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| Butts, Mary (1890 – 1937) |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| Mary Butts was a well-known and prolific novelist, essayist, poet and writer of short stories in her time. First published by Robert McAlmon, Butts was acquainted with and admired by a host of familiar modernist figures, such as Ernest Hemingway, Jean Cocteau, Hilda Doolittle, Ezra Pound, Marianne Moore, Djuna Barnes, and married for many years to the important publisher of modernist writing John Rodker. Despite her prominence on the scene of modernist writing, and being published in leading modernist journals such as the *Dial*, the *Little Review* and the *Transatlantic Review*, she was largely forgotten after her death until her rediscovery in the early 1990s. |
| Mary Butts was a well-known and prolific novelist, essayist, poet and writer of short stories in her time. First published by Robert McAlmon, Butts was acquainted with and admired by a host of familiar modernist figures, such as Ernest Hemingway, Jean Cocteau, Hilda Doolittle, Ezra Pound, Marianne Moore, Djuna Barnes, and married for many years to the important publisher of modernist writing John Rodker. Despite her prominence on the scene of modernist writing, and being published in leading modernist journals such as the *Dial*, the *Little Review* and the *Transatlantic Review*, she was largely forgotten after her death until her rediscovery in the early 1990s.  Notorious for her flamboyant and bohemian lifestyle, Butts was a socialist and pacifist during the war, intently engaging with the modern cultural landscape of her day marked by psychoanalysis, quantum physics, primitivism, and, crucially, the trauma caused by the conflict. At the same time, her work is marked by a tension between the old and modern world. Butts developed a love of classical mythology in early childhood, which deepened in adolescence as she became profoundly influenced by the writings of the classicist Jane Ellen Harrison, who celebrated ritual as the forgotten origin of art and religion, and ancient matriarchal cults and goddesses. This led to a greater interest in anthropology for Butts and its extensive use in her writing. Her work explores the bewilderment felt in response to changes wrought by the technological and scientific progress of modernity. It seeks both to give voice to and counteract the typical rootlessness of the period by showing continuity with the past through a revival of a link with the ‘primitive’ and also through the use of classical allusions and fairy tales.  Butts’s use of allegory and symbolism is also an attempt to convey mystical experience inexpressible through realist modes. There is a quest in her work for 'a fresh ‘spiritual’ adventure […] a re-statement & a development of our old experience in the field which gave us our religions’ (*Journals* 341). Butts’s spiritual quest takes the form of a mystical, pagan relationship to place and nature, which is sometimes expressed in xenophobic, even racial supremacist language regarding her native England. Her mysticism led her to explore occultist practices, including studying magic with Aleister Crowley – an experience which deepened her involvement with opium and other substances, eventually leading to her untimely death in 1937. List of WorksNovels *Ashe of Rings* (1925)  *Armed with Madness* (1928)  *Death of Felicity Taverner* (1932) Short Stories *Speed the Plough and Other Stories* (1923)  *From Altar to Chimney-piece* (1992)  *Several Occasions* (1932)  *With and Without Buttons and Other Stories* (1991)  *Last Stories* (1938) Historical Novels *The Macedonian* (1933)  *Scenes from the Life of Cleopatra* (1935) Autobiography *The Crystal Cabinet: My Childhood at Salterns* (1937) Journals *The Journals of Mary Butts*. Ed. Nathalie Blondel. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002. |
| Further reading:  (Blondel)  (Foy)  (Radford) |