if forgotten, unrenewed, and ignored. A sacred place loses its power and significance if people fail to recognise it as an important location, and re-perform it as such. This is the fate of Jerusalem, Athens, and Alexandria in Eliot’s The Waste Land (p. 75, l. 374). A. Artaud writes that theatre actually ‘has the power to influence the aspect of and formation of things’. Powys’s and Geard’s theatrics have this aim and effect. In attracting the masses of devotees and tourists to Glastonbury, Geard ensures a renewed performance of meaning in place, while Powys achieves the same through his narrative.

Page and place: continuing the theatre in the ‘real’ world

In Armed with Madness, only one character, Ross, remains untouched by the effects of the modern waste land. His purity is demonstrated in his relationship with the landscape. The others are disconnected, if only for a time. Scylla explains that the grail story ‘has never come off, or found its form or its poet’, and that similarly their lives are also ‘spoiled and inconclusive’ (AWM, p. 67). Butts seems to be implying that the story needs to be retold to bring healing. When, in the tradition of the grail quest, the group disperses, Ross is left behind; only he is still part of the land. He is the artist, a story-teller with the sympathetic magic of his painting. He remains, and ‘embrace[s] his solitude, [thinking] of the shape of each thing he drew, until the earth seem[s] one growing stillness, of innumerable separate tranquillities, for ever moving, for ever at rest’ (AWM, p. 92).

In contrast, the war-wounded Clarence is most affected by a disconnection from nature. He is surrounded by 'trees', 'grass', 'rabbits' and a 'hawk' but all he can see is 'Vanity, lechery, falsehood, and malice loll[ing] together across the grass' (AWM, p. 89). The others are not as detached from their home, but Butts tells us they are no longer easy in that place. Scylla is 'tired', and Felix 'bored', realizing he has handled the situation – the grail game – 'without imagination' (p. 92). Without imagination ritual cannot affect reality, and the quest at this point cannot be completed.

A second dispersal of characters, echoing the first, pushes the characters out into the modern waste land by themselves, and beyond Wessex's borders. This scattering of characters, and the dislocations of the modern waste land, is reflected in Butts's later switching between smaller chapters. In a similar pattern to Malory's chapters in 'The tale of the Sankgreal', each chapter is headed with the name of the character whose quest we follow at that point. Scylla visits an old friend in London who is trapped in an abusive and manipulative marriage. London here is a 'wilderness' of 'junk' and 'rubbish', where people are 'brutalised from want of contact with things growing' (AWM, p. 114). It is a waste land of 'stony rubbish' (WL, p. 61, l. 20), where nothing grows – a non-place that offers 'no unity', only 'emulation' and 'harvest ahead of vintage' (AWM, p. 117).

At the same time, Felix's waste land is situated in the decadence of Paris. The mirror-walled bar that reflects only 'black', in which Felix sits, 'reflect[s] and repeat[s] a great deal of what was going on in the world' (AWM, p. 105; my italics). Butts, continuing the theme of duality within the novel, offers a glimpse of the modern waste at parallel to the more traditional grailscape back in Wessex, but it is never completely allowed into Wessex. It only enhances its borders, as war does to the country house in Ashe of Rings.

On returning home at the close of the story, many of the characters have re-imagined and rediscovered their connection to place. Even the American, Carston, who earlier claimed, 'I have no memories' (AWM, p. 32), and is at first unable to partake in the imaginative play required for the search and creation of the grail, has realised he is inside a 'play' of the English countryside (p. 74). He
later becomes part of the performance, seeing that performance in himself, like those on and off stage at Powys’s and Woolf’s pageants. His experiences allow a memory of the landscape to form; and, as Butts tells us, ‘memory produces imagination’ (p. 32). Through imagination comes the grail game and rejuvenation. Carston now understands Wessex to be much more than just Hardy’s landscape (p. 11). He discovers that ‘the wilderness elevated him’ (p. 100), and he ‘step[s] into another world’:

Their world and his own. At its largest, airiest, and freest. He had never been there before. He had always been there. He would always be there, never the same apprehensive, gifted, rootless man (p. 96)

Along with memories, and partly due to them, Carston now has ‘roots’. The realisation that he had ‘never been therefore before’ and had ‘always been there before’ (AWM, p. 96), reflects Butts design of the landscape as a place ‘for ever moving, for ever at rest’ (p. 92). Now he understands place; now he can be at home there, in a landscape in-between – a liminal, performed and performing space.

Butts sought to rejuvenate her Wessex home through re-mythologizing the landscape. Yet, while legends of the grail continue to be manifested in features of the physical landscape – Glastonbury, Tintagle, and Cadbury – Butts seeks something more than a sympathetic reimagining and reinvigoration of these sites in her writing. On 10 July 1918, Butts visited Glastonbury, writing that the Abbey was a ‘sinister place’, but within it she saw ‘Joseph’, ‘Sanc Graal [and] Holy Thom’. They were, she wrote ‘Origins, the mystery whose cycle may be approaching its completion’ (JMB, p. 101).

187 Andrew Radford describes Carston’s earlier reaction to the landscape as an ‘aestheticised perception’ – seeing only a ‘touristic’, ‘literary landscape’ (Andrew Radford, The Lost Girls: Demeter-Persephone and the Literary Imagination, 1850–1930 (New York: Rodopi, 2007), p. 296. Radford is describing the touristic view of Wessex that I have discussed more fully in chapter one. But he is also describing a more troubling landscape, which is ‘literary’, and ‘aestheticised’; so, problematically, it is a place to which Butts objects, but at the same time, is also complicit in creating through her own work, in the tradition of Hardy. It is a conflicted and unstable landscape.

188 A similar space and quest is suggested by Eliot in ‘Burnt Norton’, when Eliot contemplates that in our search for meaning, for home, ‘We must be still and still moving’ (‘Burnt Norton’, in Four Quartets, pp. 7-23 (p. 22, V), where ‘In my end is my beginning (p. 23, V). Butts’s quest does indeed do this, finding answers and regeneration in the landscape where the quest began, where the characters have always been at home.
However, the seemingly desired contemporary transformation is located by Butts elsewhere, away from locations traditionally associated with grail lore. Though she links the legend with Glastonbury, it is of Wells (which she visits the day before arriving at the Abbey) that she writes, ‘[h]ere was Avalon, and the Sanc Graal’ – ‘Extreme energy’ (*JMB*, p. 101). There was something in Wells that appealed to Butts’s imagination, more than Glastonbury. ‘[P]leasure in the tiniest detail’, she writes, wondering at the ‘large wind, the full green hills’, in contrast to the ‘dull’ town of Glastonbury (p. 101). Nature again helps to distinguish sacred from profane place for Butts, but then Butts’ sense of the grail, like Powys’s, is something a little different. In the week after her trip she once more makes known her preoccupation with another mystical quest for knowledge and renewal, one equated with her writing. In her journal, Butts transcribes lines from Annie Keary’s *Heroes of Asgard* (1857):

I knew that I hung
In a wind-rocked land,
Nine long nights
With a spear wounded.
And to Odin offered
Myself to myself
(*JMB*, p. 102)

Butts is again absorbed in seeking knowledge within herself. Repeatedly, this seems to be sought through her own creativity as a writer reinterpreting the world through the grail. Years later, in France, Butts records a dream, which like a knight in a grail adventure, has ‘for its secret the Graal secret’ (*JMB*, p. 262).

Years later, again, living at Sennen Cove, in what seemed to be a place away from modernity’s waste land, a developer, George Barton, like the villain of her novel *Death of Felicity Taverner*, planned to develop the area for holiday-makers. In a three page letter to Barton, Butts pleads her case for Sennen, and for greater rural England:

Like most persons whose life has been spent in or near towns, the country appears to you as a kind of raw material to which you can do what you like...To me, as to others,...it is a matter of the deepest concern and distress, that, with your wealth and ability, you should elect to destroy Sennen rather than to preserve it. (Nor I
need remind you that a national outcry is arising everywhere in England over the
destruction of our natural beauties by reckless building for private gain.)

You, as a landowner here, have had a great opportunity, yet it is a matter of
general belief that you have not so regarded it, but have used your powers without
thought for the ignorant and in most ways helpless people who do not want their
ancient homes destroyed, their ancient rights taken away. (Butts, cited by Blondel,
in SPL, p. 410)

Butts pleads for the ‘ancient’ rights and homes and ways of the land, but it seems
that even before this, in what might be seen as a form of defence, she was
rewriting the landscape from dreams and imaginings of the grail.

John Eade and Michael Sallnow claim that ‘sacred geography [their
example, Jerusalem] is relevant only in so far as it illustrates an authoritative text’. For Butts the text-equivalent is the grail, and her own writings of it.¹⁸⁹ The grail
is both story and place – both of which have a textuality that allows Butts, in her
storytelling, to reshape the surrounding physical landscape. In a journal entry for
11 December 1932, at Sennen Cove, Butts writes, ‘I think the Grail will be seen
here this winter (JMB, p. 407). Then, a couple of weeks later: ‘I believe the Grail
is stirring at Sancreed: I know my life to be a series of initiations, under the cool,
holy, adorable, sophron formulae of Western man’ (p. 410, January 7 1933).
Sancreed is not far from Butts’s home at Sennen. The vessel and myth is held out
as a talisman against the rest of the changing world, and becomes part of a
realisation that her life is to be one of spiritual testing and development – a rite of
passage.

of Christian pilgrimage, ed. by John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow (Urbana: University of Illinois
Off Wessex: leaving time and place

Wessex unbound: an escape into myths past

This is a landscape that, when walked, returns you to your own body – both its strengths and unexpected vulnerabilities – so perhaps it is not surprising that in describing the shape of the land, one resorts quickly to the language of the body.¹

Madeline Bunting is experiencing a landscape through the processes of the wind – its sound, its effect on her ears, hair and eyes. It is a returning of the self to the self, through the medium of place, not unlike the experience searched for by Butts and Powys in their written and physical rituals of place. It is a process in the creation of self and space that doubles as a quest to escape from both.

Bunting’s The Plot: A Biography of an English Acre (2009) is an account of an acre of land purchased by Bunting’s father in Yorkshire. The narrative traces the plot’s ‘history’ from early England (with reference to possible burial mounds nearby) to her present writing of the book, which she considers a sort of ‘prayer to a landscape’ (p. 273). While containing some insight into the construction of space, the book’s plot remains a bounded region of heritage, memory, literature and myth. The family field is read as an archive of past times, of burial mounds and excavations, drover’s paths, farming, enclosures, the Anglo Saxons, William the Conqueror, World War One, World War Two, and the church. Wordsworth, the Arts and Crafts movement, William Morris, George Orwell, H. J. Massingham and John Betjeman are all referenced. Bunting takes a very traditional approach to English landscape. She creates a very English field, even invoking Wessex, comparing the search for treasure in the barrows of Yorkshire to the richer finds of the West Country (p. 42).

Bunting’s acre wants to be Wessex; it seems to crave the myth and authority of that borderland location, and consequently Bunting writes a sort of hymn to place that must stay grounded in cliché, and in a tourism-nostalgic view of the English countryside. Though she claims her writing brings her closer to her

dead father, who loved the land, it offers no revelation to the reader who is already familiar with the borders and restraints of such a national milieu.

A similar limitation of place became a problem for Hardy, and later Butts and Powys. Hardy left the traditions of Victorian novel writing to become an early modernist poet. Wessex begins to fade as his poetry develops; he moves free (at least in his own writing) of the myth that had developed around his invented landscape. As previously discussed, the Wessex that evolves in Butts and Powys’s writing also tends towards escape; it can be read as a performance of double movement – one towards its centre, and at the same time away to its periphery.²

Previous chapters have discussed how both Butts and Powys were interested in what they called the ‘Fourth Dimension’ – a place within our physical world yet simultaneously beyond it. In their use of classical and mythical tales and rites, their search continues to become more inward and backward, and Wessex begins to fade. Jeremy Hooker writes that the Wessex of the 1930s became an unsuitable place for the expression of the ‘cosmic’ forces Powys was interested in.³ Butts continues in the landscape of the West Country, but she too increasingly looks to the past, and particularly to classical society, in search of answers that she believed were being ignored by the modern world. Butts explains:

> The phase of civilization begun by Alexander passed away. We are beginning to know that our own is threatened. While there is another thing to trouble us. We have also observed that, in spite of our desperate need, our own time has not provided us with an equivalent for Alexander.⁴

According to Butts something happened in the classical period ‘which has modified the life of man more or less in its own likeness ever since’. ‘[T]he more

² See Morine Krissdóttir for a similar pronouncement on Powys’s use of Maiden Castle (Morine Krissdóttir, Descents of Memory: The Life of John Cowper Powys (New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2007), p. 316. The movement is matched in other ritual-like movements and structures in both authors’ work, as outlined in the first chapter, and used throughout this study to analyse the ritual nature of Powys’s and Butts’s writing. Shifts, backward and inward, backward and forward, or sideways are all at times used to illustrate a dislocation, or search, to discover and escape place and page, in action and word.
he has forgotten that world and those events that made it, the worse he has lived; the more blind lusts and beastly devices have shaped his life'.

Butts’s fiction often utilises the histories, myths and rites of the classical period, in what Eliot calls the mythical method. Ruth Hoberman locates in Butts’s villain of *Death of Felicity Taverner*, Kralin (‘a story teller and mythmaker’), a negative use of this method. She argues that by threatening to reveal stories of his dead wife, Felicity, Kralin uses the ‘mythical method’ to control the feminine. Hoberman suggests that ‘Butts’s [countering] “mythical method”, then, involves ritual not story’. Though the emphasis on ritual seems correct – as does Hoberman’s reference of the Cambridge Ritualists who positioned ritual in importance and development before myth – for Butts there is really little difference between the two: storytelling is itself a form of ritual performance, and consciously so for Butts. To avoid the storytelling, which Hoberman claims is ‘the enemy’ (p. 51), she suggests that Butts gives ‘little continuity or explanation’ in her later novel, *The Macedonian* (1933) — a retelling of the life of Alexander the Great. Here, she writes, ‘the reader must become writer’, and rely on their own knowledge to fill in the gaps (p. 52).

Jascha Kessler writes that Butts’s prose exhibits this challenge to the reader more generally, and ‘tends towards the laconic, the succinct, the terse; she is often syntactically eccentric, so that a page sometimes demands one’s careful rereading, not only to parse the prose but to absorb her music, from which her meaning tends to emerge in disjunctive utterances’. We are reminded of the liturgical nature of Butts’s writing, its rhythms, its hymn or chant-like qualities. But at the same time we must consider that Butts’s earlier novels are Wessex-based, and her trickery of language constantly engages in the production of its landscape. These so-called gaps invite a reader performance, but not as an escape from storytelling; rather, they are an invitation to partake in it. The reader as audience becomes the reader as practitioner. It is a shift from artistic experience to ritual participation.

The Macedonian and Scenes from the Life of Cleopatra (1935) are both part of this reading and performance. Storytelling is a key component, but it is located in a genre of historical fiction, much read and written by women in the 1920s, where historical events, rather than place, appear to be sought. For Butts it is a different kind of ritual reclamation. As Hoberman writes, the ‘past worth preserving is for Butts synonymous with the world of classical scholarship’ (p. 46). In The Macedonian, Butts is preoccupied with showing us the hero she believed modern England needed: ‘my wish has been to try to re-tell some of his adventures and discoveries, his preoccupations and endurances, and to show their effect on his nature and life’, she writes in the preface. Perhaps this searching of heroes past meant that Butts had abandoned her attempts at creating her own in the present, yet timeless, realms of her magic Wessex novels. In the past you could be assured of success: the past had already happened.

Yet, Butts shows that, like Wessex, history could be encroached upon by outside forces. In Scenes from the Life of Cleopatra, Butts tries to reclaim a powerful female figure from what she believed to be the infamy of a slanderous male, historical representation of the Queen – yet another rite of reclamation. Butts shows that she too might be able to rewrite the past. Hoberman notes in these novels a recurring theme of ‘[p]aternal inheritance’, and suggests that the act of writing historical novels is ‘a way of asserting inheritance over the past’. Butts, though, is never able to fully escape into this mythical past, and the past of her childhood, which insists on colouring much of her fiction, becomes the concern of her last published (posthumously) book, The Crystal Cabinet. This too, as already discussed, is an attempt to reclaim a more personal past, and its landscapes.

The Crystal Cabinet, published shortly after Butts’s early death at her home in Sennen Cove, brings together all the themes of her work. Sennen was a

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10 Hoberman, Gendering Classicism, p. 43.
11 Bryer, critic, and friend to Butts, writes that The Crystal Cabinet is Butts’s ‘least difficult book’, and a ‘dictionary for us to look up references’ (Bryer, ‘Recognition Not Farewell’, in A Sacred Quest: The Life and Writings of Mary Butts, ed. by Christopher Wagstaff (New York: McPherson,
place of escape – perhaps its remoteness contributing to her death – but the writing of the *The Crystal Cabinet* while there takes Butts back to the centre of all those concerns she had left in Paris, London, Dorset, and the past. Maybe this last book was a final self-exorcism of all concerns. In Sennen, Butts also discovered a freedom in the rituals outside of literature: in gardening, and in the emergence of a Catholic faith. Both offered a freedom that is paradoxically procured through the rigidities and boundaries of soil and dogma. And, they seem to have given her some comfort towards the end of her life, as can be seen in a diary entry for 2 March 1935. Butts writes, ‘I praised God & Our Lady from my soul for this afternoon’s gardening. A nature sacrament with the flowers & the earth & the quickening sun’. 12

**Later Powys: classical and Welsh sources**

Like Butts, and many other modernist authors, Powys too turned to classical sources for inspiration and answers. Jeremy Robinson claims Homer gave Powys a ‘love of mythology’ and ‘magical events’ and a sense of the ‘mythic gesture’, where ordinary ‘human gesture’ is ‘exaggerated up to the state of a divine moment’. 13 We see these movements in the spiritual quests of Wolf, Dud, Magnus, and in Powys’s many other characters. *Atlantis* (1954) and *Homer and the Eather* (1959) both reveal Powys’s classical interests, and the importance of these cultural origins to his work.

However, Powys’s love of myth led him in another direction – towards the myth and landscape of Wales, where he lived from 1935, after his return from the United States, until his death in 1963. 14 Robinson notes a shift of allegiance from Wessex to Wales in *Maiden Castle*, which he describes as ‘disappointing’, writing that Powys seems to have ‘exhausted himself, his environments and his themes’.

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14 See *DM*, pp. 323-427 for details of Powys’s Welsh life and writings.
detecting the emergence of Welsh instead of Wessex ‘magic’. Like Butts’s two historical novels, Powys’s *Owen Glendower* (1940) and *Porius* (1951), both examine the lives of two mythic heroes, though his novels are far more imaginative than Butts’s, and continue to probe the landscape in search of the realms of a ‘Fourth Dimension’.

Powys’s seminal novel *Porius*, only published in full for the first time in 2007, is structured around the processes of alchemy. This meaning and structure, lost in the greatly edited edition of 1951, parallels the seven stages of the symbolic, ritual and pseudoscientific search for wealth and immortality to the seven day period of Porius’s quest in which the novel takes place. These processes, which are discussed in detail by Morine Krissdóttir (*DM*, pp. 374-88), show a method beginning with destruction and purification (in the threat of war and conflict of cultures) climaxing with victory in battle, escape from reality for Merlin through death, and a final calm for Porius, who is now ruler of the land. By the end there has been a recreation, and transformation (the philosopher’s stone has been created symbolically in the character’s adventures). Escape has been achieved.

Through these alchemic-styled adventures there is a continuing sense of a need to flee the world (Merlin’s leaving of this existence, and Porius’s almost constant desire to be elsewhere). This is matched in Hooker’s mapping of Powys’s novels as a creative movement through place, which is ‘always recessive, towards the source of the dream’. He argues that this journey takes place across an ‘imaginative creation of English societies, to English societies as a medium for Welsh mythology, to a condition in which the distinctions between history and myth are dissolved’. A mixing of history and myth are, however, evident in the earliest of Powys’s novels, but there does appear to be a progression away from the centre, that passes through Wessex and Wales on the way.

Iorwerth C. Peate, though, claims in an introduction to Powys’s letters that Powys did not move to Wales for the solitude, as Hooker implies in his study of

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16 Richard Barber links the story of the grail with alchemy (Richard Barber, *The Holy Grail: Imagination and Belief* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 252-255), suggesting Powys is again concerned with the search for this mythic object and its meaning.
Powys,\textsuperscript{18} but from a strong ‘identification with Wales and his own Welshness’.\textsuperscript{19} However, Powys writes in one of the letters of his relocation to a new area of Wales, Blaenan, explaining that ‘Once there I shall become an absolute hermit’.\textsuperscript{20} Powys was obviously proud of his Welsh heritage though, writing in his book on Welsh culture and personal philosophy, \textit{Obstinate Cymric} (1947), of the Welsh ‘Province of Powys’, and of the ‘spiritual pride’ of the race. He even includes himself in ‘We Aboriginal Welsh People […]’, ‘we Real Welsh’.\textsuperscript{21}

History and myth again blur in Powys’s Wales, when he writes of Corwen (his first Welsh home), musing that ‘no lover of the historical, no lover of the mythological, could find a spot more suited to his taste’ (\textit{Obstinate Cymric}, p. 56). As the authors of the Wessex guidebooks had done in Wessex, Powys locates a ‘deep occult wisdom’ in the ‘ancient people’ of Wales, pointing to history and legend that goes further back than Stonehenge or Maiden Castle (p. 73). Krissdóttir’s writes that Wales became the ‘“between” — the borderland — a place that allowed Powys continued movement between centre and circumference’.\textsuperscript{22} But, again we find a hint of a desire to escape from the place he writes of, when he compares Welsh farmers to the compassionate Buddhist spiritual figure of the Bodhisattva (\textit{Obstinate Cymric}, p. 73). The allusion to Nirvana (approached before in Rooks’ drive towards death in \textit{Ducdame}) suggests a flight from place and time.

The inanimate: the death of place

Powys had always been intrigued by inanimate objects and the kind of magic they had to offer. His Wessex had contained this power in the inanimate and less-animate aspects of nature, but in his later fiction his objects of choice become

\textsuperscript{18} See Hooker, \textit{John Cowper Powys}, p. 66.
wholly inanimate, even manmade objects. It is here Powys finds his longed-for escape.

In *The Inmates* (1952) – an adventure set in a mental asylum, and concerned with the inmates' physical and spiritual escape – Powys imagines patients who are troubled by various fetishes. John Hush craves a certain type of young lady; Miss Sheer likes her handbag (*The Inmates*, p. 53); and Mr Squeeze loves a doll (p. 20). These all represent a growing ‘mystical idolatry for the inanimate’ taking place in Powys’s fiction (p. 20). They offer a different way of seeing. Powys writes that “‘normal people’ always seemed to take geography and the points of a compass for granted’ (p. 169). His need to flee the confines of these spatial assumptions is even manifested in a patient’s name. In Powys’s Wessex novels identity was linked to the landscape, but now it is connected to nothingness, as one patient takes the name the ‘Marquis of the Fourth Dimension’ (p. 177).

Robinson suggests that in his novels ‘Powys moves towards the sky, the air, the aether, and later, the Void’. The helicopter escape by patients at the conclusion to *The Inmates* is the equivalent of the first movement in this proposed series. Krissdóttir writes that in later novels there is a ‘flight to the circumference, an unwinding of the spiral, a search for a way out of the maze’, where Powys had been searching for the secret at its centre (*DM*, p. 414). Though this movement is revealed in aspects of Powys’s literary questing, it seems to me that it is never at the centre that Powys was searching for the secret within; it was always just beyond the circumference of things that answers were hidden.

This continued search of the edges of place is found in Powys’s retelling of Homer’s *Iliad*, entitled *Homer and the Aether*. The Aether (an element, but not a poetical muse) influences events of gods and men, and enables Homer to tell the story. The Aether stands at the margins of events, outside, but gives Homer the skill to move to the centre of things – bestowing the ‘power of reading the inmost responses of every form and shape that has ever been assumed by matter’ (including inanimate rocks, stones and sand). Powys is still using his centre/periphery style of storytelling. The Aether tells us that the creative force of

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the mind helps animate these things, making them self-conscious. The more these 'inanimates are seen and looked at and touched and used, the more definitely does this self-consciousness grow within them'. A 'gatepost', 'a heavy stone', 'a style' are listed (Homer and the Aether, p. 24). This litany of objects is similar to those given in A Glastonbury Romance, as the constituents of man’s 'West-country nature'; and again these become something greater than themselves. The Aether, or Powys, tells us: 'the noblest creations in this multiverse are unconscious creations' (Homer and the Aether, p. 25).

Later stories, Up and Out (1957), and the posthumously published short story 'Topsy-Turvy', in Three Fantasies (1985), continue to explore the world of inanimate things. In the second story of Up and Out, 'The Mountains of the Moon', an adventure and philosophical discussion takes place on the moon, where an assortment of characters meet, including a big toe from China, Achilles' heel, a crust from King Alfred's cakes, Adam and Eve's apple core and the sandal of Mahomet. These fragments dance, perform and argue, in an adventure where 'Space is the one and only category of every living creature's consciousness', and where 'Time is purely a human invention'. G. Wilson Knight explains that 'Space is for Powys the higher category' and becomes in the later works an 'elemental protagonist', observing that Powys suggests at the end of another fantasy, All or Nothing (1960) that you cannot separate space from what it contains.

However, it appears that as Powys more fantastic fiction develops, space and what it contains becomes more unstable. The objects on the moon are phantom-like. In Topsy-Turvy', a tale about the souls of inanimate objects from a room in a house, 'objects are again ethereal as they wonder from their corporeal forms to adventures in the outside world. There, they meet other ghostly forms:

'There are souls, I suppose,' said Mrs Brown Armchair, 'in every material thing in the whole world. And the whole world itself,' continued Mrs. Brown Armchair,

'has probably got a soul of it enormous own, as conscious of itself as the souls of Earth, Sun, Moon, and Stars are conscious of themselves'.

As these objects become less corporeal or fixed in meaning, so does Powys’s sense of place, which moves away from the dense, layered, but mappable landscape of his earlier Wessex novels. Powys’s ‘characters’ are, in a sense, place in itself (the chair, the painting, the doorstep are all protagonists). But this kind of place, which is place dwelling in itself, seems less substantial. It might be read as the so-called ‘Fourth Dimension’ that many of his earlier characters had been searching for, and sometimes glimpsed, like Rook in *Ducdame*.

Powys tries to explain this sense of place in *Real Wraiths* (1975) – a story that follows more ghostly forms existing on earth, in a ghost world ruled by a ghost king. Powys tells us of a location where a particularly large number of spirits gather, and of our (the living) experience of such a place in the physical world:

> Such people [the living] were only conscious of a weird deepening of the poetical awe and historical reverence they were feeling, or were hoping to feel, from the pressure of the human story weighted by its particular associations with a particular spot.

Powys appears to undermine our own experiences of place, instead searching for something more than the meanings he had himself used, and had his characters perform, in his earlier Wessex and Welsh landscapes. History, ritual, and human storytelling are now misunderstandings, or at best a very basic understanding of a significant or sacred location. The reader is forced to look at this later fiction as an almost incomprehensible space of obscure performances. We are excluded from taking part in the performance of space as the reader. The reader had performed Wessex, but now they must travel through a world where, they are told that their understandings cannot be applied.

Powys’s fantasies not only frustrate the complete interaction of the reader as performer but also suggest an attempt of escape by Powys, not just from time

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but from space too. Knight suggests that *All or Nothing* is about ‘creation, space, and nothing’.

It is a novel that questions space, asking, ‘Is it real? Is it itself creative? Is it conscious?’ (p. 115). I argue that this growing questioning of space in Powys’s work finally enables its destruction and thus escape from it.

This flight, and the stages of Powys’s retreat from the physical landscape, might be read in microcosm in ‘Up and Out’. The story begins in New York. A Welshman, Gor Goginog, is standing in the city with a girl named Rhitha, by a tree, which is described as a ‘Sacred Grove of Refuge’. We see something of Powys’s earlier work in the sanctity of nature contrasted to modernity. But this glimpse is brief. The end of the world suddenly occurs as a bomb blast destroys the earth, and the pair find themselves floating in space on a small chunk of the remaining planet. They are soon joined by other characters including God, the Devil and the Buddha. We are told of the battle of space over time, but this conflict is also one with space. Gor announces: ‘we told ourselves that we should be free from every landscape, seascape, airscape, firsecape, that submitted to Time’s domination’ (p. 38).

If time is to be beaten then space must be left behind too. In order to escape a traditional sense of both, all those gathered (including God and the Devil) agree to commit suicide. But in his final words, Gor admits, as perhaps Powys does through him, to what he most wanted to do in life:

> I want to perform, to act, to play the clown, to show off as a philosopher; and how can I enjoy all this when I am nothing and there’s nobody there! (‘Up and Out’, p. 121)

Powys attempts to answer this question in the many ghostly and disembodied stories which followed. Yet, while he and his characters try to free themselves from time and space, and indeed narrative structure, they never escape from the performances Powys seems to hold sacred. As in Powys’, and Butts’s and Hardy’s Wessex, performance remains a ceremony not only in search of the sacred, but in its creation.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Untitled

By John Cowper Powys

At Corfe Castle when the light
Has vanished and the shades of night
Steal o'er the ruins grey
There is a dungeon from light of day
Where now a grisly Spectre holds his sway.
Among the shadowy ruins groping creeps he
And when he hears a fearful shriek up leaps he
And sees another Spectre of the night
A Bogy that surpasses him in height.
Then there commences such a fearful fray
As was ne'er seen by broad light of day.
Then morning breaks and both dissolve in air
And nothing's left but the old castle fair!

Appendix B

Corfe

By Mary Butts

I

Corfe, the hub of a wheel
Where the green down-spokes turning
Embrace an earth-cup of smoke and ghosts and stone.
The sea orchestrates
The still dance in the cup
Danced forever, the same intricate sobriety
Equivocal, adored.

But when I remember you Corfe, I remember Delphi
Because your history also is a mystery of God.

‘And God is no blind man and God is our father’s’
But like lovers
Your cup is full of the courts of other princes
Disrupting you.

Very sweet is the sacred wood
In the gold clearing, in the mustard patch;
But at night comes a change
Like a gold ball thrown out
And a black ball thrown in
(Not a sunset behind Tyneham Cap
On a night without a moon.)
But a shift of potencies
Like a black ball thrown in
And a gold ball thrown out
And the players are princes
Of the turf and the weed
And the wind-moulded trees
And the hazel thicket
And the red blackberry thorn.

Never trust a hemlock
An inch above your mouth.
An ice-green hemlock
Is a lover
In the wood.
Now every way the wind blows this sweetie goes
In the south
Where goes the leaf if the rose
And the evergreen tree.

II
Inside the house, above the wood
Look out of the tall windows squared
With wood-strips painted white.
The wild grass runs up the wild hill
The wild sky runs over itself
And goes nowhere.

A man crosses the rough grass
Up the wild hill;
Strong graceless kharki [sic] legs in silhouette
Tired and tough, treading the hill down.

He will not wear it down
Let him try!
He is here only because this place is
A button on the bodies of the green hills.

III
God keep the Hollow Land from all wrong!
God keep the Hollow Land going strong!
A song a boy made in a girl
Brother and sister in a car
Over the flints, upon the turf
Beside the crookbacked angry thorn
Under the gulls, over the dead
To where the light made the grass glass.
Until they came to the world's end
The sea below and under them
The gulls above and over them
And through the thunder and the wailing
Sun full of wings was over them
In a glass world made out of grass.
'God keep the Hollow Land from all wrong!
God keep the Hollow land going strong!'

Curl horns and fleeces, straighten trees,
Multiply lobsters, assemble bees.
Give it to us forever, take our hints
Knot up its roads for us, sharpen its flints,
Pour the wind into it, the thick sea rain,
Blot out the landscape and destroy the train.
Turn back our folk from it, we hate the lot
Turn the American and turn the Scot;
Take upropitious [sic] the turf, the dust
If the sea doesn't get 'em then the cattle must.

Make many slugs where the stranger goes
Better than barbed wire the briar rose;
Swarm on the down-tops the flint men's hosts
Taboo the barrows, encourage ghosts.

Arm the rabbits with tigers' teeth
Serpents shoot from the soil beneath
By pain in belly and foot and mouth
Keep them out of our sacred south.
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