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**BODIES, SPACE, AND AFFECTIVE ENTANGLEMENT
IN *THE TAVERNER NOVELS* BY MARY BUTTS**
MA thesis

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how affect circulates between body and space in Mary Butts' *The Taverner Novels*, thereby contributing to scholarship on modernist spatial aesthetics and the recovery of modernist women's writing.

The thesis consists of an introduction, two core chapters, and a conclusion. The introduction situates Mary Butts within modernist literary studies and introduces *The Taverner Novels* as affective and spatially dynamic text. The first core chapter introduces the author in the context of modernism, gives an overview of previous research, and establishes the theoretical framework of affect, transcorporeality, and literary space studies for the following analysis.

The second core chapter provides an attentive reading of spaces in *The Taverner Novels*. The analysis identifies affective moments through textual and contextual details that blur the line between body and space. The spaces in focus are Dorset nature, the literary spaces surrounding it, the urban environments of Paris and London, and finally bodily spatiality through movement, dancing and water. The conclusion presents the findings of the thesis and suggests further possible research relevant to the topic and author.

Keywords: modernist literature, affect, space, transcorporeality, Mary Butts

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INTRODUCTION: MARY BUTTS IN MODERNIST LITERARY STUDIES

Mary Francis Butts (1890–1937), recently dubbed by *The New York Times* as “modernism’s forgotten mystic” (Emre 2021), has gained renewed scholarly attention within early twentieth-century literature. As a writer deeply engaged in the cultural, philosophical, and aesthetic currents of her time, Butts crafted a literary voice that is both distinct from and resonant with the broader field of what has come to be called (high) modernism (Lewis 2007). Her oeuvre, spanning novels, short stories, essays, and memoir blends poetic prose with recurring concerns regarding mysticism, myth, affective relations between bodies and environments, and the complexities of human relationships. Her writing stands out for its spiritual ambition and its treatment of physical and metaphysical/imagined landscapes, making her literary imagination distinctively affective and strongly shaped by the interplay between place, body, history, and spirituality. This thesis focuses on these spatial and affective dimensions through a study of *The Taverner Novels*, examining how Butts writes her characters to experience and inhabit landscapes and how space emerges as an embodied, affective, and at times spiritually or energetically charged environment.

Mary Butts was an active and visible participant in the cosmopolitan high modernist scene during her lifetime, particularly in central metropolises such as Paris and London, also described in the novels at hand. Butts’ enmeshment in the social and intellectual networks of the movement is documented both in her publications from 1923–1937, as well as her correspondence with and consideration of other prominent modernists — T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce — as evidenced in her personal diaries, manuscripts, letters, and photographs (Hawkes et al 2025). Butts was also reviewed by prominent critics of her time, for example Eliot and Marianne Moore, and was a recognized presence within the literary landscape of the period. Butts’ novelty lay in her fearless embrace of emotion, something many

other modernists tended to avoid; as Moore noted: “One need not read Mary Butts who has not a feeling for feeling. Her presentation of what one feels is... as accurate as of what one sees” (quoted by Kessler 1995: 207).

Butts’ short fiction, poetry, and essays were published by prestigious presses and featured in leading journals such as *The Bookman*, *The London Mercury*, and *The Little Review*. Her first work, *Speed the Plough and Other Stories*, was published in 1923. Her most prominent novels, collectively named *The Taverner Novels*, also reached audiences on both sides of the Atlantic. The spiritual detective novel about chasing the meaning of Sanc Grail titled *Armed with Madness* (1928) was published by Albert and Charles Boni in New York. The novel focuses on the relationships within a close-knit group of young bohemians (the Taverners) living in the upper-class English country home and their quest for truth and magic within that space. The sequel, *Death of Felicity Taverner* (1932) discusses the struggle between modernity and changing spatial notions of home and family dynamics within that same ancestral place a few years later. The second book was first published by Chatto & Windus in London. The fact that her work was published by the leading publishing houses of the time demonstrates the recognition of her work internationally (Foy 2000).

Despite this visibility during her lifetime, Butts was largely excluded from mid-20th-century literary histories and critical studies posthumously, due to a combination of possible factors: her work being overshadowed by disruptions of World War I or her otherwise famously eccentric character (Blondel 2002), her writings’ distinctive spirituality resisting easy analysis (Kessler 1995: 207), and modernism being largely framed as a masculine enterprise (Foy 2000). Only in recent decades, particularly following the publication of Natalie Blondel’s biographies *The Journals of Mary Butts 1890–1937* (2002) and *Mary Butts: Scenes from the Life* (2004), produced in collaboration with Butts’ daughter Camilla, has critical interest begun to recover the significance of her contributions. Her literary works were republished under *Recovered*

Classics of the McPherson & Company press in the late 1990s to the 2010s, and this revival of scholarly interest is further underscored by the publication of *Mary Butts: Necessary Contradictions and Feminist Reconstructions* (Hawkes 2024). Led by Hawkes, the editor of the recent collection, The Mary Butts Letters Project (partnered with many universities, The Estate of Mary Butts, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the University of Victoria) brings renewed attention to the author's life and works (Hawkes, et al 2024). In addition to ongoing research, the project keeps an active account of recent articles, book chapters, talks, conference papers and exhibits concerning the author and her works.

The Taverner Novels that will form the central focus of this thesis are considered by many as Mary Butts' magnum opus. Butts writes mostly about English spaces, common within the canonical 1920s literary modernism, with heavy focus on the countryside in addition to the cityscape. Early modernist literary studies frequently privileged the metropolis as the defining spatial environment of modernity, but modernist studies have long since expanded to consider a broader range of spatial, including rural, contexts (cf Bluemel and McCluskey 2020). At the same time, the countryside depicted in Butts' fiction is specifically an upper-class English countryside, as "rural" here often signifies distance from the metropolis rather than the lived realities of agricultural labor or rural working communities. In this respect, Butts' landscapes retain a degree of social conservatism, focusing on elite mobility and cultural inheritance, both within urban and non-urban environments. Yet, her landscapes are nevertheless spiritually and emotionally charged, and thus highly affective. Her prose treats the Dorset landscape as a sacred, ancestral space (Greenfield 2013), while also reflecting a nuanced awareness of metropolitan environments undergoing cultural transformation.

As mentioned before, Butts does not shy away from granting agency and emotional depth to her literary spaces. Despite similarities with the spatial treatments of other modernists, such as the fear of change and feelings of alienation in the city (Lewis 2007), Butts grounds her

characters in an emotional and spiritual connection to their home in the English countryside. In Butts' work, all space is dynamic, relational, and integral to the construction of narrative and subjectivity, as it expresses multiple coexisting realities and cultural tensions (Sergeant 2021). This can be seen especially vividly in *The Taverner Novels*, where space functions not merely as a static setting but as a dynamic, symbolic, and affective force that expresses the characters' spiritual, mythical, and psychological dimensions.

A more expansive view of modernist writing, sometimes referred to as multiple modernisms¹ helps to recognize literary modernism as a diverse field of practices shaped by differences in gender, sexuality, geography, and class (Sergeant 2021: para 9), which subsequently brings attention to Butts as an “author of an experimental queer – proto-environmental – feminist – occult – ritual – and jazz-infused work” (Hawkes et al 2024). Along with her spiritual, affective, and magical narratives, her work adds a theme of intimacy with natural environments to the modernist spatial canon. Rather than presenting the human subject and landscape as separate entities, her writing emphasizes their interconnection, foregrounding how bodies and environments shape and respond to one another through affective and sensory experience. In this way, Butts contributes a particular emphasis on affective and spiritually infused spatial experience to the wider study of spatiality within literary modernism.

This thesis examines how Mary Butts' novel collection, *The Taverner Novels* (1932), portrays affective literary spaces where landscapes, objects, and myth shape emotional and embodied connections between people and space. This thesis specifically studies the affective connections between body and space in literature, thereby aiming to contribute to both the expanding scholarship of modernist spatial aesthetics and the recovery of modernist women's writing.

¹ “Multiple modernisms” attempts to expand the scope of modernist discourse beyond its traditional, often Western culture centered, urban and canonical boundaries (Bénéjam and Bishop 2011: 2–3, 7).

CHAPTER ONE: INTELLECTUAL CONTEXT AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to build a context for the following theoretical discussion and literary analysis, Chapter One will, first, provide an introduction to Butts' biography. As her writing is closely tied to her life experiences that are largely unknown within broader research into modernism, I will describe her life more extensively than is perhaps expected, in order to show the roots of her ideas. This will be followed by the review of previous research on Butts and an overview of theories of space and affect relevant for the present thesis.

1.1. Mary Butts in the Context of Modernism

To examine the spatial and affective dimensions of *The Taverner Novels*, it is necessary to contextualize Mary Butts' work within the lived experiences, intellectual environments, and artistic networks that informed her literary development in the early 20th-century. This chapter relies on the work of her biographer Natalie Blondel to connect Butts' formative influences to broader movements within modernism. While not assuming a direct link between life and text, the chapter recognizes that Butts' engagement with rural landscapes, occult and spiritual movements, and cosmopolitan modernist circles contributed to the thematic concerns and stylistic features of her fiction. By tracing these contexts critically, the chapter provides a framework for understanding how Butts' personal and intellectual experiences intersect with the affective spatiality explored in her writing, laying the groundwork for the later analysis of *The Taverner Novels*.

Mary Francis Butts was born on December 13, 1890, in Poole, Dorset, into an upper-middle-class English family. Her upbringing at Salterns, a large 18th-century house near Parkstone, overlooking Poole Harbour, provided cultural and aesthetic environment "saturated with the arts" (Butts 1937), which would later shape her literary imagination, particularly her attention to spatiality and setting (Garrity 2006). Thomas Butts, Mary Butts' great-grandfather,

had been a patron of poet and artist William Blake (1757–1827) and therefore numerous works by the painter were kept at the family estate’s “Blake Room”. According to the author’s posthumously published autobiography *The Crystal Cabinet: My Childhood at Salterns* (1937), this is where her lifelong interest in symbolism, mysticism, and spiritual ideas developed (Blondel 2002).

Blake, by whom Mary Butts was heavily inspired throughout her life, created a highly personal and intricate mythological system in his poetry and visual art, in which he explores moral, spiritual, and psychological truths through symbolic narratives. Many modernists, including T. S. Eliot (Eliot 2014: 187–192) and W. B. Yeats (Marvel 1986; Paul and Gould 2018: 303–304), in addition to Mary Butts, drew on Blake’s use of symbolism and myth to explore complex psychological, spatial, and cultural issues (Wiseman 2015: 385–388). Blake’s emphasis on imagination as a pathway to truth resonated with modernist concerns about the limitations of rationality in an increasingly industrialized and disenchanted world, and as such his works were essential in shaping the literary vision of Mary Butts.

Butts was particularly close to her father, Frederick Butts, whose literary and artistic connections included friendships with pre-Raphaelite figures (such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti) and knowledge in Greek myths, thereby cultivating Butts’ intellectual and imaginative engagement with classical narratives (Cluckey 2014: 78). This early exposure to myth inspired her to compose stories on classical themes throughout her life, from her 1921 work “Bellerophon to Anteia” to later imaginative accounts of Alexander the Great and Cleopatra in the 1930s. In contrast, her relationship with her mother, Mary Colville-Hyde (1863–1944), was strained due to lack of interest in Mary’s writing and exacerbated by her mother’s decision to sell the Blake collection (now residing at the Tate Gallery in London) (Blondel 2002: 3). Narratives of danger to the mystical, ancient, sacred landscape of her childhood are ever-present throughout Butts’ work. The estate of her childhood became “Butts’ ‘sacred landscape’, against

which every other landscape was measured,” and would recur throughout her literary production as a space charged with mythic and affective power (Greenfield 2013, para 2). Butts’ journals (Blondel 2002: 16) reveal that the idea for her *Taverner Novels* was sparked from a vision or daydream she experienced at Bradbury Rings at the start of World War I, rooting her personal and national identity, as well as her literary pursuits, in the familiar history of the Dorset landscape.

Butts was educated locally until her father’s death in 1904, after which she attended St. Leonard’s School for Girls in St. Andrews, Scotland (1905–1908). Mary Butts’ subsequent education at Westfield College in London (1909–1912) exposed her to a wide range of intellectual and artistic influences. In her biographies, it is often noted that Mary Butts was expelled from Westfield College for organizing a trip to a horse race (Garrity 2006), which mirrored her later tendency to reject societal norms. In this period Butts also began exploring her bisexuality, in her often fluid and overlapping relationships (Blondel 2002: 4). Her later writings likewise reflect a nuanced understanding of sexuality, exploring themes of gender fluidity, homosexuality, and unconventional desire (Kessler 1995: 210; Garrity 2025: 36).

Mary Butts adopted pacifist and socialist views from her London circle at the outbreak of World War I. Her personal diaries (1916–1937) reveal a sustained discontent with the war at a time when military conflict was often idealized. Butts took action by undertaking social work with the Children’s Care Committee at East End (Blondel 2002: 4). Sources refer, often indirectly, to Butts’ involvement in a sapphic and feminist circle during this period (Blondel 2002: 482). Despite this connection, Butts married the modernist poet John Rodker (the marriage lasted 1918–1927) (Blondel 2002: 4, Emre 2021).

Around the time Butts gave birth to her daughter Camilla in 1920, she also helped Rodker establish himself as a publisher. Much of the inheritance of her father was spent fueling her husband’s Ovid Press, through which she met modernist writers, including Ezra Pound,

Wyndham Lewis, Ford Madox Ford (“One of his parties in Paris was the inspiration for Butts’ story “Ford’s Last Dancing” (1998)” according to Blondel 2002: 476), Roger Fry, Aldous Huxley, May Sinclair, and Hilda Doolittle (see Blondel 2004, 2002: 478 and Garrity 2006). These relationships with prominent modernist contemporaries shape Mary Butts’ intellectual and literary pursuits throughout her entire life. Her letters reveal intense engagement with contemporary literature in the form of reviews, ideas for manuscripts, as well as Butts’ ever-present financial troubles and debts caused by her profligate spending habits and travel (Hawkes, et al 2024). Mary Butts’ social network with prominent figures of the early 20th-century is so extensive that it cannot be covered in detail in this thesis. Thus, I will only focus on those that shaped her literary pursuits. (Blondel (2002: 473–484) provides a more comprehensive account of her relationships.)

Butts’ journals are filled with quotations from a variety of sources, such as the Bible, contemporary songs, ballads, as well as the works of Blake, Pound, Eliot, Kipling, Shelley, Emerson, and chiefly Yeats (Blondel 2002: 30). Throughout her journals Butts ponders “the craft of writing and the role of the writer in relation to ideas raised by her reading of Yeats’s work” (Blondel 2002: 484), who she admired for their shared interest in mysticism and his search for the “divine life” in the “outer life” (Blondel 2002: 22). Though according to the available materials Butts and Yeats only met once in 1916 (before the start of her journaling, as mentioned in *The Crystal Cabinet* quoted by Blondel 2002: 30), it is evident that his works influenced her artistic pursuits and personal opinions about what it meant to write. Butts was drawn to Yeats chiefly because of their shared interest in mysticism. Butts was inspired by his mystical vision of nature as a spiritual landscape and adopted his belief in art as a quest for hidden truth and transcendent beauty rooted in the communion between the self and the natural world (Blondel 2002: 30).

In her personal journal, Butts also mentions working with the Sanc Grail legend and mythology of Frazer's *The Golden Bough* in parallel to T. S. Eliot, even jokingly stating that her novel *Armed with Madness* (1928) may as well have been called "The Waste Land" (Blondel 2002: 263–266). As Butts notes in her journals, the two authors had much in common, such as their interest in the spiritual condition of modern society viewed through ancient myths (Blondel 2002: 475, Kroll 1999: 161). These similarities did not equate friendship, however, as Butts observes in her journal entry in 1927: "T. S. Eliot /.../ the only writer of my quality, dislikes me and my work, I think" (Blondel 2002: 475). Eliot's writing tends towards a more formally disciplined mode of modernism in contrast to the sort of literary liveliness present in Butts' works. During his tenure as editor of *The Criterion* and later in his role as a publisher at Faber and Faber, Eliot rejected a number of Butts' submissions and also refused to provide an introduction for the reissued edition of *Ashe of Rings*. However, in February 1937 (merely a month before Butts passed away), Eliot showed an interest in publishing a collection of her short stories. According to Blondel (2002: 475): "Had her sudden death not prevented this, Eliot might have done as much for Butts' permanent literary reputation as she had done for his," as Butts had been the owner of the publishing house where Eliot published some of his early work.

As mentioned before, Butts actively participated in the various avant-garde artistic and intellectual circles of London and Paris, principal metropolitan hubs of modernist thought, where she spent most of the 1920s. As Kessler (1995: 211) observes, Butts' work demonstrates a pronounced fascination with the spiritual and uncanny qualities of ancient, shadowy spaces, contrasting them with the material and spiritual modernity, thus creating a tension between historical depth and contemporary cosmopolitan life. Kessler also notes that Butts' fiction blends historical and esoteric motifs with modernist sensibilities to evoke a subtly unsettling atmosphere, in which the past and the uncanny coexist alongside the everyday cityscape. This

is also relevant to the city scenes in *The Taverner Novels* that depict a similar modernist view of metropolises (Paris and London) as will be shown below in section 2.2.4.

It was also during this decade that Butts shared “several passionate yet difficult relationships (Blondel 2002: 4, 477), eventually marrying her second husband, painter Gabriel Atkin (1897–1937) in 1930. Despite the marriages, Mary Butts retained her own name throughout her life, indicating her commitment to maintaining an autonomous literary identity and resistance to conventional expectations surrounding marriage and authorship. She was a writer, first (Blondel 2002: 4). Butts continued to engage often with her modernist contemporaries and befriended new ones, such as the American novelist Gertrude Stein (1874–1946) and French writer and artist Jean Cocteau (1889–1963). Cocteau became a friend and a major literary influence for Butts, though also detrimental in their shared opium addiction (Blondel 2002: 474). He illustrated her books *Imaginary Letters* and *Armed with Madness* and drew Butts’ portrait which was later reproduced as a frontispiece for her memoir, *The Crystal Cabinet*, published in 1937. Butts, in turn, dedicated “The House Party” (1930) to Cocteau.

Mary Butts approached her emotions and experiences as material for inquiry (Blondel 2002: 22) and took a strong interest in the growing spiritualist movement of the 1920s. According to Pimple (1995), this revival reflected broader continuities in spiritualism since the 1840s, offering consolation and continuity in the post World War I context, particularly among those seeking ways to make sense of loss that neither traditional religion nor scientific rationalism seemed able to address. Modern spiritualism became widely accessible with the expansion of metropolitan middle-class leisure culture, which enabled séances, readings, and spiritualist literature to function as both social practices and commercial activities (Beaumont 201: 218), accessible to a larger variety of people (Morrisson 2008: 2).

Women played a central role within these circles, not only as participants but also as mediums and organizers, as spiritualism afforded them a degree of authority, public visibility,

and safe gender transgressions (since the spirit spoke through them), that was often unavailable within more conventional religious institutions. Butts likewise experimented with practices such as automatic writing as part of her engagement with occult and mystical ideas (Greenfield 2013). Such search for female authority also runs in parallel with the ideas of the suffragette movement and echoes the expanded public perception of the acceptability of women's authority and visibility during World War I (Young 2014).

Though interested in the topic throughout her life, Butts' spiritual eccentricity peaked during her brief association with occultist Aleister Crowley. Butts had even been the inspiration for Crowley's *Diary of a Drug Fiend* (1922) (2013: para 4) and collaborated on his work *Magick (Book 4)* with other students (Greenfield 2013, para 7–8). According to Cluckey (2014: 78), around this time “Virginia Woolf referred to Butts as ‘Malignant Mary’ (Letters 6: 138), and Ford Madox Ford commented, ‘she does so give me the creeps’ (Correspondence 355).” Butts ultimately rejected Crowley's more extreme ideas and communal practices in favor of a more personal form of spiritualism, and the two would go on to detest each other in print for many years (Greenfield 2013, para 7–8). She described occultism as “stirring, but unsatisfactory, a maze of blind alleys” (Blondel 2002: 21) and Crowley's magic as “a desolate path” (Blondel 2002: 102), also criticizing modernists for using ancient myths in purely aesthetic ways. In her journals, she later reflected that the spiritual phenomena she had encountered throughout her life were all somehow interconnected and thus “impossible to realize /.../ without emotion” (Blondel 2002: 21). This explains her unique blending of mysticism and modernist sensibilities in her literary work.

Toward the end of her life, Mary Butts returned to the English countryside and more conventional religion, settling in Sennen Cove in southwest Cornwall (Blondel 2002: 473). Like several other modernists and decadents, including Eliot (Blondel 2002: 476), Butts also returned to English Catholicism, perhaps reflecting a need for an established stable belief system or

reconciliation of spiritual and aesthetic concerns. Still, she maintained a magical side in her imagination and literature, leaving behind many manuscripts of stories including one “What the Moon Saw,” which are yet to be published (Blondel 2002: 399, 435). She lived largely alone but remained in contact with her former husband Rodker, her family, and various friends and literary figures. Plans to publish a collection of her short stories, supported by T. S. Eliot on behalf of Faber & Faber, were never completed due to her sudden death at 46 in 1937 from a perforated gastric ulcer linked to long-term drug and alcohol use (Greenfield 2013, para 5).

Butts’ return to Cornwall also marked a reconnection with the mystical landscapes that shaped her early imagination. She described these landscapes as charged with power, influence, and charisma, combining spiritual and environmental forces (Blondel 2002: 287) in her ongoing interest in what she called “mana”, a form of supernatural energy that can be attributed to and drawn from both location and person (examples from her journals can be found in Blondel 2002: 101, 267, 281, 394; and more specifically discussed in her *Traps for Unbelievers*, and in *Ashe of Rings and Other Writings*, as noted by Blondel 2002: 287). The “mana” she describes can be thought of as a combination of power, energy, influence, authority, charisma, depending on context. In this way, Butts almost completes a circle in her magical meaning-making, by returning to the location that most influenced her writing when she was younger and continued to do so up until her death.

Mary Butts’s writing remains significant in literary history for its sustained engagement with cultural and ethical questions emerging in the 1920s that continue to resonate today. She was closely embedded in modernist literary and artistic circles, moving within avant-garde networks of writers, artists, and editors central to European modernism, as her writing developed in constant dialogue with its evolving concerns. Butts remained an active participant in it across her career, continually reworking its ideas to articulate her own ethical, spatial, and literary vision. While sharing many modernist concerns, her work resists purely ironic or

detached forms of representation, drawing instead on the mythical landscapes of Dorset as her biggest literary inspiration and spatial theme.

Elements that earlier criticism sometimes dismissed as part of her excessive “feeling” overlook the complexity of Butts’ cultural and social concerns, registered as an anxiety about cultural decline that later events (World War II, the atomic age, large scale environmental damage) have helped to clarify. Her work also addresses enduring concerns surrounding women’s autonomy, the challenges of self-realization within constraining social frameworks, and the negotiation of gendered identities in an increasingly impersonal and consumer-oriented society (Kessler 1995: 208–209). Taken together, these aspects suggest that Butts’ writing warrants renewed attention not only as part of modernist recovery, but as a body of work whose concerns and imaginative reach remain relevant to contemporary critical and cultural discussions today.

1.2. Previous Research on *The Taverner Novels*

Previous academic research on Mary Butts has primarily focused on her major fictional works, particularly *The Taverner Novels*. Scholars have emphasized a range of interconnected themes, including her engagement with modernist disenchantment and re-enchantment through myth, occultism, and decadence; the ethical and gendered dimensions of her mystical and magical practices; the construction of literary space through personal experience, landscape, objects, and ritual; and lastly the tension between tradition and modernity, particularly as expressed through lineage, community, and cultural memory. These critical studies form the core framework for understanding Butts’ contribution to modernist literature and provide the foundation for the present study of affective bodies and literary space in her novels. The following literature review thus brings together key academic contributions with theoretical background to address these areas of inquiry in the present thesis.

1.3. Disenchantment

In October 1925, Mary Butts recorded in her journal a meditation that brings into sharp focus her broader modernist project: a sustained effort to confront, contest, and imaginatively reconfigure the condition of disenchantment that defined early 20th-century modernity. The disenchantment of modernity, as discussed in the text, refers to the loss of spiritual meaning and mystical elements in the modern world due to the rise of scientific rationalism and intellectualization (Cluckey 2014: 82). Butts writes of a desire for the magical, imagining a moment in which “the scientist” would be compelled to “square up” with enchanted reality (Blondel 2002: 217–218). Her journal entry flows seamlessly between reflections on Albert Einstein and questions about whether events ever truly “stop happening” (Blondel 2002: 217), effectively destabilizing linear temporality (as modernists do) and challenging the closure of scientific explanation. For Butts, modern science does not simply displace mystery but opens into a world in which the very nature of reality is not fixed by empirical understanding. For Butts, modern science does not eliminate this uncertainty, but illuminates the limits of its explanatory reach, creating conditions in which re-enchantment becomes possible.

In her article, Cluckey (2014) agrees that Butts’ occultism is not merely aesthetic but functions as a critique of modernity’s disenchantment. Butts’ reflections implicitly position her against the narrative of disenchantment associated with Max Weber, also mentioned in that same journal entry. In his 1917 speech “Science as a Vocation,” Weber describes modernity as a process of rationalization that strains the world of magic, replacing mysterious forces with calculable and controllable systems. This process evacuated modern life of spiritual and mystical significance, leading to a world that is predictable and devoid of enchantment, which Butts somewhat argues against (Cluckey 2014: 81–82). She imagines the opposite movement: not the replacement of magic by science, but a confrontation in which scientific rationality must account for what exceeds it.

In parallel to Weber, modernist writers in general turned to myth, magic, and occult frameworks to re-enchant a world stripped of mystery, belief, and spiritual grounding. This turn offered both imaginative order and ethical engagement, providing narratives and symbols that could counter the disorientation of a post-religious, industrialized society. In general, it seems that modernist writers such as Yeats, Eliot, and Butts used mystical and mythical frameworks as ethical and imaginative responses to the psychological and spiritual effects/devastations of modernity. Similarly to Eliot, Butts draws on myth to address a world fractured by war and social change, yet her approach is distinctly more personal and rooted in specific landscapes and spatial relations within her texts.

Kroll's (1999) analysis situates Mary Butts within a comparative modernist framework, highlighting how her literary strategies offer alternatives to more conservative high modernist approaches of Eliot. Kroll (1999: 163) argues that Eliot's *Waste Land* focuses on decay, sterility, and distaste toward renewal, often reflecting his personal struggles and emotional withdrawal. Eliot characterizes the relativist, subjectivist, and "free-thinking" society associated with liberalism as fundamentally corrupting, framing liberalism as analogous to the purposeless excess and formal play of decadent art (Sherry 2014: 226). In contrast, Butts *Armed with Madness* portrays a more complex and experimental world of both dissolution and regeneration, offering hope and healing through human connection, love, and engagement with all forms of life and various belief systems (Kroll 1999: 167). Significantly, it is chiefly her female protagonists of *The Taverner Novels* that embody and transform in this sense of mythology. In this way, Eliot and Butts are both negotiating modernity's crises, but while Eliot's stance aligns modernity with cultural decay and moral anxiety, Butts reconfigures it as a creative, restorative force within modernist aesthetics.

Kroll argues that the journey of the heroine in Butts' *Armed with Madness* serves as an "unrest cure" for the spiritual unease and disillusionment depicted in Eliot's poem (1999: 159).

The term “unrest cure,” as used by Mary Butts, refers to her approach to healing “psychically sick” individuals, particularly men. Based on autobiographical materials, Kroll highlights how Butts believed in pulling them out of their emotional withdrawal and immersing them in life, often through intense emotional and physical engagement with literature and sometimes the members of her social circle. This process was linked to her artistic vision of showing people “beauty-soundness” (Kroll 1999: 164) through her writing and helping them live at their fullest capacity despite the dis-ease of modernity (Kroll 1999: 163–164). In *Armed with Madness*, this concept is reflected in the novel’s emphasis on sensuality, soulfulness, sexuality, and the transformative power of human connection and nature (Kroll 1999: 169).

Both Eliot’s and Butts’ works draw on Arthurian Grail-quest mythology and are influenced by Jessie Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance* (1920) and James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* (1890). These texts explore fertility rituals and myths of “dying gods” whose resurrection restores life to barren lands (Kroll 1999: 161). However, Kroll also maintains that Butts reclaims the Grail myth from its male-dominated interpretations and infuses it with an alternative perspective that emphasizes the importance of community in the process of healing. Butts’ characters, unlike Eliot’s, do not withdraw from the world’s chaos but engage with it through embodied connection, emotional risk, and seeking community (Kroll 1999: 169–170). The lived space in *The Taverner Novels* thus becomes a site of healing through its mythology, and space is rendered affective and relational rather than static. This mythologized spatiality reclaims the wasteland as a terrain for regeneration, positioning engagement as central to modernist recovery.

Butts sought to reveal the magical and mystical qualities of everyday life and transcend the material world (evident in her journals discussing Yeats). Building on these ideas, Cluckey (2014: 79) explores Butts’ engagement with occultism and myth as an ethical response to the fragmentation of the modern world, asserting that Butts “developed an ethics of occultism that

sought to heal those sickened by modernity.” In the context of the disenchantment of modernity, the notion of ethics revolves around the responsible engagement with magic and occultism to counter the spiritual and psychological damage caused by modernity. Butts sought to use magic to heal and rejuvenate those affected by the alienation and disconnection of the modern world; unlike Crowley, who often engaged in ethically questionable practices in his pursuit of magical power, Butts emphasized the importance of ethical and communal considerations in magical or healing practices (Cluckey 2014: 87).

For Butts, magic is not inherently good or bad, but a suppressed facet of daily life that can provide unmediated experiences of both in the material and mystical realms (Cluckey 2014: 79). She believed that magic required patience, care, and a willingness to engage with unknown forces responsibly, which was inherently done better by women, who she saw as uniquely attuned to the healing and transformative potential of magic (Cluckey 2014: 80, 96). Cluckey argues that rather than reinforcing essentialist links between femininity and irrationality, this gendered angle in Butts’ fiction positions women as capable navigators of alternative knowledges rooted in intuition and affective responsiveness. Butts portrays her female characters as attuned to magical engagement precisely because of their historical exclusion from dominant and masculine rationalist discourses, suggesting that this marginality becomes a source of unique insight (Cluckey 2014: 79–80). This framing allows Butts to construct her modernist literary space not as abstract and emotionless, but as embodied and affective, challenging dominant spatialities within canonically masculine high modernist literature. Through these interventions, illness and mystical practice are transformed into mechanisms of healing, self-fulfillment, and re-enchantment, restoring wonder, ethical engagement, and imaginative depth to a disenchanted world (Cluckey 2014: 84).

1.4. Affect

Affect as a term is notorious in its resistance to clear definition. The concept emerges across various disciplines, from literary studies and philosophy to psychology, queer theory, and postcolonial studies, yet never fully fits into a single fixed framework. In this sense, affect is inherently multiple, fluid, and unfinished — a concept that both challenges and invites interpretation. Affect as an institutionalized theoretical study emerged in the 1990s (Angerer et al 2014: 7), to capture those experiences, bodily sensations, and intensities that often elude language, offering a way to think about what feeling does rather than only what it is.

In the simplest sense, affect can be understood as an embodied, relational, and pre-cognitive sensation, while emotion refers to the consciously experienced and socially intelligible feelings that emerge from processing it (Schaefer 2019: 1). In literature, these distinctions are particularly significant yet also complicated: literary affects are always representations of affect, translating pre-conscious, bodily, and relational experience into a textual form that is always mediated by cognitive processes.

In the introduction of her book, *Modernism and Affect*, Julie Taylor (2015: 1–2) notes that contemporary scholarship has increasingly highlighted the centrality of affect and emotion in modernist literature. She points first to the general feeling of loss and melancholia tied to the forward-looking nature of the modernist movement, exposing a paradox at the heart of modernism, where the new is always entwined with the past, and innovation is inseparable from retrospective reflection and its emotional resonance. Despite the intention of breaking from romanticism and sentimentalism of artistic movements past, as well as the rejection of contemporary mass culture (Taylor 2015: 2), modernists nonetheless required “the old” to make something “new” of. The reframing of old mythologies by rejecting overt feelings points to a certain type of chosen avoidance, not a lack of affect. Thus, affect functions as a strong

undercurrent in modernist literature regardless of aesthetic intent, threading through experience, memory, and the act of innovation.

Even without explicit reference to affect theory, critics frequently describe modernism's ongoing influence in terms of the emotional textures it enables, for example its evocations of feeling, mood, and interiority (James 2018: para 6). In this context, James (2018) argues that contemporary fiction often engages with modernism precisely through affect.

Despite this continued revision of modernist aesthetics, Taylor also notes the relative lack of historical research into certain affective aspects of modernism, as scholarship has often focused on the movement's preferred aesthetic traits of irony and detachment over emotional embodiment (Taylor 2015: 2). This could in part be due to a tendency of opposition within modernism itself, emphasizing not only the dichotomy between modernism and mass culture, but also between "the male artist ('objective, ironic, and in control of his aesthetic means') and woman as 'a reader of inferior literature – subjective, emotional, and passive'" (Huyssen 1986: 46, as quoted by Taylor 2015: 2–3). However, it is important to remember that many women modernists challenged these biases by purposefully emphasizing affective values, while also firmly participating in the broader artistic movement (Clark 1991: 38, as cited by Taylor 2015: 3). The latter statement encompasses the works of Butts, who did not shy away from sentiment in her literary pursuits.

Butts' fiction demonstrates how affect in modernism extends beyond interior emotion into the material and environmental realm. This is especially important for this thesis. Central to Wiseman's (2015) analysis is Butts' revival of animistic conceptions of landscape, in which apparently inert matter (such as stones, tides, and vegetation) possesses agency and vitality. Through paratactic syntax, fragmented narration, and defamiliarized description, Butts depicts Dorset as a site of human-nonhuman entanglement rather than pastoral stability (Wiseman 2015: 375–379). Wiseman aligns this aesthetic with Jane Bennett's notion of "thing-power,"

arguing that Butts' fiction foregrounds the ethical implications of recognizing agency beyond the human, thereby undermining anthropocentric models of subjectivity (Bennett 2010: 6, as quoted by Wiseman 2015: 376).

Wiseman further situates Butts' environmental vision within the stylistic and formal innovations of cosmopolitan modernism. Drawing on Walkowitz's concept of "cosmopolitan style," he argues that Butts adapts techniques, such as wandering consciousness, free indirect discourse, and perspectival multiplicity, commonly associated with metropolitan modernity to a rural setting (Walkowitz 2006: 115, quoted by Wiseman 2015: 379–381). This formal strategy expands on the ethical scope of modernist narration by incorporating nonhuman presences and marginal human perspectives into the fabric of narrative consciousness. In this respect, Butts' work resonates with broader modernist efforts to decenter the unified subject and challenge realist assumptions about perception and community.

At the same time, Wiseman (2015) underscores the contradictions that complicate attempts to read Butts as a straightforward environmental or posthumanist thinker. Despite her sensitivity to nonhuman agency, Butts' characters sometimes express negative attitudes toward urban populations and exclude cultural outsiders from their private spaces. Butts' hostility toward urban modernity and perceived threats to nature's rural purity displays tensions between her ecological insights and her conservative politics, echoing concerns raised by critics about the historical entanglement of environmentalism and nationalism. Wiseman thus cautions against extracting a fully coherent ethical program from Butts' work, emphasizing instead its ambivalence and instability. Ultimately, Wiseman positions Mary Butts as a figure whose modernist engagement with place reveals both the possibilities and limits of cosmopolitan environmental ethics. Her writing demonstrates how modernist formal experimentation can articulate a relational understanding of human and nonhuman life, while also illustrating how such visions may be compromised by nostalgia, elitism, and resistance to social change

(Wiseman 2015: 384–389). Taken together, these perspectives suggest that affect in modernism is not confined to individual psychology but extends outward into landscape, materiality, and spatial relations, preparing the ground for an understanding of modernist space itself as fundamentally affective.

In (modernist) literature, the affective dimensions of spatial imaginaries emerge through a range of textual strategies that shape how environments are experienced and felt by bodies within the narrative. Writing about space becomes affective not simply through description, but through the ways in which language mediates the relationship between characters and their surroundings. This may include the use of sensory or emotionally charged vocabulary or instead something left unsaid, shifting narrative perspectives, and moments where the boundaries between character and environment become blurred. Sentence structure can also contribute to this effect, for instance through fragmented syntax, rhythmic pacing, or pauses that mirror moments of hesitation, tension, or confusion. Rather than relying on a single identifiable feature, the affective quality of literary space often arises from a combination of many elements that may be difficult to pinpoint, working together to express how spaces are felt, inhabited, and responded to by bodies. As a result, space in literature can function not merely as a setting but as a dynamic field of interaction in which environments and embodied experience continually shape one another.

In *The Taverner Novels*, this literary affectiveness further manifests as a deliberate ambiguity in both temporal and spatial definition. Instead, these spaces serve more as thematic locations defined primarily by the affective experiences and bodily sensations of her characters. This atmospheric approach is even more pronounced in her natural Dorset landscapes, which emerge as landscapes composed of affective and symbolic matter, therefore requiring an almost intuitive comprehension of the literary space. Consequently, Butts' natural and urban environments cannot be entirely traced with a finger on a map (as one might do with the precise

London locations in *The Waste Land*) but can instead successfully be navigated through the sensory and emotional resonance of her space-writing. This reliance on the felt experience of space renders affect theory an ideal framework for analyzing the nuances of her literary spatiality, both in urban and non-urban environments.

From a retrospective vantage and with the support of the sources cited above, it could therefore be argued that modernist literature is at its core inherently affective. Central to much canonical high-modernist literature are themes of emotional loss, alienation, and dislocation, which represent a fundamental struggle to reconcile personal experience with a rapidly changing world. These themes are not merely intellectual concerns but are rooted in affective states of displacement. Even when conscious emotional processing is absent, the resulting experience of trauma or numbness indicates a powerful affective presence within the text's spatial and formal layers. On the other hand, modernism also encompasses more affirmative registers that emphasize the restorative connections between person, place, and a sense of belonging, as shown by Talviste (2025) on the example of the work of Virginia Woolf and Jean Rhys. Whether processing the "shock" of modernity or the intimacy of belonging, these varied thematic strands demonstrate that modernist space is consistently shaped by the body's sensory encounters. This is particularly evident in the works of Mary Butts, whose writing foregrounds spatial feeling, affect, and bodily experience.

1.5. Space

As noted by Thacker (2003: 2), "the claim 'We live in spacious times' comes not from some postmodernist or postcolonial theorist but from the modernist writer and critic Ford Madox Ford" in his attempt to capture the ambiance of 1905 London. Thacker underscores the extent to which modernist writers were already attuned to the spatial dimensions of narrative forms and thematic concerns of modern life, long before spatiality became a central concern in literary studies in the second half of the twentieth century (Tally 2017). Ford's statement

reflects a broader modernist impulse to register and represent the effects of rapid urbanization, frequently by placing the modern city at the center of narrative attention.

It seems that this sensitivity and attentiveness to the rapidly transforming space of the early 20th-century world is precisely what makes modernist writers so attuned to and skilled in representing literary space. Beebe (1974: 1074–1076) argues that one of the defining features of modernist literature is its reconfiguration of space, particularly through the representation of the modern city as a formally controlled environment rather than a social landscape. Urban space becomes a symbolic and psychological terrain: streets, buildings, and crowds are filtered through the perceiving consciousness of the artist or protagonist. Rather than presenting the city as a coherent social environment, modernist texts fragment urban space into impressions organized through mythic or formal structures, producing a closed artistic world that substitutes symbolic order for empirical realism (Beebe 1974: 1075). This treatment reflects modernism's broader tendency to absorb the external world into subjective perception, allowing the city to function less as a site of collective life and more as a projection of individual consciousness (Beebe 1974: 1075–1076).

Such formal spatial strategies often generate affects such as dread, confusion, and insignificance, even where texts strive for emotional restraint. The conscious attempt to avoid or suppress emotion does not signal the absence of affect but rather reveals its persistence in a displaced or inverted form: emotional restraint, fragmentation, and rationalization themselves become expressions of unease, alienation, and anxiety. Modernist urban space thus becomes a site where affect is not absent but instead deflected, contained, and formalized. While this formal and spatial enclosure contributed to the making of canonical works such as *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*, (Beebe 1974: 1076–1077) suggests that it also exposes modernism's limitations, as the increasing absorption of urban space into aesthetic form ultimately distances literature from lived social reality.

Butts engages directly with this canonical modernist treatment of urban space, particularly in her depictions of London and Paris, where space can appear fractured, performative, and emotionally unstable. Yet her work does not remain confined to the enclosed aesthetic autonomy described by Beebe. While she registers the alienation and cultural dislocation associated with modern urbanity, she simultaneously expands the affective possibilities of literary space to generate forms of positive intensity: moments of heightened perception, aesthetic order, or symbolic coherence that offer temporary structure within this common disorientation. In contrast to the city's fragmentation, her natural landscapes offer experiences of attachment, continuity, and belonging. These spaces are not merely backdrops but living environments that shape and respond to human presence.

Rives (2005) provides a crucial insight into this affective spatiality through her analysis of objects in Butts' fiction. In *Armed with Madness*, the Grail Cup functions as an emotionally charged object whose meaning emerges through each characters' beliefs, attachments, and superstitions, ultimately creating division within their community. The mythical properties of the item are thus not so much rooted in its magical power of the original legend but rather it carries an affective power in the way it eludes a mutually understood meaning and thus plays with affective perceptions (Butts 1992: 18, 20, 37). Moreover, in the narrative of the first novel, the cup represents a form of modern disease, as the item's history and current existence are not tied to any specific place or any specific person. Its "placelessness, creates spacelessness" (Rives 2005: 614) and its discovery likewise remains unseen.

For Rives (2005: 620), space becomes "meaningful and ultimately empathic when its structure preserves the forms of attachment that keep it intact." This notion emphasizes Butts' use of objects and their corresponding affects as a means of constructing space and its inhabitants. For example, Rives observes that Butts' urban characters tend to "display" objects

while rural people “place” them (2005: 622), creating a contrast between performative modern display culture and a more rooted, purposeful material practicality.

Rives (2005: 608) further explains how Felicity Taverner’s items only become “possessions” when they are the subjects of “choice,” through an idealized process that builds, rather than severs, the affective relation between these objects and their collectors.” At the same time, Butts critiques elite intellectual exclusivity, demonstrating how the act of “owning” culture mirrors a broader possessive mentality that reinscribes objects with meaning outside their original contexts (Rives 2005: 613–614). Through this material and affective network, space emerges not as a static background construction, but as something relationally manifested through human and nonhuman interaction.

This relational understanding of space aligns with Wiseman’s (2015: 373–375) argument that Butts’ representations of Dorset emerge from a sustained tension between deep local attachment and formative experiences of metropolitan modernity. Butts is preoccupied with the dynamic between city and countryside, contrasting her literary cityscapes with an idyllic and romantic English countryside, and framing urbanization as a threat to home, continuity, and identity. Drawing on Berman’s conception of modernity as simultaneously enabling and destructive, Wiseman shows that Butts does not reject modernity outright but reworks it to articulate an ethics attentive to nonhuman agency and environmental interdependence (Wiseman 2015: 374). Her fiction thus bridges modernist formal experimentation and an ecological sensibility that anticipates later posthumanist and new materialist thought. Space in Butts’ work therefore also carries positive affective force: it enables shared consciousness, environmental attunement, and a sense of being embedded within a living world rather than estranged from it.

At the same time, this mythical spatial vision is not ideologically neutral. Radford’s (2011) analysis of Butts’ use of the Persephone myth reveals how her landscapes are bound to

constructions of Englishness and lineage. In *Death of Felicity Taverner*, Mary Butts constructs Felicity as a modern Persephone, a symbolic earth goddess whose presence and absence shape both narrative and landscape. Felicity's mysterious death transforms her into an embodiment of the Holy Grail, a representation of English lineage, beauty, and regional pride (Radford 2011: 141). The Taverner family takes on the sacred task of preserving the memory of a lost relative, defending the Dorset countryside from the destructive forces of modernity and gentrification embodied by her husband, Nick Kralin (Radford 2011: 128, 136). In this pursuit, Radford (2011: 339) argues that Butts portrays the land and the family's bloodline as inseparable, as preserving Felicity's legacy equates to safeguarding the ecological and cultural integrity of their region.

Radford (2011: 146) links this theme to Butts' own experience of perceived threat to her family estate. Butts' literary women are depicted as active, resourceful agents, whose connection to "primitive" spiritual and natural forces allows them to protect both lineage and landscape (Radford 2011: 131, 133). Yet, according to Radford (2011: 139–140, 143) this idea is framed within conservative, exclusionary constructs of nationality, race, and heteronormativity.

Radford (2011: 145) maintains that the mythologized landscape of Butts' Englishness creates a sacred effect that is at best attributed to explorations in style and theme, but ultimately difficult to separate from underlying notions of "Anglo-Saxon power, patronage and privilege." He also contends that Butts' novels are intertwined with problematic notions of racial and cultural purity, a tendency, unfortunately, not uncommon among her modernist peers. These aspects, Radford notes, have been largely ignored in prior studies, including Foy's (2000) *Ritual, Myth, and Mysticism*. This detail seems significant in the light of new academic perspectives on the studies of modernisms, as it reveals how seemingly aesthetic innovations

are inseparable from underlying social and ideological structures, challenging traditional readings that overlook issues of race, nationality, and privilege.

A further dimension of Butts' spatial poetics appears in her haunted landscapes. Matless (2008) examines the spectral landscapes in Butts' *The Taverner Novels* (1936) and argues that her portrayal of ghosts and hauntings in *Death of Felicity Taverner* reflects anxieties about property, history, identity, and cultural memory (Matless 2008: 337). Matless (2008: 339) uses Wright's idea of Butts' intimate connection between family and place, describing family as "a transcendent value threatened by its own historicity," to highlight how the author's spiritually significant landscapes were likewise endangered by modern forces such as materialism, suburbia, and mass leisure.

Her ghosts, Matless (2005: 338) continues, are not trapped in the past but rather constructed through "precise if not necessarily linear geographies, histories, temporalities, and spatialities." This reading complements Cluckey's (2014) assertion that Butts' occultism is not merely aesthetic but functions as a critique of modernity's disenchantment, as her blending of mysticism and landscape critiques an increasingly commodified and artificial modern world. Butts' ritual-infused modernism, in this light, not only revives an intimate relationship with space, but also uses myth as a tool of aesthetic and ideological resistance. This relational understanding of space anticipates concerns later articulated in new materialist thought, as objects, land, and atmosphere participate in meaning-making rather than serving as passive settings. Butts' landscapes generate attachment, shared consciousness, and ecological interdependence, even as they may remain entangled with ideological tensions. Modernist space in Butts' fiction is therefore neither purely alienated nor purely restorative, but a dynamic field in which affect, materiality, myth, and power intersect.

As has been argued by Papacharissi (2015: 19, as cited by Schaefer 2019: 20) spaces characterized by disorder, marginality, or liminality often provide the conditions in which

affective intensities can emerge most strongly, precisely because structured and hierarchical environments tend to stabilize meaning and constrain the openness through which affect operates. Instead, affective power operates in moments of emergence, from instances of connection between body and space. In dealing with modernist spatiality and bodies, Taylor often cites the concept of transcorporeality from the work of Stacy Alaimo (2010). “Transcorporeality” describes a way of thinking about the body as fundamentally interconnected with the surrounding environment. As Alaimo explains, the “substance of one’s self” is inseparable from the material world in which it exists (Alaimo 2010: 2). She further illustrates this concept through the circulation of toxins and pollutants, showing how human bodies are literally entangled with global environmental flows. These processes disrupt the notion of the bounded individual, revealing that our flesh and blood carry traces of substances from the wider world, making humans materially inseparable from their surrounding space.

In synthesizing these critical perspectives and theoretical backgrounds, it becomes evident that Mary Butts occupies a distinctive position within the landscape of modernist literature, offering a unique lens through which to view spatiality and its affective meaning-making. Her spatial narratives emphasize the importance of community and the emotive potential of objects, often navigating the tension between historical continuity and a rapidly shifting social and cultural world. Within this framework, Butts utilizes myth and occultism not merely as aesthetic choices, but as tools for navigating the persistent tension between historical continuity and the fragmenting force of modernity. Much scholarship has highlighted the importance of the author’s personal connection to space as reflected in her work, sometimes with conservative or exclusive connotations. However, there remains a lack of comprehensive research examining how literary representations of space engage the affective relationship between bodies and their environments in *The Taverner Novels*.

This thesis addresses this gap by analyzing the embodied and affective dimensions of modernist space in Mary Butts' *The Taverner Novels*. Drawing on affect theory, it explores how bodies experience and respond to different spaces, and how spaces, in turn, shape and influence bodily perception and feeling. By focusing on this reciprocal interaction between body and environment, the study demonstrates how modernist space in Butts' work emerges as an affective field produced through lived, embodied encounters rather than as a purely descriptive or static setting. In doing so, the thesis seeks to contribute both to ongoing feminist recovery work and to the broader field of modernist spatial studies.

CHAPTER TWO: AFFECTIVE SPACES AND BODIES IN *THE TAVERNER NOVELS*

The Taverner Novels are connected through recurring characters and shared themes of spiritual search, affective spatial experiences, relational intensity, and the struggle to articulate and preserve a version of untouched reality amid social and psychological uncertainty. Both novels focus heavily on the space–affect–body connection and thus provide rich material for a comprehensive textual analysis reaching beyond the scope of previous studies of specific aspects in the novel. The following chapter gives an overview of the methodology of the thesis, then moves to a summary of the two novels and finally provides an analysis of the two texts.

2.1. Methodology

This thesis focuses on Mary Butts' *Taverner Novels*, selected because they offer a productive site for examining affective spatiality through their strong emphasis on landscape, atmosphere, and bodily sensation. In these novels, environments are not only settings for action but are frequently depicted as active forces that influence and interact with the characters who inhabit them. This framework understands literary space as something produced through ongoing relations between bodily sensation, spatial orientation, and affective force (cf Schaefer 2019: 17–18).

Therefore, this thesis employs textual analysis informed by insights from affect theory and literary spatial studies. Literary spatial analysis provides tools for examining how texts construct environments through descriptive language and narrative structure, while affect theory offers a framework for understanding how these environments register at the level of bodily sensation and emotional intensity. For this, Julie Taylor's *Modernism and Affect* (2015) is useful for situating affect within modernist literature, while Stacy Alaimo's *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (2010) clarifies the entanglement of bodies and

environments through her concept of “transcorporeality,” making it particularly suited to analyzing the interaction between space and body in the selected texts.

The analysis began with a general reading of the novels, during which key thematic patterns of body and space were identified. In this initial reading, passages were selected that specifically engage with interactions between body and space, particularly in moments of heightened affect or sensory intensity. These include passages that describe spatial environments, bodily experience, and affective interactions between bodies and space.

The selected passages were then thematically categorized corresponding to the structure of the analysis: spaces as constructed in the novels, landscapes as affective environments, the mutual influence between bodies and spaces, affective depictions of urban space, and representations of bodies as animalistic, merging with space, or expressing spatiality through movement. From each category, the most representative and affectively rich passages were selected for closer analysis, to examine how affective literary space is produced through the interaction of bodies, environments, and movement.

In the analysis, attention is given to how language mediates the relationship between bodies and space. This includes the use of sensory and emotionally charged vocabulary, as well as moments of silence or omission, shifting narrative perspectives, and instances where the boundary between character and environment becomes blurred on both a thematic and linguistic level. Sentence structure is also considered, particularly fragmented syntax, rhythmic pacing, and pauses that reflect hesitation, tension, or confusion. Rather than relying on a single identifiable feature, the affective quality of literary space emerges through the interaction of these elements, which together express how space is felt, inhabited, and responded to by bodies.

The passages are examined in detail to identify the thematic and stylistic strategies through which the author builds her affective literary space and in turn how affect is constructed on a literary level. By isolating and examining these so-called nodes of affective intensity, the

analysis aims to demonstrate how literary space in *The Taverner Novels* is constructed and how it affects its meaning-making.

2.1.1. Summaries of the Novels

Armed with Madness follows a small, intertwined group of young bohemians who retreat to a remote estate on the southwest English coast in pursuit of spiritual, aesthetic, and personal meaning after the upheavals of World War I. The Taverner estate is historic and untouched by modernity, characterized by its mystical aliveness and exclusivity. The so-called “inner circle” is made up of a handful of central figures, such as Scylla Taverner and her brother Felix who own the estate, Felix’s close friends Picus and Ross, and their neighbor Clarence. The circle of young intellectuals is joined by an American tourist Carston, evoking familial, romantic, spatial, and cultural tensions among the otherwise like-minded group.

Their fragile social harmony is further unsettled when Felix, Picus, and Clarence discover an ancient chalice buried in a well, which some begin to believe may be the mythical Holy Grail. The find sets off psychological tensions, romantic rivalries, and contestations of desire and belief among the group, further provoked by the English countryside. Members of the group form differing understandings of the chalice, and their relationships with each other and the surrounding nature become more intense and chaotic.

Felix flees to the deceptively romantic but mechanized city of Paris, Picus visits his mother’s grave, Ross turns inward and to painting, and Carston takes Scylla to meet her old friend Lydia in London, until the group eventually regathers at the Taverner estate. In a confused mental state, Clarence attacks Scylla in jealousy and, after a narrow escape from death, the relationship between Scylla and Picus intensifies, causing Carston to leave the Taverners after being rejected by the inner circle who close themselves to outsiders in their attunement to the local nature. Clarence is sent away, and the novel ends with the introduction of a new character, Boris, brought to the Taverner home by Felix. *Armed with Madness* mainly explores

a network of strange and shifting relationships, nature and belonging, and how idealism and disillusionment, intimacy and alienation unfold in a romantic and natural setting.

Some years later, *Death of Felicity Taverner* reunites many of the same characters — Scylla, now married to Picus, Felix, and Boris. The plot centers on the mysterious death of the Taverners' cousin Felicity, whose absence, old belongings, and familial influence haunts the narrative. Felicity's sudden death becomes the catalyst for moral, emotional, and social tensions among the extended Taverner circle, creating the conflict between nature preservation and the urbanization of the landscape at the hands of a so-called "outsider."

Felicity's estranged husband Kralin, another Russian émigré, intends to transform her cottage and the surrounding land into a resort, threatening both the memory and home landscape of the Taverners. Felicity's mother and brother, who represent differing attachments to inheritance and reputation, along with the divided loyalties of the newcomer Boris, complicate the emerging conflict. As Scylla, Felix, and Picus seek to preserve Felicity's name, her land, and their own communal ideals against Kralin's disruptive ambitions, the novel becomes an investigation into betrayal and belonging, highlighting the contested meanings of home and heritage. Despite focusing more explicitly on familial relationships and conflict, nature remains an active character of the novel, by aiding the inner circle with their mission to protect their sacred home, even if doing so requires violence and the concealment of crime.

2.2. Spaces of the Novels

The portrayal of space in *The Taverner Novels* extends beyond background scenery and becomes an active participant in the unfolding of the characters' stories. Some spaces are based on real locations, such as Dorset, London, Paris, New York, and mentions of Russia, while others are fictional or adapted, such as Tollerdown (likely based on the real Toller Down), Starn, and Stone End. Natural spaces are often described with heightened care and narrative agency, sometimes exceeding human characters, and are linked to continuity and forms of spatial

intelligence that are accessible mainly to those within the Dorset inner circle, whereas city spaces often produce the opposite affect.

Building on the concept of transcorporeality (cf. McLaughlan 2015: 50), the environments under analysis in this thesis are shaped through their relation to bodily and emotional experience, more specifically where boundaries between body and space become unstable. This empirical analysis chapter focuses on Scylla and Felix's Taverner estate, the nearby Tollerdown Cottage where Clarence lives, the nearby town Starn, as well as Paris, London, and the sea; examining these spaces that show heightened affect between bodies and their environments, particularly in how they respond differently to attuned and non-attuned bodies. Through shifts in perception, tactile encounters, and animated landscape metaphors, the text reveals how affect emerges between bodies and space, continually blurring distinctions between self and environment through language and embodied experience.

2.2.1. The Taverner Estate and Nature

This emphasis is present from the outset of the first novel, *Armed with Madness*, as it opens with a strikingly affective description of the Taverner estate:

In the house, in which they could not afford to live, it was unpleasantly quiet. Marvellously noisy, but the noises let through silence. The noises were jays, bustling and screeching in the wood, a hay-cutter, clattering and sending up waves of scent, substantial as sea-waves, filling the long rooms as the tide fills a blow-hole, but without roar or release. The third noise was the light wind, rising off the diamond-blue sea. The sea lay three parts round the house, invisible because of the wood. The wood rose from its cliff-point in a single tree, and spread out inland, in a fan to enclose the house. Outside the verandah, a small lawn had been hollowed, from which the wood could be seen as it swept up, hurrying with squirrels, into a group of immense ilex, beech and oak. The lawn was stuck with yuccas and tree-fuchsias, dripping season in, season out, with bells the colour of blood. (Butts 1992: 3)

From the outset, the landscape is presented as affectively loaded, with extensive sensory details constructing the space. The narrative does not establish a fixed time frame or precise location, though it reveals itself gradually in relation to the semi-imaginary Dorset. Likewise, the narrative voice is at times difficult to identify, shifting between an omniscient perspective and the internal thoughts of characters as they experience the surrounding fields of affect through a sort of feedback system (Seigworth and Gregg 2010: 6, cited in Taylor 2015: 9), in which bodies

interact and combine with biological drives as well as other bodies. This vagueness of space and how it is felt is already affective, as it must be experienced, not placed in relation to external references.

The Taverner house is first introduced through contradiction, as one “unpleasantly quiet” yet “marvellously noisy.” It does not function as a stable object but as something that is structured through perception and sensations. This spatial perception is further destabilized by suggesting that sound and silence are not opposites but interwoven conditions of the same environment. Adding to the affective overload, the hay-cutter produces “waves of scent” as “substantial as sea-waves,” collapsing many sensory aspects such as sound, smell, and visual registers into one another. The natural environment and the constructed house thus begin to overlap, as interior and exterior spaces continuously bleed into one another. This merging of spaces is further intensified by the phrasing “without roar or release,” which removes the expected culmination or end of movement, and instead produces a circulation of affect that never settles into a final form. This resonates with Ahmed’s notion of affective economies, where feelings are generated through their circulation and movement between them (Ahmed 2004: 8, as cited in Taylor 2015: 8).

In this way, silence and sound emerge as equally active sensory and affective forces in the construction of space, so that at the Taverner estate’s silence is reworked from a stable absence of sound into an active and multiple experience:

The silence let through by the jays, the hay-cutter, and the breeze, was a complicated production of stone rooms, the natural silence of empty grass, and the equivocal, personal silence of the wood. Not many nerves could stand it. People who had come for a week had been known to leave next day. The people who had the house were interested in the wood and its silence. When it got worse, after dark or at mid-day, they said it was tuning-up. When a gale came up-Channel shrieking like a mad harp, they said they were watching a visible fight with the silence in the wood. (Butts 1992: 3)

The opening line immediately destabilizes any simple notion of quiet by describing it as “a complicated production of stone rooms, the natural silence of empty grass, and the equivocal, personal silence of the wood,” suggesting spatial layering. The “stone rooms” imply an

architectural, stony silence, while “empty grass” evokes an open and natural one, and the “wood” introduces a “personal” and “equivocal” silence that resists stable definition, as if it carries its own ambiguous agency or mood and is up to the interpreter to “hear.” This instability further produces an affective intensity felt by bodies which “Not many nerves could stand.” Silence thus becomes something physiologically overwhelming, capable of permeating the human body despite its apparent non-materiality and in the process exceeding or unsettling the body’s material limits (cf. Taylor 2015: 6). The fact that visitors “had been known to leave next day” reinforces this sensory pressure.

In contrast to the disruption it causes the newcomers, the inner circle of Taverners and their friends interpret this unsettling condition differently, reframing it as something dynamic: “When it got worse, after dark or at mid-day, they said it was tuning-up.” The metaphor of “tuning-up” draws on musical language, suggesting that the silence behaves like an instrument adjusting itself, further establishing itself as an active affective presence.

This sort of musical association with weather, animals or people continues throughout the novels: “The gutters of the roof rushed and sang and leaked, single notes from which the ear eventually picked out a tune. Syncopation, magic, nature imitating Mozart?” (Butts 1992: 36), with the Taverners “enjoying it, the first row of the stalls for a nature-play. Discussing other spectacles” (Butts 1992: 36). In this way, the Taverners are represented as an audience, whose artistic perception includes both emotive meaning-making and the formal qualities of music, so that the aesthetic spatial experience is understood not only in terms of feeling but also as something that emerges through form and structure (Atkinson and Duffy 2015: 98). Their enjoyment of the “nature-play” suggests an attention to how sound, space, and rhythm are constructed and perceived.

This sense of embodied movement and musical association within the space of silence is further exemplified when in the same scene in describing how “a gale came up-Channel

shrieking like a mad harp,” blending the wild force of wind and animalistic movement with the imagery of a playing musical instrument. The gale’s movement and shriek channel the surrounding environment into something like a resonating body. The comparison to a “mad harp” intensifies this effect, as the wind appears to play on the channel, producing almost violent music. The scene highlights how bodies and environments are not sealed entities but constantly act upon one another, composing and recomposing forms through contact (Alaimo 2010: 13). In this way, silence is treated as something dynamic and responsive, capable of being “tuned,” being affectively perceptible, and set into motion through the interaction of bodies and space.

This sense of underlying agency intensifies further in the final image of the loud gale’s “visible fight with the silence in the wood.” During a storm, even natural forces become theatrical, and silence is engaged in an embodied struggle, made visible and almost material in its description. Across the passage, silence shifts from an absence to a presence that is produced, perceived, and experienced through the interaction between body and space, thus functioning as one of the affective presences that make up the space of the Taverner estate.

Extending this affective framing, Butts further stylizes her literary space through a recurrent pattern of threes (Butts 1992: 3–4, 77), reminiscent of fairy-tale logic, which already frames the space as subtly ritualized. This is first established through sound, where perception arrives in layered sets of three: “the noises were jays, bustling and screeching in the wood, a hay-cutter, clattering /.../ The third noise was the light wind, rising off the diamond-blue sea” (Butts 1992: 3). The sounds circulate through space, producing an environment of multiple layered sensory images that intersect with one another.

This logic of threes extends into the spatial organization of the estate, where sea, wood, and lawn form a nested configuration that folds inward on itself. The sea that “lay three parts round the house, invisible because of the wood” establishes a surrounding circularity that is partially obscured by the wood, which “rose from its cliff-point in a single tree, and spread out

inland, in a fan to enclose the house.” The affective and physical enclosure provided by the wood comes from an active unfolding movement that is both vertically and horizontally expansive as it surrounds the Taverner Estate. The estate can be experienced less as a fully enclosed system, but as a system of shifting perspectives or fragments (Cole 2015: 164).

The innermost layer of the trifold enclosure, the hollowed lawn, the view opens toward the layered landscape in which the wood is seen “as it swept up, hurrying with squirrels.” This phrasing attributes a sense of collective motion to the environment, removing the distinction between plants and animals so that trees and squirrels participate in the same rhythm of movement, and become to the human perception a united entity of organisms. This produces a sense of spatial continuity that is further extended as the wood rises into “immense ilex, beech and oak,” where scale is intensified, reinforcing the impression of a landscape that exceeds human proportion.

The effect of this trifold nesting produces a sense of inhabiting a world that is enclosed within its own logic, where space is continuously generated through relation rather than fixed external structure. The estate is therefore not simply located within a landscape but held within overlapping environmental movements that circle and return upon it, producing an atmosphere of immersion, wonder, and at times disorientation. The environment behaves as if it is actively organizing itself around the house and this contributes to the broader affective condition of the text where, to use the ideas of Alaimo (2010: 13), the relationship between space and bodies remain porous and continuously in motion.

This section also shows how the boundary between nature, space, and human bodies becomes porous at the level of language, with natural imagery consistently described through bodily terms and with bodily experience projected onto the environment: “dripping season in, season out, with bells the colour of blood.” As a result, nature and human embodiment become linguistically intertwined. This is further confirmed by an observation one page later, noting

that the Taverners “belonged to the house and the wood and the turf and the sea” (Butts 1992: 4), suggesting a reciprocal relationship.

The Taverner estate is also initially framed through the impression of a newcomer, Carston, as a somewhat romanticized version of the English countryside: “‘This is the England we think of. Hardy’s country, isn’t it?’” (Butts 1992: 11). Yet this familiarity is largely illusory, as the newcomers often misread the space they are entering, reducing it to something already known or easily manageable: “Don’t worry about me. I’ve done some camping” (Butts 1992: 11). This remark quietly reveals a lack of awareness of what the landscape demands and how deeply it is enmeshed with those attuned to it, while remaining dangerous to those who enter it as outsiders.

This tension between exclusion and belonging in or with space is best illustrated through the contrasting ways Picus and Carston inhabit the same landscape. For Picus, the Taverner space is porous and responsive: “He looked out of the window at the wood swimming in the mid-day heat, let out a little breath and waited an answer from the wood. He smiled and began to dance, like a marsh-bird, swinging up a leg, effortlessly, in any direction” (Butts 1992: 22). Here, the wood is implied to breathe and respond, as if the boundary between human and landscape has dissolved into a shared rhythm. By contrast, Carston experiences the same environment as overwhelming as, in his self-proclaimed urban sensibility he is unable to attune to the affective density of nature: “To him, straight from London, Paris, and New York, the silence was intolerable. The wood sighed at him. Just like that” (Butts 1992: 12). Through these interactions between space and body, though different in affective quality, the nature surrounding the Taverner estate is consistently animated and personified, as if it were a living participant in the scene.

Across these moments, natural phenomena are rendered through human action and social behavior. In an example, “The last of the lightning winked at them, the rain turned to a

sweet shower, an after-thought” (Butts 1992: 37), the lightning acts like a human eye (also in Butts 1992: 39), suggesting a playful intention, while the rain is refigured as something that can soften in affect, and linger as an “after-thought.” Nature is thus depicted as a responsive presence that behaves with an implied awareness of the characters. This anthropomorphic tendency becomes even more pronounced in Carston’s perception of his environment: “He became aware of all the noises of the wood, that it was cackling all the time, a frightful old long gossip about dirt and the dead ends of lies” (Butts 1992: 64). Here, the wood is transformed into a speaking, socially embodied figure, “cackling” and engaging in “gossip,” which affectively responds to or mirrors Carston’s insecurities about his own presence within the social space of the Taverners. Across both passages, natural forces are repeatedly attributed human capabilities, so that the landscape emerges as an active, expressive presence.

The nature around the Taverner estate remains throughout both novels an entity that resists capture. Ross’ attempt to capture the nature on canvas fails, as its visual representation breaks down: “He drew in a tree-shape rather hard. The white haze gathered. The more he looked, the less he saw. Instead, he began to see shapes in his head, not outside it” (Butts 1992: 24). What begins as an act of artistic representation is gradually undone by the environment. The affectively vague sense of a “white haze” does not merely obscure and reshape Ross’ visual perception, blurring the boundary between external object and internal image as the landscape withdraws from visibility and shifts into a mental projection. The movement between mental and physical space produces a corporeal loss of control. The landscape thus asserts its agency by refusing to be rendered as an external, controllable object.

The nature surrounding the Taverner estate is also notoriously elusive in its material form, repeatedly disorienting those who attempt to move through it. This is evident in the many instances of characters getting lost and the constant warnings to newcomers (Butts 1992: 46–51, 146, 298). Scylla notes regarding the arrival of her friends to Carston, “The openness here

is deceptive, and they might come a hundred ways” (Butts 1992: 14). This instability is further reinforced in her framing of the environment as a “‘Midsummer Night’s Dream,’ true greenwood” (Butts 1992: 8), evoking a spatial affect of enchantment, confusion, and dream-like disorientation where spatial perception is easily unsettled. Even Boris, a seemingly nature-attuned character, gets lost on his way back to the Taverner house in the second novel, prompting an extensively affective encounter between space and body:

On the road, however, his god gave out. /.../ he tried an amateur’s short cut. It was not a success. Crossing the stone walls, the thorned lashes that bind them cut off shreds of cloth and skin. Loose stones fell out and hit the delicate bones of his legs. On the down-crest he could not strike the green road. He had struggled up an earth-wall to the down top, at dusk, into sea and wind cries that were almost inaudible, and like the coming of another power which was to take over the world. (Butts 1992: 218)

What begins as ordinary travel “on the road” quickly shifts into disorientation as “his god gave out,” a phrase that suggests the loss of personal control within the chaos of the environment. To his attempt at “an amateur’s short cut,” the landscape responds as an active, affective force produced through contact between body and space. The environment becomes hostile: “thorned lashes” tear “shreds of cloth and skin,” and “loose stones” strike “the delicate bones of his legs,” producing a dense corporeal imagery in a body’s movement through space.

As Boris’ journey continues, this spatial resistance extends into cognition, as “On the down-crest he could not strike the green road,” suggesting that even visible routes fail to align with mental mapping. The phrase “he had struggled up an earth-wall” intensifies this effect by rendering the terrain almost architecturally obstructive. Arriving at the top, “into sea and wind cries that were almost inaudible” marks a threshold experience: Boris enters a space where nature seems to “speak,” but in a way that is indistinct. This once again exemplifies the role of sensory details in the construction of affectively active natural landscapes, that can only be navigated by the experienced few, as Felix and Picus eventually rescue Boris.

This capacity of the landscape to resist being fully mastered extends more broadly to questions of ownership and possession in the second novel, *Death of Felicity Taverner*, where land likewise refuses containment as property. In Scylla’s articulation of what is at stake in

Kralin's desire for Felicity's house, the land is not simply considered an owned space, but as something infused with bodily and ancestral existence:

.../ this bit of England .../ the flawless, clean and blessed, mana and tabu earth; strictly of their flesh, whose birds and beasts and eggs and fish, and fruit and leaf and air and water had nourished their bodies, "composed their beauties"; whose pattern was repeated in them, the stuff of a country made into man. (Butts 1992: 258-259)

Read through the lens of transcorporeality, this passage dismantles clear boundaries between human bodies and the environment, presenting land and organism as materially continuous and mutually constitutive (Alaimo 2010: 2). Scylla's description of "this bit of England .../ strictly of their flesh" frames the landscape as something already incorporated, and metabolized by bodies over time, and vice versa. The list of "birds and beasts and eggs and fish, and fruit and leaf and air and water" emphasizes an ongoing circulation of matter between human and nonhuman life (Alaimo 2010: 2). This becomes evident in Scylla's emotional release of Felicity's body: "let the earth take her; do what it liked with her; make her service able for its coarse business under the soil (Butts 1992: 168).

Material intertwining of human and non-human life becomes even more explicit in Boris's reflection on the sinister impact of Kralin's plans, where the true threat is located not only in losing their territory, but the Taverners' embodied existence: "the attack on their bodies, nerves, roots, the essence of their make-up, in the attack on their land" (Butts 1992: 341–342). Read through Alaimo's theory in which "the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world" and where human substance is inseparable from "the environment" (Alaimo 2010: 2), this merging of body and land becomes more than metaphorical. Instead, it foregrounds how corporeality is materially continuous with its surroundings, so that an assault on the land simultaneously registers as an assault on their bodily existence, erasing any clear boundary between human and environment entirely.

For Kralin, the sea is merely an object to be exploited in his plans to turn the coastline into a resort (Butts 1992: 249). Picus reacts to this threat, but his response is not immediately articulated as a clear emotion. Instead, it appears as a pre-verbalized, bodily intensity:

Picus listened to this, and all that he was sure that he felt was a pain somewhere deep in the middle of his inside. /.../ There was a wound going through his long thin body. His feet and her feet and his brother's would walk on knives always after this. He found, as he cocked his head on one side to listen to Kralin, that he was staring very hard at his exceedingly powerful hands (Butts 1992: 249).

Here, affect is registered as visceral sensation, as “a pain somewhere deep in the middle of his inside.” Before this affect is cognitively recognized or named as anger, it emerges as an immediate bodily experience. Kralin, too, registers this intensity, but as a palpable physical threat, as the narration shifts into his perspective and to Picus’ “exceedingly powerful hands.”

Kralin’s inexperience with the landscape becomes even more evident when Boris invites him for a swim, as he “went on to explain how rocky the cove below the village was, and how necessary it was for him to find the best places” (Butts 1992: 352). It becomes clear that Kralin’s interest in the landscape is not tied to preservation but to gentrification and this disconnect is further reflected in his physical inability to engage with the terrain: “He followed Boris round the coast. Between huge boulders they went, Boris leaping, Kralin stumbling and splashing through pools /.../” (Butts 1992: 354). This creates a contrast between Boris’s embodied familiarity with the landscape and Kralin’s clumsy interaction with it, reinforcing his lack of attunement to its affective value.

As Alaimo (2010: 2) suggests, this sort of thinking across bodies reveals a world of “fleshy beings with their own needs, claims, and actions,” which is made particularly visible in the landscape, where space behaves as an active participant in its preservation. This becomes especially apparent in the culmination of the struggle over the inheritance of Felicity Taverner’s estate following her death in the second novel, as her ex-husband Kralin and the unofficial representative of the Taverners, Boris, come into a direct conflict over the land. In this context, the landscape is no longer a neutral setting but shapes the conditions under which the

confrontation unfolds. This leads to a highly charged episode in which Boris, with the sea's apparent complicity, murders Kralin in a hidden cave:

He walked across after Kralin, following him quickly and once or twice he looked back, to the high empty land, to the untrodden beach. The eyes of man, if there had been any eyes, would have seen two men walking along a rock-path, at low tide, to an island in the sea. Two men, and then he might have rubbed his eyes, and asked if there was a third, or what was making the confused transparency, that the sea-sparkle and weed-dark showed through, as of a shadow threaded with brightness that followed them. (Butts 1992: 355)

The corporal imagery of eyes and the act of looking becomes crucial here. Boris looks back at the land, as if non-verbally communicating with it. The following phrase “The eyes of man, if there had been any eyes” disrupts this act of looking by blurring the lines between who is seeing and who is being seen. It becomes increasingly unclear whether the scene is being witnessed in some sense by the ghost of Felicity (cf Matless 2008), nature or, on a meta level, the reader. The looking back almost functions as an affective wink to the reader on a textual level.

This breakdown of perceptual clarity becomes more pronounced in the question of “a third” presence, which is never confirmed but instead takes shape as an affective disturbance within the scene. The description of “the confused transparency, that the sea-sparkle and weed-dark showed through” produces a layered sensory field in which light, water, and organic matter blur into one another, resisting separation into discrete visual objects. The final image, “a shadow threaded with brightness that followed them,” further intensifies this instability, as the figure of the “shadow” is both present and unstable, simultaneously material and immaterial. Affect here is therefore not located in a character's interior response but emerges at the level of the perception of the unfolding events, where nature's shifting textures actively disrupt the possibility of a fixed or rationalized understanding of what is being seen.

The act of visual exchange continues to echo throughout the scene as Boris leads Kralin toward the cave: “On the sea-face, cutting them off from sight of land, the cave opened its mouth. /.../ Boris glanced for a second out to sea” (Butts 1992: 355). The “glance” functions as a nonverbal communication between body and nature, as if Boris is seeking approval to the

act he is about to commit. This creates the sense of the sea as an affective accomplice. The cave “opening its mouth” reinforces this idea of an active, living landscape, recalling how earlier in the novel the cliffs are described as “low and soft, rounded with a black snout” (Butts 1992: 4). In these descriptions, the language used to describe space is rendered animate.

This sense of shared perception and participation is complicated by Kralin’s experience of the cave, marked by an intensified, almost pleasurable fear: “A connoisseur in sensations, he relished a fear that came to him – that where they were walking was really underneath the sea; that already it was creeping back on them; that in three hours they would be standing underneath the ocean, in the darkness of the roots of the rocks” (Butts 1992: 356). Here, fear becomes affectively charged for Kralin, suggesting a fascination with the idea of being overwhelmed by the environment. The imagery of walking “underneath the sea” intensifies the scene where seeming opposites (land/sea, above/below, safety/danger) begin to blur into one continuous, immersive experience.

As the culmination of the scene, the exchange between Boris and Kralin, turns the image of looking into an act of self-recognition, produced through the water’s reflection through which Kralin is forced to see himself:

“Look into the water, Kralin. It is flat, like glass, and you will see a man drowned.” Kralin said, after staring at his own face: “I see nothing.” “But you see yourself. That is what I have brought you here to see. Bien.” Instantly as he said it, Kralin understood. Why he had been brought there; what was to be done to him; what Boris was. In a single flash that was like an image, but shapeless-as a stone is shapeless. It made no difference that he heard himself told not to move, that Boris was covering him with Felix’s automatic borrowed for practice with Adrian. He /.../ swallowed, tasting his death. (Butts 1992: 357)

The last phrase of the scene, “He /.../ swallowed, tasting his death,” presents death as something that enters the body as if it were of material substance, despite its apparent lack of physical form. This echoes Alaimo’s account of matter as constantly circulating through bodies and environments, such that even death becomes part of a continuous transcorporeal exchange between body and environment (Alaimo 2010: 11). The verb “swallowed” further shifts the realization of death away from abstract cognition and into a bodily action, where understanding

occurs through ingestion rather than thought. In this way, the language turns an abstract awareness into something physiological, located in the mouth and throat, so that recognition of death is no longer intellectual but immediately embodied.

The following scene in which Boris conceals the body is notably stripped of affect, however, and presented in a clinical or strictly procedural tone: “Boris knelt beside him, turned him over, considered the torn contusion at the back of his head. Examined his body attentively. /.../ He rolled his body over into the pool, and when it had sunk, weighted its chest with some stones” (Butts 1992: 357). The detached, sequential phrasing foregrounds action without emotional commentary, producing an impression of affective disassociation from the act. This indicates that violence is registered only as a series of physical operations, rather than an emotional or morally difficult event.

Yet, affect quietly seeps back into the scene through the presence of the sea: “A little wave broke over his shoe /.../ A flicker of water iced his ankle. He looked and saw the sea-floor dancing in on them” (Butts 1992: 358). These movements shift the environment back to active bodily contact. The return of “dancing” reintroduces movement and animation into the landscape, suggesting that the sea retains an active, responsive presence. This sensory interruption leads directly into practical awareness: “Then Boris remembered what he had forgotten to do, and that he must not return wet” (Butts 1992: 358). In this sense, the sea functions almost like an accomplice, its contact with the body prompting renewed awareness and action and re-introducing affect into the scene as physical sensation.

This section illustrates the agency of the nature surrounding the Taverner estate as an active and responsive force that continuously interacts with human bodies. The landscape shapes perception, sensation, and action, producing affect through direct contact with the body. At the same time, it highlights the instability of boundaries between self and environment, where bodies exist in a constant state of exchange with the surrounding space. The language

used to construct these affective encounters repeatedly blurs the boundaries between bodies and landscape, as natural elements take on human or animal qualities, creating a sense of dynamic exchange. Overall, these affectively charged scenes present a world in which human and non-human elements are entangled, continuously influencing one another within a dynamic and shifting field of relations.

2.2.1.1. The Taverner House

The Taverner house is described through sensory experiences. There are not many explicit descriptions other than in relation to its surrounding nature: “The wood was innocent, the house fresh and serene” (Butts 1992: 7). It is established as a grand and historic English country house, already difficult for the Taverner group to maintain (Butts 1992: 3), with “library steps, made like everything in the house before the days of cheap furniture” (Butts 1992: 54). Across these early references, the house is established as a solid, strong, historic country house, presented through the imagery of a fortress:

.../wind shifting about outside in the trees, until with a scream the up-Channel gale was loosed and they became creatures couched under a stone that quivered in the uproar and mounted to bed with candles streaming. (...) The house was strong, he thought, its stone thrilling but not a window that rattled, tapped by their climbing roses. (Butts 1992: 99)

With the previous knowledge of the estate being situated in a remote location, with hints of looming danger, this description creates an almost Gothic atmosphere. The passage also introduces a primal embodied affect, particularly in the phrase “they became creatures couched under a stone,” which reduces the inhabitants to their instinctive bodily forms, while simultaneously reinforcing the architectural solidity and enduring strength of the house as a structuring force. In this way, the house also begins to formulate and affect the experiences of those who encounter it, echoing the idea of consistent flows of reciprocal affect that Alaimo (2020) describes.

The house thus functions as a structuring force that shapes bodily experience and perception. Carston, for instance, feels the oppressive presence of the house through “the weight

of the blue slate roof, cooling and darkening the rooms, holding the house to the earth” (Butts 1992: 53), where the roof both physically and affectively connects the house to the landscape. At the same time, the house’s boundaries attempt to separate inside from outside, as in “The wood was darkish, fearful and sad, until they saw the windows shut and already lit” (Butts 1992: 53) and “The shutters were bolted across the [sic] french windows. From nowhere could the night come in” (Butts 1992: 167). Yet these boundaries are often blurred through unlocked or open doors (Butts 1992: 195, 238) and the recurring terrace or veranda space that merges interior and exterior environments (Butts 1992: 3–4, 11, 13, 23–27, 35–40, 165, 319), creating a form of spatial spilling between house and landscape.

Similarly, the space between house and nature begins to merge through bodily imagery: “In and out and up and down a house much larger than it seemed, cooler than the wood's heart /.../ the long attic, roaring dark, directly under the roof. The roar was from bees who hived under the slates, and the smell their fresh honey and the black clots, old combs.” (Butts 1992: 53). The house, like the surrounding nature, is described as one playing with perception, blurring of the “spatial-divide” of inside/outside, expressed via bodily imagery of “cooler than the wood's heart.” Moreover, the animalistic “roaring dark” of the attic consists of nature-related sensory imagery, such as the buzzing from a bees’ nest and the smell of honey, signifying the porousness between the two spaces colliding.

This blurring of inside and outside occurs even on a textual level in the description of “a house where the windows were doors and stood open” (Butts 1992: 162). By describing windows as doors, the novel disorients conventional boundaries and forms of movement through space, while the open entrances further blur distinctions between house and landscape. This spatial ambiguity also shapes the Taverners’ bodily experience, reflected in their “double adventures of life out-of-doors, and life indoors, their life alone and their life as social animals”

(Butts 1992: 299), where movement between spaces becomes tied to shifting modes of social and embodied existence.

In the second novel, the inside of the Taverner house is likewise constructed from sensory details that are described to “obscure reality” (Butts 1992: 181). The room enters into conversation with the group, when:

There was silence again, while Scylla prepared the next sequence, and the room had its turn. Instead of four voices, the fire spoke, the voice of flames disintegrating salted wood into the quiet fall of light ash. The crack of old panels responding to heat, and behind them the ground scratch of mice. A door in the kitchen quarters opened and shut. Nanna's feet and the maid's mounted the stair. The heavy shutters bolted-out the interminable conversations of the trees. Behind these incidental breaks, the pulse of the long room in the delicate candle-light beat in time with the house and the wood. In time with its own time, a pace inaudible, yet sensible to each. Felix had said that a sonata could be written on the room's tempo, whose finale should be a demonstration of relativity. (Butts 1992: 180-181)

The interior of the house is constructed through sensory details and affectual perceptions. “The fire spoke” and the panels “respond[ed]” to heat, making the materials of the house seem active and communicative. The shutters attempt to separate the house from the “interminable conversations of the trees” outside, yet the scratching mice within the walls and the muted sounds of nature continue to permeate the space, blurring the boundary between inside and outside. In this way, the Taverner house becomes an active presence that shapes perception and mediates experience within the wider environment, suggesting a form of agency in line with Grosz’s idea of embedded systems merging and communicating with each other (as cited by Alaimo 2010: 10).

2.2.1.2. The Grail Cup in Staged Space

In *The Taverner Novels*, the Dorset landscape is frequently imagined as a kind of stage on which life unfolds, with nature shaping the structure and atmosphere of the performance and everyday items taking on a heightened symbolic meaning. In the words of an outside observer, Carston: “Here the scenery seemed to be the play” (Butts 1992: 12).

The staging becomes visible in the group’s small rituals, such as the moment when “A large gramophone stood with its mouth open on the verandah flags. They had been playing to

the wood after lunch, to appease it and to keep their dancing in hand” (Butts 1992: 3–4). The scene frames the verandah as a staged space where action takes on ritual and performative qualities, and where music is directed toward the wood as an active participant in the scene. Butts’ space emerges through exchanges between space and bodies, mutually shaping and responding to each other. Carston even notes how “The others were enjoying it, the first row of the stalls for a nature-play. Discussing other spectacles” (Butts 1992: 36).

This performative and affective spatial structure becomes even clearer when the closed environment begins to operate explicitly as a scene where ritual action and natural force are held together within a shared, dramatized space:

The earth was now closed in a hot, purple air-ball, the lightning flicking on and off. Without any regard for the weather, Ross arranged their chairs in the verandah while the storm banged about. /.../ And Clarence /.../ turned on the gramophone to play against the sky. They were not disturbed about Scylla, who might be out walking alone in the livid night. (Butts 1992: 35)

The environment here becomes intensely atmospheric: the earth is “closed in a hot, purple air-ball,” lightning “flicking on and off,” as the storm “banged about.” These strong descriptions heighten the affective pressure of the scene, enclosing the characters within a charged sensory field. The textual affect of lightning “flicking on and off” almost resembles a light switch or stage lighting, momentarily illuminating and darkening the scene as if it were part of a theatrical performance. Because Dorset functions as a ritualized setting where natural forces, human actions, and emotional atmospheres circulate together, Scylla’s absence does not signal danger, as she remains in the same affective field.

Within this performance, everyday objects take on a mythologized affective significance. The Taverner men report their find of a jade cup from within a well, noting that it was “fished out with a spear” (Butts 1992: 16): “An excursion down the well to clean out the hedgehogs had led to a discovery. An odd cup of some greenish stone had been found, rather like pea-soup carnelian” (Butts 1002: 15). The story of finding the cup is reminiscent of the re-

tellings of legends, in which the event is not witnessed and acquires significance through narration and its perceived significance by the characters (Butts 1992: 18, 20, 37).

This relational quality becomes even clearer when the cup mysteriously disappears (having actually been hidden by Picus) and Carston seeks out Picus' father to trace its origin. Before the disappearance, the cup had already been framed in elevated terms, as a "chalice" that "might have been made out of starmaterial" (Butts 1992: 17, 29). Yet the vicar undercuts this affect by off-handedly suggesting a much more banal history of the object as it "may have been an ash-tray in a Cairo club" (Butts 1992: 140). Despite this rational demystification, information about its likely background does not settle the cup's meaning. Instead, the vicar recognizes that what matters is the affect it produces, describing the events around it as "something like a ritual: a find, illumination, doubt, and division, collective and then dispersed. /.../ Adventures. Danger and awe and love" (Butts 1992: 140). In the end, the cup is revealed to have originated from India and had been stolen from Picus' father's collection, but this is less important than the affects and relationalities the object generates.

In some instances, Butts' literary landscapes begin to mirror the same unstable qualities generated by the cup. These affects then extend outward, shaping how space is perceived, organized, and felt, leading into a particularly affective scene, where Picus guides the group through nature from their estate to the nearby town, Starn: "Sunk roads are filled with loose sand. They go from nowhere to nowhere now. They trap the sun and keep out air. Their banks curl over in a fringe of heather wire" (Butts 1992: 46).

The road is no longer a fixed path but something shifting and unreliable due to the "loose sand," which renders it physically difficult to navigate and spatially destabilizing. This instability intensifies when the roads are described as going "from nowhere to nowhere now," where spatial logic collapses through repetition and paradox, removing any clear directional framework. The confusion deepens as the group becomes lost in the landscape: "they had

forgotten where they had entered the sunk road that led nowhere in particular; followed it as it wound into exactly the middle of everywhere” (Butts 1992: 47). The paradoxical language of “nowhere” and “exactly the middle of everywhere” is disorienting, as the precision implied by “exactly” is paired with a phrase “middle of everywhere” that makes mapping or rational navigation impossible.

The verbs “trap” and “keep out” that describe the winding paths make the space feel enclosed, while light and air are controlled by the landscape that controls which bodies can enter and leave it. It is notable how the only character able to navigate the affective environment surrounding both the landscape and the cup is Picus, while others stay “behind the heather rim” (Butts 1992: 48). The image of a “fringe of heather wire” combines something soft and natural with something sharp and restrictive, reinforcing the uneasy feeling that the landscape is both organic and subtly threatening. This is further developed with the scene where “Felix shrieked when a snake flicked across his shoe. But it was all part of a game” (Butts 1992: 47) subtly suggesting through the moment of fright and the symbolism of the snake that the land-cup is agentive in playing with the perceptions and emotions of its inhabitants.

The text constructs space also through sensory and bodily descriptions, such as “liverish grass”, “thick water”, and “feet chafing with sand” (Butts 1992: 46–47), which make the environment physically felt and repellent. This bodily discomfort intensifies when the group walks along a path of pine needles described in visceral language as difficult to walk on, “like a floor of red glass” (Butts 1992: 48), suggesting the threat of pain beneath each step. Continuing on the path under the trees, “It is not cool under them, a black scented life, full of ants, who work furiously and make no sound” (Butts 1992: 48). The scene is affectively dense, with heat, scent, color, and the movement of ants producing a sense of sensory overload, giving the ground a mechanical, almost machine-like quality beneath its organic surface. The path thus appears as a living system whose hidden processes surround and press upon the moving body

and becomes metaphorically further alive when the group “saw on their right a creek of yellow grass running inland behind them” (Butts 1992: 46). It is significant that nature is so often characterized through human-like movement and bodily descriptions.

Within this unstable terrain, green imagery becomes significant, especially “the patch of green land reclaimed from the heath” (Butts 1992: 47), which echoes the cup’s jade-like materiality. This links object and landscape through uncertain associations of value and danger. “The sunk road, having come to the middle, stopped in a circular sand-bank round a foul pond bordered with marsh-grass where there was no way out. /.../ ‘We can’t stay for ever in this cup’” (Butts 1992: 47), intensify this relation, as the circular forms and enclosure mirror the cup itself. This logic is made explicit when the estate is described in *Death of Felicity Taverner* as “their quiet land-cup” (Butts 1992: 165), showing the landscape functioning as the cup rather than simply resembling it throughout the novels.

The analysis reveals how the Dorset landscape in *The Taverner Novels* functions as a staged environment where space, bodies, and objects co-produce meaning through affect. It is framed as a play set shaped by ritualized patterning, mythic resonance, and unstable spatial description. Within this space, the jade cup acts as the central “prop”, organizing movement, perception, and spatial meaning by destabilizing its surroundings so that landscape and narrative begin to mirror each other through enclosure and repetition. Butts constructs this through looping spatial language and sensory detail, producing a fluid field where objects, bodies, and landscape continuously reshape one another.

2.2.2. Tollerdown Cottage

The small village of Tollerdown, where Clarence lives, emerges as an affectively dark and threatening space that both reflects and produces his mental distress and emotional isolation. It is described as “the darkest place that exists” (Butts 1992: 28) and “a place where no sane man would live” (Butts 1992: 126), already generating negative spatial affect on a

textual level. This is intensified further through the merging of cottage, landscape, and body: “The cottage was indistinguishable from the white, flint casing chalk rock out of which it was made /.../ Placed at the mouth of a quarry, he lived naked as could be after his late smothering in trees” (Butts 1992: 126). The “indistinguishable” boundary between building and landscape produces porous spatiality, while Clarence’s nakedness and the repressive phrase of his body “smothering in trees” create transcorporeal affect through vulnerability in bodily exposure and a repressive sense of environmental proximity. This creates a reciprocal relation between character and space, where internal mood and external environment continuously shape one another, blurring their boundaries so that psychological disturbance and spatial atmosphere become difficult to separate.

Clarence’s affective state is repeatedly constructed through fear that emerges not from specific figures from his relation to space: “by himself, was simply and terribly afraid. Not of individuals, but of a menace that walked hand in hand with night, joined with the fear natural in remote places to a man not intuitively tuned” (Butts 128: 128). The phrase “menace that walked hand in hand with night” produces fearful affect through the personification of atmosphere, where “night” becomes an active companion to an unidentified sense of threat. Similarly, Clarence’s fear of “remote places to a man not intuitively tuned” locates fear in a mismatch between his body and environment, suggesting that the negative affect arises from a failed spatial attunement.

A similar pattern appears in Clarence’s sense of being watched by an “audience” of “blood-mist of poppies” (Butts 1992: 126), “a house huddled against the ground, and below the aphrodite sea” (Butts 1992: 128). Here, surveillance emerges from fragmented spatial perception rather than any visible observer. The “blood-mist of poppies” produces a violent corporeal affect through its association with blood and the intense red of poppies, while the “mist” diffuses this bodily imagery into the environment, making fear atmospheric and thus

difficult to locate. In these passages, Clarence's lack of attunement to the surrounding environment produces a diffused spatially induced fear rather than fear caused by a specific human threat. This demonstrates how in the novels affect emerges most prominently through the continuous relationality between body and environment.

2.2.3. Town of Starn

Starn, the town closest to the Taverner estate, emerges as a mediating space between the affectively immersive environment of the estate and a more structured social world. Unlike the dense sensory atmosphere of the countryside, Starn offers Carston relief and clearer spatial orientation: "At Starn he was refreshed again with contacts from outside. There was an unusual number of tourists, two and two on the hillpaths, swarming the square. They did him so much good that he crossed to the station to meet a down-train that held more" (Butts 1992: 73). The movement, circulation, and presence of people produce a more manageable and readable environment, suggesting Carston's greater attunement to organized, city-like spaces. At the same time, Starn is remains affectively charged and socially performative:

Carston was surprised at his attention to this, until he noticed that their setting outside the inn was the setting of a play. Before he had wished for drama, and had not found his role. Now he was too much of a man to take himself off. The stage surpassed all romantic expectations, a town with towers, in hills high enough and low enough to set and display it equally. A fleece of stars over it, thick as the flocks on the down-sides, turning, turning with the earth. (Butts 1992: 74)

Starn is explicitly framed through theatrical language as "the setting /.../ of a play," where Carston becomes aware of his "role" within the unfolding "drama." The town appears carefully staged and spatially ordered, "set and display[ed]" for performance, making it feel more artificial and structured than the immersive landscapes of the Taverner estate, though still connected to natural rhythms through "a fleece of stars /.../ turning with the earth."

However, Starn also exceeds this stabilizing function through its own spatial agency, appearing to address Carston directly when he searches for the meaning of the Grail Cup and meets with Picus' father:

Carston heard a noise like bells he distinguished for the blood in his ears. Then there rang over Starn a variation on three notes, flood-tide pouring into the hill circle, passing out down the valleys, striking and hushed at once on the grass cloth of the hills. “Don’t tell,” said Starn bells. “Don’t tell. Don’t tell!” (Butts 1992: 77)

The “noise” initially blends with the rhythm of Carston’s bodily processes, through the “blood in his ears,” before expanding outward into the landscape, translated into external water-like imagery as “flood-tide pouring into the hill circle,” blurring auditory and natural registers and rendering the environment as a continuously affective system (Alaimo 2010: 2). The repetition of the sound “Don’t tell” in threes intensifies the rhythmic and communicative force of the scene, while the personification of the bells gives the environment agency by making the space itself speak. Unlike the Dorset countryside, Starn appears more attuned to Carston’s perception, operating as an affective environment that both stabilizes and disrupts him through sensory and communicative intensity. Again, Butts constructs space as affective and relational, one that can also directly shape human perception and experience.

2.2.4. Cities: Paris and London

The city sections, experienced by the Taverner siblings Felix and Scylla, mark a shift from the relational openness associated with Dorset to more fragmented and alienating urban environments. As Felix first arrives in the metropolis, he “felt the rhythm of Paris begin to stir him and caress. /.../ His lost goodness returned, recomposed out of adoring attention, until like a polished bay, the Place de la Concorde opened before him” (Butts 1992: 104). The “rhythm” of Paris suggests mechanization, as the city moves with a repetitive industrial pulse that acts directly on Felix’ body and emotions. This spatial intimacy of “caressing” is reinforced when he “remembered that he had a rendezvous with a person as well as Paris” (Butts 1992: 104). Placing the city alongside a human meeting implies that Paris itself functions as a relational presence, capable of carrying emotional and affective weight comparable to a person.

On the one hand, Paris offers a wider range of social encounters and experiences: “When they got back, the little bar off the dancing-room was roaring with the love of life” (Butts 1992:

107). Yet even these scenes of sociability are marked by bodily and animalistic imagery, as the “roaring” crowd evokes a wild environment, while “round their table moved the herd of painted animals” (Butts 1992: 125). The city crowd becomes bodily and transcorporeal, merging people, movement, and space into a shared affective environment. Similarly, the cafés of Paris, “filled with mirror panels squared with small red and gold lights. Like an old mirror that has a circle of miniature mirrors inlaid in its glass, the place reflected and repeated a great deal of what is going on in the world” (Butts 1992: 105) do not remain passive. Space here reproduces and multiplies social life, turning the café into a site where contemporary social, artistic, and cultural energies circulate and are mirrored back onto those inhabiting it (Fromm 1997: 255, 256, as quoted by Alaimo 2010: 11).

On the other hand, Paris generates “a different kind of loneliness,” to the physical isolation of Dorset, as Felix questions what it means to know oneself and feel alienated even near many people (Butts 1992: 104, 105–108). This detachment is reinforced through mechanical imagery describing Parisians: “Not that they were interested /.../ nobody was interested. Their pure speech hummed like a dynamo” (Butts 1992: 106). Human interaction becomes machine-like, as speech is described through industrial sound. The city’s rhythm therefore extends into its inhabitants, whose bodies and voices resemble mechanisms operating automatically rather than meaningfully connecting.

This fusion of mechanization and nature is evident in movement through the city: “They were on the shore of the Place de la Concorde, this time an empty sea. The taxi raced across its grey glass, over the arc of a bridge, and began to thread old Paris like a furious shuttle” (Butts 1992: 113). The square is rendered through natural imagery as “an empty sea,” yet this fluid image is cut by the taxi’s mechanical motion. Described “like a furious shuttle,” automobility is given affective force, producing a cityscape where bodies, vehicles, and space are entangled

in shared momentum. The weaving metaphor further suggests that movement through the city actively generates connections between spaces, bodies, and affective states.

“If Paris is a lovely salon displayed for conversation, London is a lumber-room to be foraged for junk, rubbish, white elephants, treasure” (Butts 1992: 114). This is the line through which Butts shifts the narrative focus from the unstable sociability of Paris to the more overfull affectively intense milieu of London, where Scylla meets her old friend Lydia. The city description actively produces bodily and emotional distortion, as:

She arrived in London at the time when all reasonable citizens are trying to leave it, and the place seems fuller than ever. Full of townspeople shewn up by the magnificence of summer, with children who appear brutalised from want of contact with things growing; where, in spite of every grit-weathered leaf, there is a pretence made that all is for the best inside the vast, roaring, fortuitous wilderness: that Epping Forest is the true greenwood, and Southend virgin sea (Butts 1992: 114).

The passage presents London as paradoxical and overwhelming, a space that feels “fuller than ever” even as people try to leave it, creating a sense of pressure and sensory excess. This intensity is not just spatial but bodily, as children appear “brutalised from want of contact with things growing,” suggesting that the urban environment affects their development through lack of exposure to nature; the mention of a “grit-weathered leaf” hints at how degraded and limited natural life seems within the city. At the same time, Scylla’s observation points to a shared misrecognition, where places like “Epping Forest” and “Southend” are framed as “true” nature, even though this sense of naturalness is exposed as a constructed illusion.

Lydia’s marriage and London home are presented as artificial and restrictive compared to the openness of Dorset. Scylla describes her entering “the new sitting-room with its faked cabinets and painful majolicas /.../ Lydia in a too-short frock and a too-tight hair wave, and a too-pink make-up, reading the Romaunt de La Rose” (Butts 1992: 115), where Lydia’s body appears “too”-constrained and over-styled². Scylla reads Lydia’s compliance as a degrading performance, as she is animalized and ridiculed through the metaphor of “a stunt to please her

² “Romaunt de La Rose” used as an intertextual reference hinting at a conquest of love through the imagery of picking a “rose.”

husband, like a lion riding a bicycle at a fair” (Butts 1992: 115). This critique seems tied to class tension, as Lydia has married below the social position of “a woman bred out of great stone castles” (Butts 1992: 115), and her husband is similarly animalized as “a sick little animal /.../ laying paws on her pride” (Butts 1992: 116) and a “misplaced insect” (Butts 1992: 117), reinforcing Scylla’s perception of him as socially and bodily inferior.

Keeping with the intertextual nature imagery, their shared home is described as “a house where there would be no children, nor any garden for forgiveness full of the other’s favorite flowers” (Butts 1992: 116-117), which frames the domestic space as affectively and relationally closed. The absence of “children” and a “garden” removes the regenerative qualities often associated with nature, suggesting a home that cannot sustain growth or renewal. The image of “no garden for forgiveness” is affectively significant, linking emotional reconciliation to a missing material environment. In Alaimo’s (2010) terms, the house becomes a space where affect cannot circulate freely between bodies or be grounded in shared, living surroundings.

In contrast, Scylla’s life in Dorset is linked to greater personal freedom and relational possibility. Lydia notes that “Scylla had kept her freedom, was up to all their old amusements out in Europe, down in the South” (Butts 1992: 116). The South and Dorset woods stand for shared activity and more fluid identities outside urban domestic constraints, which complicates conventional associations between city modernity and liberation, as well as the relationship between the two friends who now metaphorically represent their respective environments. The following disagreement between the women is not verbalized but emerges as bodily affect, registered through physiological intensification as “the blood rising in Lydia’s face,” which is immediately refigured not as a blush but as a “tide to the brain,” shifting emotion into the register of natural movement and flow. This affective escalation is then spatialized, as the emotional rupture, “brutal farewells” in their friendship take form through environmental

language, where “a gulf had opened between them,” their conflict expressed through a widening, landscape-like separation. (Butts 1992: 121, 122)

Lydia nonetheless remains emotionally attached to Dorset, admitting “London makes me ache for it. I hear the waves turning over – don’t interrupt, Phil – and the branches turning round in the wood” (Butts 1992: 118). Her memory of waves and branches signals a continued sensory connection to the natural environment. This contrast with the London interior reinforces Dorset and the South as spaces of relational openness (Alaimo 2010: 2), while the city appears controlled and limiting. This is also indicated by the determined refusal to obey the interruption of the husband in her attempt to reclaim some personal space, even if only in memories.

These sections on Paris and London reinforce Butts’ broader contrast between rural and urban environments. Rural space is presented as immersive and relational, allowing fluid connections between bodies, objects, and surroundings. In Paris, social life becomes both animalistic and machinic, marked by movement, noise, and a persistent inability to form deeper connections. London, by contrast, appears more restrictive and artificial, staging a false sense of nature while limiting genuine exchange between bodies and environments. Across both cities, urban space disrupts the flow between human and nonhuman entities, while rural space sustains their continuity.

2.3. Bodies Merging with Space

This section looks at “brain–body–world entanglements” (Blackman 2012: 1, as quoted by Garrington 2015: 89) by examining how bodies, emotions, and spaces merge, so that bodily experience becomes spatial and emotions take on material, almost physical forms. This becomes particularly visible in Clarence’s response to the shifting relations between Scylla and Picus. This deepening relationship makes Clarence depressively turn inward: “He walked slowly, inside himself, petting his phantoms, especially a phantom of Picus, the body up at the house was behaving more and more unlike” (Butts 1992: 89). The differentiation between affect

and emotion therefore also becomes a question of where feeling is located (Taylor 2015: 7–8) and, in Butts’ text, this location extends beyond the boundaries of the physical body into an extended space, allowing Clarence to “walk” within himself.

Picus steps into another affective realm, as he realizes his feelings towards Scylla: “Immediately, he stepped 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” (Butts 1992: 96). In contrast to Clarence’s constricting and negative affective space, Picus’ experience is marked by openness and expansion. His earlier description as “rootless” draws on natural vocabulary, suggesting a lack of grounding, which is here transformed through his affective relation to Scylla. This new emotional state appears to root him, not only psychologically but spatially, producing a sense of being more fully situated and included within the world he inhabits and shares.

For Clarence, however, the opposite occurs. As his negative affect intensifies, his emotions begin to take on an increasingly material and autonomous form: “Through the grilling haze, Luxury, Malice, and Untruth strolled over the grass to Clarence” (Butts 1992: 91). Here, emotions are not only externalized but personified and spatialized, moving toward him as named entities. Their capitalization as proper names reinforces their agency, as emotional experience exceeds the body and becomes something that confronts him physically.

Nature here is not background but interchangeable with the body (Alaimo 2010: 2), as shown in Scylla’s shifting animal and natural descriptions, including comparisons to birds (Butts 1992: 143–144, 192), a cat (Butts 1992: 170), and the term “bitch,” a female dog (Butts 1992: 5, 10, 96, 149). Similar animal imagery appears in Picus as bird (Butts 1992: 19, 52, 216, 257) and cat (Butts 1992: 88–89), Boris as wolf (Butts 1992: 201, 253), and Ross as dog-like (Butts 1992: 6, 45), showing bodies framed through nonhuman forms. This is extended when Scylla is merged with nature: “The ash-fair tree-tall young woman /.../ The wood and the

woman might be interchangeable” (Butts 1992: 12), and her body is described “like a light tree” shaped by “summer's long wave-tumbling and the caresses of the sea” (Butts 1992: 174), suggesting mutual shaping between body and environment.

This becomes explicit in Scylla’s meditation: “Then to detach herself she played an old game, that she was lying out on the wood’s roof: translating the stick and leaf that upheld her into herself: into sea: into sky. Sky back again into wood, flesh and sea. It did not work, as it was meant to, to deliver her from herself” (Butts 1992: 67-68). As Alaimo (2010: 2) argues “trans-corporeality reveals the interchanges and interconnections between various bodily natures,” and it is specifically this linguistic form of “trans-” that indicates movement across different embodiments, including crossing the boundaries between human and nonhuman creatures, ecological systems /.../ and other actors.” Her aim of affective “detachment” is significant, as the failure of the indicates that these shifts do not produce release from the self but intensify awareness of embodiment.

Taken together, these examples show how Butts constructs a literary world in which bodies, emotions, and spaces are deeply entangled. Emotional states extend into and reshape the environments they inhabit, while spaces become responsive to and expressive of bodily experience. In this way, affect operates as a mediating force that dissolves clear boundaries between inner and outer, so that bodies become spatial and spaces become bodily.

2.3.1. Spatiality of Bodies Through Movement

Passages from *The Taverner Novels* portray dance as an effectively modernist method through which embodiment, affect, and relationality are explored. Across the chosen three examples, dance becomes a way of thinking about both freedom of expression and the instability of bodily boundaries. At the same time, the text complicates the traditional idea that dance simply expresses an inner self and, instead, demonstrates how movement can merge bodies with nature, provoke emotional realization, and even manifest involuntary bodily states.

The first passage presents dance as a form of transcorporeal connection, a merging of bodies during a moment of shared social affect: “Let’s dance,” said Scylla; and they danced together, the six of them, but Picus infinitely the best. One of the little things he could do, but not one with Scylla, who moved about with her brother, limbs of the same tree.” (Butts 1992: 37). The comparison of Scylla and her brother to “limbs of the same tree” (Butts 1992: 37) evokes a form of transcorporeality (Alaimo 2010: 2) in which the dancers appear as extensions of a shared organism rather than as separate individuals. The dance movements of the inner circle, described as tightly knit, suggest kinship and produce a sense of collective embodiment. Dance here dissolves the boundaries that normally distinguish individual bodies, aligning them instead with natural structures, in this case a tree.

This ambiguity reflects the idea that the fundamental elements of dance are difficult to delineate because movement does not necessarily have a distinct beginning or end and cannot easily be assigned a fixed meaning (Atkinson and Duffy 2015: 97). In the scene, the act of dancing is spontaneous and loosely organized. The absence of speech describing the dancers’ intentions, conveyed by the simple phrase “let’s dance” (Butts 1992: 37), leaves the movements open to interpretation and action. As a result, the significance of the scene through the shifting relationships between the bodies involved.

The fact that Scylla, the heroine of both novels, initiates the dance is significant when considered alongside 20th-century ideas about dance as a particularly powerful form of female expression (Atkinson and Duffy 2015: 98). Scylla’s suggestion can be read as an assertion of agency through bodily experience. At the same time, because the dance unfolds collectively, rather than as an individual performance, Scylla’s initiation creates a shared space of bodily interaction.

The text suggests that embodied movement and rhythm can reveal the inner emotional states of male characters as well. Dance becomes a broader mechanism through which internal

tensions surface in physical movement. This is evident in Boris's recollection of the moment that prompted his confession about loyalties in the second novel, *Death of Felicity Taverner*:

It came back to me at dawn, with the birds. But more when I went down to the rocks where the sea dances, as you say, a ballet with each tide. That is so. I remembered all that had happened there. How we played long ago in Paris, and how not you but your lovely cousin got the apple. I did not agree. /.../ I had just remembered it all, seen it all, and had to run up off those rocks like a man under a curse. (Butts 1992: 206).

Here, the image of the sea “dancing” with each tide could be read as an externalization of Boris's psychological turmoil. Boris is caught between the inner circle of the Taverners and Felicity's husband, Kralin, placing him in a position where he has to betray somebody. The memory triggered by the dancing sea therefore brings this unresolved conflict into the open.

The final reference to dance occurs after Boris undergoes an intense psychological episode at the Taverner estate, a landscape that repeatedly provokes memories and anxieties connected to his past. Surrounded by the natural environment, Boris experiences a moment resembling a traumatic flashback, in which buried memories surface with overwhelming force. After this episode passes, the narrator describes his relief in peculiarly physical terms: “Their Slav sat down again, propped his back against the rough purple bark of a fir. He was feeling a little better, as people do whose skeletons have done rattling, popped out and done their dance and gone back to their cupboard” (Butts 1992: 311). The metaphor of the skeleton “doing its dance” (Butts 1992: 311) evokes an image of the body temporarily animated by an uncontrollable internal force, before settling back into stillness. This description resonates strongly with the idea of trauma as a bodily phenomenon. The passage frames distress as something that erupts through the body.

The episode shows how dance can emerge not from deliberate artistic expression but from the body's confrontation with emotional and psychological pressure. Seen in this light, the image of a skeleton performing a dance evokes ideas of numbness and emotional fragmentation often associated with literary portrayals of young men who have been affected by World War I. The metaphor of the skeleton momentarily “popping out” (Butts 1992: 311)

could reflect this sense of involuntary expression. This resonates with his earlier description of running from the rocks “like a man under a curse” (Butts 1992: 206), suggesting that Boris is suffering from a trauma, in which memory, anxiety, and bodily reaction are entangled in ways he cannot consciously manage. By rendering this psychological turmoil through metaphors of bodily movement and distorted dance, Butts approaches mental distress in an unusual and distinctly modernist way.

Yet this disturbing movement also produces relief, as “once the skeleton has “done its dance” Boris feels somewhat better. In all these scenes moments of dance represent a form of release. The image of the sea performing its “ballet with each tide” (Butts 1992: 206) prompts Boris to confront a memory he had suppressed, forcing an emotional truth to surface, similarly to his skeletal “dance” emerging from trauma and anxiety, yet ultimately releasing tension. Scylla’s invitation to dance in the earlier scene represents a more positive and voluntary form of bodily expression that encourages a more intimate connection that also mends social stress in the group. Taken together, these moments suggest that such forms of embodied expression are valued highly within Butts’ narrative world. Dance becomes one of the methods through which the novels explore transcorporeality and affective connectedness.

The image of the sea performing a “ballet with each tide” (Butts 1992: 205) invites a reconsideration of movement not only as spatial choreography but also as a medium through which affect circulates between bodies and environments. Reading the sea in this way situates it within a broader modernist interest in movement, embodiment, and the body’s sensory engagement with space. The first account of swimming in *The Taverner Novels* takes place in the very first chapter and subtly stages an affective and spatial division between bodies that can enter the sea and those that remain at the shore. Felix’s movement into the water is described as effortless bodily immersion:

One of them sat up, and rolled off the reef’s edge into the sea. /.../ It was Felix, the brother, who had swum out. His sister sat up and watched him with the touch of anxiety common to females, however disciplined. “Be careful,” she called, “the tide’s turning.” He wallowed under the sea. /.../ she stood up

and watched the boy's head popping in and out of the crisp water. Naked, the enormous space, the rough earth dressed her. The sparking sea did not. But the sea at the moment was something for the men to swim in, an enormous toy. She thought again: 'He won't drown. Besides, why worry?' (Butts 1992: 5)

Although there is immediate bodily engagement with space, the physicality of movement is not rendered through technical detail or physical exertion. The language of "rolled off the reef's edge into the sea" and "his head popping in and out of the crisp water" suggests loose, unrestrained motion rather than effort or discipline of a learned swimming stroke. The verb in "wallowed under the sea" conveys an almost indulgent, playful relation to the space, reinforced by the description of the sea as "something for the men to swim in, an enormous toy." Here, the sea functions as an open affective space that invites fluid bodily movement and sensory engagement, yet this ease is unevenly distributed, as it is explicitly framed as accessible to men, while Scylla remains excluded from the physical immersion with the space.

Scylla in contrast remains spatially fixed on land, watching Felix from the shore. Her relationship with the sea is defined through distance and observation, as she is not shown swimming at any point in the novels. The sentence "Naked, the enormous space, the rough earth dressed her. The sparking sea did not" is particularly significant, as it suggests that land provides a form of grounding or protective quality, or containment, that "dresses" her body. Bodily contact with water appears almost too intimate here, resisting the same kind of stabilizing incorporation that land affords, specifically with Scylla.

This produces a clear affective distinction in how space is encountered. The sea allows fluid, almost careless movement for the men, while Scylla's relation to it is limited to observation. This spatial arrangement produces an affective imbalance, as Felix experiences the sea through mobility, play, and immersion, while Scylla encounters it through anxiety, restraint, and spectatorship. The scene therefore frames the sea as a space of bodily freedom that is unevenly accessible, where gendered bodies are oriented differently within the same environment. Her response "He won't drown. Besides, why worry?" further reinforces this distance, where affective tension is quickly neutralized.

This symbiotic engagement between Felix and the sea continues as he steps out of the water: “Something long and white came up behind them out of the sea. An extra wave washed Felix a ledge higher. “Thank you,” he said and skipped across” (Butts 1992: 6). As he exits the water, “an extra wave washed Felix a ledge higher,” momentarily animating the sea and turning it into an agentive force that participates in shaping bodily movement. This attribution of agency to the environment produces a sense of distributed agency, where movement is not located solely in the human body but emerges through an entangled relation between body and space. The sea operates as a transcorporeal field in which Felix’s body and the aquatic environment continuously co-produce movement. His response, “Thank you,” reinforces this as a moment of perceived reciprocity. At the same time, this spatial intimacy remains subjective. The sea’s “agency” is fleeting, while Felix alone translates this encounter into an articulated affect.

A similar dynamic appears in a later chapter in *Armed with Madness*, where Carston and Felix swim together, but the sea is again differently registered through their bodies. Carston remains largely outside the affective logic of the space, encountering the water as a surface for comparison and bodily performance: “After breakfast he had the sea full; bathing with Felix who treated the sea like a living animal. Carston was content to show how well he swam. Very content, that he swam so well, better than the boy” (Butts 1992: 18). Here, swimming does not function as an affective connection between body and environment or between two human bodies but is reduced to a competitive display of masculinity. This contrasts sharply with Felix’s mode of engagement with the space, where he “bathes” rather than swims, and treats the sea “as a living animal,” suggesting an openness to the sea as an active, affective entity. The sea becomes a textured, living spatial field that shapes Felix’s movement as much as it is shaped by it, while Carston remains unable to access this relational intensity, reducing the same space to measurable performance.

Across the two swimming scenes in *The Taverner Novels*, the sea is framed as an immersive, rhythmic environment through which affect circulates between body and space through motion. Swimming extends the logic of dance into a liquid medium, foregrounding transcorporeal entanglement and embodied immersion as key modes of spatial experience, while also revealing how such affective connectedness may be unevenly distributed within the narrative world. Nonetheless, it echoes already established notions of affective connectedness between Butts' literary space and the bodies of her characters, and foregrounds affect as the mediating force between human and nonhuman matter.

CONCLUSION

This thesis examined how Mary Butts' *The Taverner Novels* (1932) construct space as an affective, relational, and materially active field in which bodies, environments, and objects continuously co-produce meaning. The first aim of the thesis was to show how Butts constructs literary space through affect as a mediating force between body and environment, challenging stable distinctions between inner and outer, human and nonhuman, and subject and environment. A secondary aim was to contribute to the expanding scholarship on modernist spatial aesthetics and the recovery of modernist women's writing by foregrounding Butts' distinctive treatment of affective and embodied space. Across the thesis, the novels have been read through a framework that combines affect theory, transcorporeality, and literary spatial studies to show how bodies and environments are entangled in processes of mutual transformation. Rather than treating space as representational or symbolic alone, the analysis has focused on how space acts, affects, and responds within the narrative world of *The Taverner Novels*.

The first chapter of the thesis situates Mary Butts within modernist literary studies and provides the contextual background necessary for examining *The Taverner Novels* as affective and spatially dynamic texts. It introduces the research aims of the thesis and outlines the relevance of affect theory and transcorporeality for studying the relations between body and space in literature. Drawing particularly on Julie Taylor's contextualizing work *Modernism and Affect* (2015) and Stacy Alaimo's concept of transcorporeality developed in *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (2010), affect is understood in this thesis as relational, circulating between bodies, objects, and environments rather than existing solely within individual subjects. This provided the conceptual basis for reading bodies and spaces as porous and mutually constitutive rather than separate entities in meaning-making.

The second chapter provides a brief summary of the two novels and develops an analytical approach that focuses on textual and contextual details in passages that specifically underscore interactions between bodies and environment. This reveals how Butts' literary space is constructed through affective encounters and, in turn, how affect is produced at the level of language. The following empirical chapter is thus structured around these key areas of analysis, including natural landscapes, mythologized objects, urban environments, bodily movement, and transcorporeal relations between bodies and space.

The analysis demonstrates that Dorset functions as an affective and ritualized literary environment where landscapes actively shape bodily experience and emotional atmosphere. The Taverner country house is structured almost as a liminal space, where the veranda mediates between interior and exterior space, and where natural elements extend into and permeate the domestic house. Through this porosity, distinctions between inside and outside dissolve, as the house comes alive as part of the surrounding landscape and enters into conversation with the characters through agentive agency, exemplifying how Alaimo's theory of affect circulates seamlessly between bodies, space, and nature in *The Taverner Novels*.

The natural Dorset landscape itself becomes performative, as everyday actions take on ritual qualities and natural elements respond to human presence. Natural spaces repeatedly emerge as immersive and unstable environments structured through sensory detail, enclosure, rhythm, and performative staging, where the Taverner inner circle knows their role and outsiders fail to fit in. The jade cup, mistaken for the Grail, solidifies this framing of the setting as a "play," as it acquires its mythical and sacred status not through factual origin but through affective perception and interpretation. The cup's affective quality actively destabilizes spatial logic, producing looping and enclosed environments where the item and landscapes mirror one another in description, affective uncertainty, and mythic resonance. It does not simply exist as an object within the story but actively structures the affective field and space around it. Spatial

meaning is therefore again generated through circulation between human and nonhuman bodies, rather than existing as a fixed representation.

This staged quality extends into Starn, which operates for Carston as a mediating space between rural immersion and urban fragmentation. Unlike the dense affective saturation of the Taverner estate, Starn introduces a more legible spatial structure while still retaining a degree of theatrical social qualities. However, it also demonstrates how space can become agential, by addressing characters directly and shaping perception through auditory and atmospheric intensity. Starn thus functions as both stabilizing and destabilizing, revealing the persistence of affect even in more socially organized environments.

The analysis further shows that affective relations between bodies and environments structure the representation of space throughout the novels. The Tollerdown Cottage further deepens the analysis of spatial affect by presenting a space in which architecture, landscape, and body become indistinguishable. Here, affect is overwhelmingly negative, producing fear that is not tied to specific objects but emerges from environmental misattunement. This demonstrates how Butts' literary space can directly shape psychological states, making emotional experience inseparable from material surroundings through the blurring of nature/bodily descriptions, as Clarence's emotional distress is expressed through bodily vulnerability and dispersed or fractured spatial experience.

In contrast to natural spaces, the cities in *The Taverner Novels* are characterized by a constant tension between organic and mechanical affects. Paris is marked by intense sensory and social circulation where, despite urban environments being described in natural or city people in animalistic terms, these natural affects are structurally undercut by machinic and artificial registers. In addition to the automobile cutting through the sea of Place de la Concorde, the speech of city people also often takes on machinic qualities that blur distinctions between human and system. Paris is represented as affectively isolating despite its density of social

contact, where proximity to others does not produce meaningful connection but instead intensifies a sense of detachment, aligning with broader modernist literary themes.

While Paris retains traces of movement and social intensity, London emerges as a paradoxical and overwhelming space, characterized by sensory excess and a sense of pressure. The city produces only strained and mediated versions of natural life, where any sense of organic environment is withering, constructed, or misrecognized. This misalignment extends into bodily experience, as urban life is shown to disrupt growth and embodied attunement to living environments. Domestic space within London intensifies these dynamics by highlighting artificiality and restriction, as the apartment becomes a closed and performative environment marked by class tension. The absence of genuine connection is likened to a garden metaphor, signaling a loss of regenerative and affective circulation. In contrast, Dorset and the South persist as embodied memories of openness, movement, and relational freedom, highlighting the extent to which London operates as a space of containment where affect can circulate between bodies and environments, but in fragmented and strained forms.

Across all spatial settings, a key pattern emerges. Affect does not originate within individual subjects but circulates between bodies and environments, as space is consistently shown to be active, responsive, and co-constitutive of emotional and bodily experience. Movement, particularly in the form of dance and swimming, intensifies this entanglement. Dance scenes show bodies affectively merging into collective forms, dissolving individuality into shared motion and forms of nonhuman embodiment. In these moments, bodies are moved by affective forces, including involuntary, rattling dance-like responses to trauma, where emotional intensity becomes physically enacted and externalized. These states are mirrored in nature, where rhythmic and cyclical movements echo the same affective forces circulating between body and environment. Swimming scenes extend this logic into aquatic space, where the body becomes physically immersed in space, and where the force of movement is

distributed between body and environment. In both cases, agency is no longer located solely in human subjects but emerges through relational fields of motion and affective response. These scenes show movement functioning not simply as expression but as a relational process that temporarily dissolves bodily boundaries and produces moments of emotional release, connection, or psychological confrontation.

The final sections of the analysis also demonstrate that Butts constructs bodies as fundamentally porous and spatially extended. Emotional states are not contained within individuals but externalize into the environment, where they take on material and sometimes autonomous form. This is evident in the personification of emotions, the animation of landscapes, and the constant blending of bodily and environmental description. Characters are repeatedly merged with animals, landscapes, vegetation, and water, foregrounding the transcorporeal exchanges between human and nonhuman entities. This reinforces the idea that bodily identity is not fixed but relationally produced through environmental contact. As such, bodies become readable only through their interactions with space, and space becomes legible only through its effects on bodies.

Taken together, the analysis demonstrates that *The Taverner Novels* construct affect as a structuring principle of spatial experience. Butts constructs her literary space as fundamentally affective and relational, as space, objects, bodies, and emotions continuously reshape one another. Affect thus extends from an internal psychological state to a relational force that binds bodies and environments in continuous exchange. Space therefore becomes expressive, as it shapes, responds to, and intensifies emotional and bodily states. Bodies, in turn, are not closed entities containing affect, but open extensions of spatial and environmental processes. They are affected by and affect atmospheric conditions, are transformed by movement, and reconfigured through interaction with objects and landscapes. The boundary between body and space is thus consistently unstable, producing a model of embodiment that is distributed rather than

contained. Butts' literary environments therefore resist stable divisions between subject and object, inner and outer, or human and nonhuman. Instead, the novels depict space as something continuously produced through affective interaction and sensory experience.

Affect, on the example of *The Taverner Novels*, is produced at the level of language through the accumulation of sensory detail, metaphorical transfer of bodily/natural/mechanical values, rhythmic repetition, and shifting descriptions that intensify relations between bodies, objects, and environments. These linguistic features do not merely represent affective states but actively generate them by structuring perception in ways that heighten pressure, movement, and relational intensity within the text. Affect is also produced through moments of nonverbal communication between bodies and space, as well as through the atmospheres these interactions generate, where meaning emerges from embodied proximity, movement, and environmental responsiveness rather than articulated language alone.

This thesis hopes to contribute to contemporary modernist literature studies by demonstrating how Butts expands modernist spatial writing by foregrounding natural, collective, and affective forms of spatial experience through the presentation of bodies and environments as deeply interconnected. The work also shows how affect theory and transcorporeality, despite their conceptual ambiguity and methodological challenges, can be productively applied to the analysis of literary texts, and how close attention to spatial construction can reveal wider dynamics of meaning within a literary work. Most importantly, this thesis hopes to elevate Mary Butts to the level of her contemporaries so that her name becomes more widely recognized and her work more extensively studied.

The scope of this thesis remains necessarily selective. While the analysis focuses on the affective relations between bodies and space, *The Taverner Novels* would also allow for further study through ecological criticism, queer modernism, spirituality and occultism, gender studies, or material object studies. Future research could additionally examine how affective spatiality

functions across Butts' wider body of work or compare her treatment of literary space with that of other women modernists concerned with landscape, embodiment, and affect.

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RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Liisbet Aruste

Bodies, Space, and Affective Entanglement in *The Taverner Novels* by Mary Butts
Kehad, ruum ja afektiivsed seosed Mary Buttsi Taverneri romaanides

Magistritöö

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Lehekülgede arv: 80

Annotatsioon:

Magistritöö uurib kuidas Mary Buttsi Taverneri romaanid loovad kirjanduslikku ruumi kehade, objektide ja keskkondade vaheliste afektiivsete suhete kaudu. Töö eesmärk on analüüsida, kuidas afekt romaanides keha ja ruumi vahel ringleb.

Magistritöö koosneb sissejuhatusest, kahest põhipeatükist ja kokkuvõttest.

Sissejuhatus asetab Mary Buttsi tänapäevase modernistliku kirjandusteaduse konteksti ja tutvustab Taverneri romaane kui afektiivseid ja ruumiliselt dünaamilisi tekste. Samuti annab see tööle kontekstuaalse tausta ja esitab selle uurimiseesmärgid.

Esimene põhipeatükk tutvustab autori tausta modernismi kontekstis, annab ülevaate varasematest uuringutest ning loob järgneva analüüsi jaoks afekti, transkorporeaalsust ja ruumiteooriaid kombineeriva teoreetilise raamistiku. Metodoloogia tugineb Julie Taylori ja Stacey Alaimo töödele.

Teine, empiiriline peatükk arendab esmalt välja sünteesitud analüütilise lähenemisviisi afektiteooriast ja transkorporeaalsusest ning rakendab seda seejärel Taverneri romaanide ruumide lähilugemises. Analüüs tuvastab afektiivseid hetki tekstiliste ja kontekstuaalsete detailide kaudu, kus piir keha ja ruumi vahel on hägustunud. Fookuses olevad ruumid on Dorseti loodus, seda ümbritsevad kirjanduslikud kohad Starn ja Tollderdown, Pariisi ja Londoni linnakeskkond ning lõpuks kehaline ruumilisus läbi liikumise, tantsu ja ujumise.

Analüüs näitab, kuidas kehade, objektide ja keskkonna omavaheliste suhete kaudu kujuneb ruumiline ja emotsionaalne tähendus, ning milliseid kirjanduslikke vahendeid on selle loomiseks kasutatud. Kokkuvõtte sünteesib magistritöö peamised leiud, rõhutades selle väärtust kaasaegses kirjandusteaduses ja pakkudes välja edasisi võimalikke uurimisvõimalusi seoses antud teema ja autoriga.

Märksõnad: modernistlik kirjandus, afekt, ruum, transkorporeaalsus, Mary Butts

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