

### Season, Landscape and Identity in the BBC *Ghost Story for Christmas*

The figures arrive out of the fog and smoke, or come into focus in the landscape, resolving into physicality. They are in the countryside, the English countryside, maybe in a small community, but isolated from large concentrations of human life. And they are going to face something terrifying, something that is probably rather old, something that has been disturbed. The landscape will observe, unconcerned with the human activity taking place within it. The birds will keep on singing as people are terrified, or even killed, by something supernatural.

This is the BBC *Ghost Story for Christmas*.

I warn you that this is a somewhat more associative paper than I normally present. I think that there are a lot of ideas and associations here, but I am aware that I may not always make the connections clear, largely because they are not, yet, clear to me. Not only that, but I am drawing here on a number of ideas which do not appear to have had significant academic exploration, or at least not that I have been able to find and access. For example, the emotional affect of the landscape is something that is key to this, but I am not aware of much work that focuses on it, although it is the sort of subject that is touched on in quite a few places. So if this is vague, apologies, and maybe our discussions can help with focussing these ideas.

In this paper I want to consider some ideas that stem from my current research into seasonal horror broadcasting, and which also connect to my wider concerns with genre broadcasting and how it relates to notions of identity. In particular, I want to focus on the way that seasons and landscape relate to identity using the series of programmes known as the *Ghost Story for Christmas*. [slide] These programmes ran with one episode a year throughout most of the 1970s, and are probably best remembered as adaptations of M.R.James' ghost stories, although they also included an adaptation of Dickens' *The Signalman* [slide] and two original stories in a contemporary, i.e. 1970s, setting. [slide] Three new episodes [slide] picking up on the strand have been produced so far in the 2000s, but no consistent, ongoing annual series has yet been established.

These productions relate to season in a number of different ways:

- Their very description by their title as a *Ghost Story for Christmas* indicates that these are connected to a particular season, although the actual on-screen title does vary, and rarely includes a direct connection to Christmas. Indeed, it can often simply present the episode title.
- The title of the series not only declares a connection to the season, but also connects the productions to the longer tradition of Christmas ghost stories. Indeed, the title *A Ghost Story for Christmas* is an almost direct lift of the subtitle of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol, Being a Ghost Story of Christmas*. [slide]
- This connection is reinforced by the productions being part of an ongoing tradition of ghost and horror stories broadcast at Christmas, a tradition which goes back almost to the beginning of broadcasting in

the UK. These thus connect the experience of Christmas with the expectation of a broadcast ghost story being part of the mix.

- Then there is the way that the seasons are represented within the productions themselves, which can be interpreted through the performances, and through the depiction of landscape, weather and behaviour.

These various associations between these texts and the season also relate in a number of ways to identity, particularly national identity, although, as with all programming, personal and group identity become closely tied up with these productions through memory and nostalgia. National identity, however, is embedded in the very practice of the Christmas ghost story, a practice which originates in England rather than Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. In each of those, Halloween is the time for horrific tales, something which was exported to North America through the emigration of groups from the countries, and which North America has been busy re-exporting to the rest of the world since at least the 1970s, in a large part through its depiction as the norm in broadcast texts and films.

However, I would also contend that the very depiction of the seasons through the representations of landscapes and the natural world in these adaptations itself has particular national resonances. These resonances and the understandings of the natural environment that are associated with them in turn add to the horror of these productions. This horror in particular turns upon the shift in understanding from the comfortingly familiar national landscape to something which is either indifferent or is actually inimical to human activity.

In order to demonstrate what I mean, let us start with a scene from one of the episodes of *a Ghost Story for Christmas*, 'Lost Hearts'.

### [CLIP]

This clip shows a fairly idyllic scene of a human figure in a landscape, which then turns horrific or uncanny in some way. This, to us, is a somewhat familiar landscape, one that is recognisable as an English landscape, complete with rolling hills, open fields, little copses of trees. This is a landscape which appears natural, but which is a product of thousands of years of human activity. The lyrical non-diegetic Vaughn Williams soundtrack emphasises, through its underscore of human, English, art, that this is an idyll of human construction.

But that ghostly whispering opens up uncanny possibilities. The boy may have been on his own, but this seemingly taunting supernatural presence emphasises that he is not just alone, but isolated, exposed to observation by unseen watchers in the woods. Those woods themselves shift from simply being part of the surroundings, simple dividers between different parts of the managed countryside, to being threatening areas of shadow and concealment. We cannot know how many watchers there are, nor can we know their nature.

And so the landscape turns from comfortingly familiar to unnervingly unfamiliar. England dissolves. And we are given the feeling that is summed up in an unattributed quotation provided by Robert Macfarlane: [slide]'Landscape was here long before we were even dreamed. It watched us arrive.' (Macfarlane, 2008, p. 59) Our ancestors may have shaped the countryside, cut down the wildwood, carved the soil with ploughs, shifted stone to make fields, planted then rooted up hedges, moved rivers and hills. But there is something older than landscape beneath crop and tree and soil, in the bedrock of the land.

This twist of the familiar and comforting landscape into the unfamiliar and discomfiting recurs throughout the *Ghost Story for Christmas*, and I think is a key part of the affect and effect of these productions. So let's contextualise them, bring in some other concepts to help us work out what is going on.

The narratives all take place within the countryside, within the landscape, with the only real exception being *Number 13*, which takes place largely within the confines of an inn and of a cathedral's archives. Even there, one character declares that 'This is mostly a rural community.' This adds to a sense of isolation which I am arguing is key to these productions and to their success, and which has been identified as a central concern of the work of M.R.James. James was considered to be a very sociable person and his weird tales typically contain horrors that only occur when the protagonist is alone, and which are dispelled by the presence of others. In these adaptations, isolation is emphasised by the distances not only between people, but also between gatherings. Characters may travel from location to location, either by train or by bicycle or by foot, but there is a definite sense that humanity exists in little pockets of communities, or largely solitary country houses, surrounded by the natural world.

The relationships with the representation of a seasonal landscape in broadcasting a horror or ghost story discussed in this article are not limited to the *Ghost Story for Christmas* productions. However, they are a part of the popular view of these dramas. In describing a typical *Ghost Story for Christmas* in *The Guardian*, Sarah Dempster included [slide] 'stunning, panoramic shots of a specific area of the British landscape' as one of the key characteristics (2005, p. 6). We can connect this to other rural and particularly period rural horror dramas, which use the calm of the countryside to highlight the horrors within, but I think it interesting that Dempster chooses to emphasise the specifically British nature of the landscape here in relation to these programmes.

A particular aspect of these productions, as is common with the televisual or cinematic ghost story, is that they contain frequent scenes where there is little or nothing being said, and where human action is minimal or even absent altogether. This means that the viewer is encouraged to consider the environment more closely, looking for signs of movement, for identifiable figures, for human action with which to engage. This is particularly encouraged in a number of the *Ghost Story for Christmas* productions by scenes in which the haunted protagonist scans their environment, or where there are simply shots of parts of their surroundings. This happens particularly in 'A Warning to the Curious' and 'A View From a Hill', where Paxton and Fanshawe respectively scan their surrounding woodland for pursuing figures. With the

absence of human figures, the viewer is encouraged to engage with the image of the landscape itself, taking in the signs of the season and experiencing a response to those signs.

Indeed, Su Harper has called landscape [slide] 'the sublime object, since it raises consciousness while being itself immobile.' (Harper, 2010, p. 150) Unlike people it does not demonstrably react to individuals or to actions. It simply is. She also argues for the significance of landscape in human culture, saying [slide]:

On the most primitive level, the natural world - the one which we inherit - provides the raw material of culture. The sights and sounds of nature are what human beings use to construct an *emotional ecology*. From these rocks, trees and water - from these deserts, winds and flowers - human beings construct systems of myth which enable them to discriminate between the pure and the impure, the sacred and profane. But cultural artefacts vary enormously in the manner in which they deal with these mythological systems. (Harper, 2010, p. 149)

So Harper indicates the way that the representations of landscape through the media connect to the specificities of the culture. Many nations connect the characteristics of their peoples to the earth, the rock, the forests of their homelands, but each does so in a specific way.

The rural landscapes of the *Ghost Story for Christmas* consist most often of woodland and open land, often associated with water, rather than the working landscape of farms. Even where, as in 'Lost Hearts', this landscape is one of parkland around a country house, it is largely empty of people, and there is a sense of abandonment and wildness to be found. The horror of the story is typically one that resides within this landscape, or is at least made manifest within it, using the loneliness of the countryside as a place to unnerve, or attack, the unwary. We can see this in the attacks made on characters within the woodland of 'A Warning to the Curious' and 'A View From a Hill', for example.

[clip]

There is possibly something to be made of the recurring connection with wood and water in this adaptations. These are, of course, simply indicative of the natural world, and the expressions of woodland and waterway are part of what marks out the specifically English, and regional, natures of these landscapes. However, I have a nagging feeling that there is something more supernatural and specific about their connection. They are two of the five Chinese classical elements, but beyond providing general mystical associations, that would seem to be an odd connection for the adaptations to make, at least consciously. So if anyone has any ideas why I have this feeling that the association of wood and water may be significant, and what that connection may be, let me know!

Of course, these rural landscapes and country houses are a key part of the heritage drama, where they are used to present what has been interpreted as a conservative vision of a distractingly attractive past which conceals and overrides any of the more disturbing issues of the historical period or the plot. However,

Helen Wheatley's consideration of Gothic television presented the concept of 'dark' or 'feel bad heritage' programming, which shares characteristics with the conservative heritage production, but uses them to disrupt and disturb (2006, p.49). Making particular reference to the *Ghost Story for Christmas*, Wheatley argues that such programming 'refuses the sanitation of nostalgia' in order to [slide] 'offer the viewer narratives of fear and anxiety set in a past which is not only marked by a sense of decay or dilapidation, but which is also disturbed by uncanny happenings and supernatural events' (2006, p.50). In particular, [slide] 'the Gothic literary adaptation removes the surety of the past as a haven or site of nostalgia' (Wheatley, 2006, p.50). In other words, 'dark heritage' programming may share heritage programming's use of detailed historical settings and a fascination with depicting the surfaces of those settings, but presents these surfaces as distracting, concealing the rottenness and darkness beneath. In these productions, the past is not neat, elegant and organised, but chaotic, grimy and brutal, although often still with an appealing surface.

Peter Hutchings has discussed a similar concept of the disruption of the heritage perspective through the idea of the 'uncanny landscape' (2004). Here, the landscape [slide] is 'suffused with a sense of profound and sometimes apocalyptic anxiety; it is also a landscape of a comprehensive dispossession and vacancy' (Hutchings, 2004, p.29). It is a place where human activity is displaced, ultimately unimportant, where even the thousands of years of human alteration of the landscape make way to more ancient powers. In this landscape, Hutchings argues, the heritage drama's identification of landscape with national identity is not only questioned, but it can disappear, as [slide] 'This is not a landscape where we find ourselves as modern national subjects; it is instead a landscape where that sense of identity is diminished or removed entirely' with the representation of human individual or social agency as ultimately powerless (Hutchings, 2004, p.29).

In particular, this can be seen to emphasise the temporary nature of any specific way of life, and the way that any perceived current stability only conceals long-standing, underlying dangers and powers. Roy Strong has claimed that Hardy's depiction of the landscape in *The Return of the Native* [slide] 'catches something fundamental in the English perception of their countryside: the primeval timelessness of the landscape' (Strong, 2012, p. 156), which Hardy described as giving [slide] 'ballast to the mind adrift on change, and harassed by the irrepressible New' (Hardy, 1978, p. 56). The 'dark heritage' version of this feeling is the sublime sensation that the rural landscape is not a reassuring indicator of permanence, nor a comforting example of man's dominance over nature in the form of agriculture and planned parkland, but rather a symbol of the thin skin of civilisation which covers the deep and ancient horrors of the world.

As Billig argues, [slide] 'A nation is more than an imagined community of people, for a place - a homeland - also has to be imagined' (1995, p.74). Landscape is intimately connected to notions of nation, as the nation is taken to be a combination of physical and cultural geography. It is the human connected to the physical location, often linking the characteristics associated with the geographical qualities of the nation, or the region, with the qualities that make up the particular national, or regional, identity. However, there are also the more 'mystical' associations that develop between particular landscapes and national identities.

In the case of England, one of the key landscape types is woodland, which is significant to a number of the adaptations considered here. The initial association of woodland with Englishness was practical, as English trees provided the wood to build the fleet which protected England from invasion and spread its power around the world. This practical association grew to become more mystical, through legends of woodland outlaws and tales of the greenwood as refuge, or through [slide] 'the theories of Richard Payne Knight, for whom "native woods" were "creation's boast and pride"' (Hayman, 2003, p. 95). The type of woodland became important; Richard Hayman records that [slide] 'Ruskin identified a particularly English form of woodland, with "sunny glade, and various foliage, and dewy sward" quite distinct from the black forests of other nations.' (Hayman, 2003, p. 95) In this way, not only was woodland made a central part of the idea of Englishness, but it was emphasised that there was a very specific expression of the natural world that was English.

The landscapes in these adaptations are particularly English, as opposed to British, ones; although as is so often the case, [slide] 'evocations of English landscape are often specifically regional, projecting a Southern Englishness in the name of the whole.' (Matless, 2012, p. 17) Most commonly, they are the landscapes of East Anglia, with Norwich providing the locations for Barchester, and 'A Warning to the Curious' being filmed in Norfolk, while 'A View from a Hill' was recorded in 'a heavily autumnal Suffolk' (Dempster, 2005, p.6). What this particularly means is that these are the lands of invaders and colonisers, the Angles who drove out or intermarried with the previous inhabitants of the area. The connection to the local soil and landscape runs generations deep, but it has also been built upon the remains of earlier populations, with earlier connections to that landscape, overrun by the incomers. This emphasises what could be considered as the silting up of history, with layer upon layer building on each other. An alternative image would be the one used in 'Stigma' when Verity peels layer after layer off an onion [SLIDE], yet there are always more layers waiting to be uncovered beneath. It is also 'Stigma' that makes a connection further back even than the Angles, by using the Neolithic landscape around Avebury as its setting. In other words, the landscape may encourage identification with the nation, but it also emphasises how the landscape is interpreted through the history of human action upon it.

This includes the associations made with particular aspects of the landscape and human activities or characteristics. In 'The Ash Tree', the titular tree is associated with the actions of a witch, Mistress Mothersole, and ultimately acts as a birthing place from which she can send out her vengeful spider-babies. This draws upon the association of the ash with various magical beliefs, although as Richard Hayman records these beliefs are mostly positive. (Hayman 153)

Meanwhile, in 'Stigma', the connections are made with the Neolithic standing stones which extend into the garden of the cottage which is the main location for the story. In 'A View From a Hill' it is the locations of the ruined Fulnaker Abbey and the disused gallows on Gallows Hill that form key points where human activity in the past is connected to geographical locations in the present, with the name 'Gallow's Hill' emphasising how human activity is memorialised through place names. In the same way, 'The Stalls of Barchester' are said to be carved from the wood of a tree known as The Hanging Oak,

around which ancient pagan blood rituals were said to take place, in addition to its being used as a place of legal execution. The haunting in 'A Warning to the Curious' is caused by the disturbance of a burial mound.

So it seems that human activity leaves supernatural as well as physical and cultural marks on the landscape. But the landscape also influences human activity, at least through its emotional affect upon us. As Ronald Hutton has argued [slide]:

the rhythms of the British year are timeless, and impose certain perpetual patterns upon calendar customs: a yearning for light, greenery, warmth, and joy in midwinter, a propensity to celebrate the spring with symbols of rebirth, an impulse to make merry in the sunlight and open air during the summer, and a tendency for thoughts to turn towards death and the uncanny at the onset of winter. (Hutton 426)

So the changes in the countryside, particularly in vegetation, as the seasons change also suggest how we should feel.

After all, summertime is when the living is easy, while the midwinter is bleak. And as the weather changes, so does the performance of actors. We may remember Christmas specials that were clearly filmed in August, with the actors looking rather warm in their many layers rather than grateful for their protection. But seeing a performer contending with the chill, and the wind of an exposed field or beach in late autumn or early spring, or rustling through the fallen leaves and angular branches of the woodland, that affects us, making us feel chills in sympathy, and gratefulness for our own warmth and safety and shelter. This is aided by the visual quality of the low sun, with its light seeming pale, washed out, diffuse, rather than warm and direct. The low sun also provides long shadows, while making the boundaries between things indistinct.

We come back to the trees, which are central to so many of these adaptations. The Hanging Oak provides the wood for 'The Stalls of Barchester'. The supernatural beings of 'A Warning to the Curious', 'A View From a Hill', 'Lost Hearts' and 'The Ash Tree' are visually associated with trees [slide] in such a way that they almost merge with them. The trees provide barriers to vision and to movement in 'A View From a Hill' and 'A Warning to the Curious'. It is in a woodland where Mr Eldridge meets his doom in 'The Tractate Middoth', at a boundary gate, a liminal place.

But woodlands are themselves liminal. Robert Macfarlane notes how [slide] "In the 1930s, Dr Philip Gosse of Steyning declared in his book *Go to the Country* that "even on bright summer days there is an uncanny sense of some unseen presence which seems to follow you about. If you enter the dark wood you are conscious of something behind you. When you stop, it stops; when you go on it follows.'" (Macfarlane 319) Hayman, meanwhile, has pointed to more specific characteristics that encourage this understanding of woodland [slide]:

Woodlands were one type of wild place where the boundary between the natural and supernatural worlds could be crossed, as it could be at caves or springs. The nature of woodlands, with their green canopies, clearly had different connotations to mountains open to the sky. They were, in effect, a gateway between secular and supernatural worlds, and in classical literature to the underworld. (Hayman, 2003, p. 20)

Obviously, the woodland as depicted in these productions is shot in order to produce a required atmosphere and emotional impression, but in doing so they draw upon existing associations and concepts of the woodland within our culture. Or, as Harper and Rayner put it **[slide]**

all notions of landscape are produced by human interpretation which, simply due to human physiology or due to political or cultural bias, is selective. Subsequent aesthetic treatments of landscape, whether in painting, photography or film, involve further selection, interpretation and omission, whether by an individual or group. Landscapes can be comforting or daunting, challenging or reassuring. (Harper and Rayner, 2010, p. 16)

And that includes this sense of the liminal woodland, of something which has a longer history than any individual person, and which is likely to be there for longer than us.

So woodland and landscape are not just older than us, but they also represent the future that will be there after us. When a tree is planted from seed, it is future generations that will see it reach its optimum growth, not the current one.

At the same time, the woodland and the landscape will ultimately absorb human constructions. To an extent, we can see this in 'Lost Hearts' and the small temple in the grounds of Aswarby Hall, where nature is seeming overrunning its cupola. We can see it in the ruins of Fulnaker Abbey and the overgrown foundations of the old gallows in 'A View From a Hill'. We can perhaps see it more clearly, and more menacingly, in 'The Ice House', where the titular building is clasped by the unusual flowering vine which appears to be connected to the hosts of the health spa, and to the fates of the guests there, who end up frozen, preserved in conservative immobility.

'The Ice House' is one of two of these productions that draw upon the idea of summer as associated with fertility and growth. The other is 'Stigma', although there are also hints of these associations in 'The Ash Tree'. 'The Ice House' features older people, unencumbered by family and encumbered by wealth, finding a retreat from the cares of everyday life in a country house spa in immaculate gardens. The clear warmth of the summer days, with performers relaxed in short sleeves and basking in the light, is contrasted with the 'cools' that infest the guests and staff. These signify their growing detachment from the warmth of the personal and the social, their separation from the rest of society provided by their wealth, their move towards being preserved in the titular ice house.



'Stigma', on the other hand, welcomes summer and connects it to the burgeoning sexuality of the thirteen year-old daughter of the family, Verity. Two workmen are trying to remove a standing stone from the family's garden. The warmth of late summer provides an additional excuse for the younger to work shirtless, providing an object for Verity's attentions. The summer also provides extra time for Verity to be away from school, at home during the day, wandering around the upthrust standing stones of the Avebury region and the rounded cone of Silbury Hill. She is thus connected with the idea of these as possible sites for fertility rituals, as well as them being more general sites of mystical power, power which she is also connected to as a young woman, picking up on pagan ideas of goddess earth power rather than masculine power. At the same time, her mother is starting to disintegrate, bleeding from invisible wounds. This seems to come as the result of her being invested with the energy of the witch buried thousands of years ago beneath the standing stone that she and her husband are having removed from their garden. The onion [slide] that Verity starts to unpeel at the end of the episode works to signify the layers of history that are involved here. It also suggests that she has taken on whatever the energy was that infused her mother, that escaped from under the stone, as her father had previously gone down to the kitchen on hearing voices and found an onion with a bite taken out of it that seemed to fall out of the air, indicating the presence of an onion-eating ghost. (Lawrence Gordon Clark has himself said that he is not entirely certain exactly what is going on in this episode, and I must say that I agree with him in some ways, but that there are also some very effective moments and ideas, and that this is possibly the episode that I find most repays returning to it.)

'Stigma' also opens with a hazy landscape through which the key protagonists move, even if this time they are in a car. The connection to the past and the landscape is emphasised by the line of standing stones leading up to the cottage, with the stone where the witch is buried being an extension of this line, which would continue on into or through the cottage if extended. This suggests the flow, of energy or narrative, from the countryside out of which the stones emerge and into the cottage and its inhabitants. It is apt that the release of whatever is beneath the stone is shown through a sudden strong wind which seems to only affect Katharine, the mother, with the power of the witch being represented by the natural power of the air. The energy which thus infests her is also represented by what seems to be an earthquake which flexes the cottage and shakes the ornaments, but which Verity never mentions; however, this is not just a visual metaphor, as Verity rights a picture which has been knocked out of alignment on the wall. This picture is a print of an engraving of Fuseli's *The Nightmare*, suggesting not just horror with its subject matter, but also suggesting this reproduction of elements through time.

The programme even extends this into the future, with its mention of the Voyager probe which is leaving the solar system and is turning around to take its last images of Earth. Meanwhile, modernity is signalled by the posters on Verity's walls, while the sound of the Rolling Stones' 1966 track 'Mother's Little Helper' on the radio could be a reminder of the recent past. Indeed, as the programme was made for Christmas 1977, and Verity is just reaching her thirteenth birthday, the track and Verity are about the same age. The music could be suggestive of the change of Katherine from woman to mother, while the episode shows the shift of Verity from girl to woman, and the end of Katherine's life.

Fertility and continuation are also significant in 'The Ash Tree', where the attraction between Mistress Mothersole and Sir Matthew is shown as part of a lush, rural idyll. This contrasts with the harsher landscape that greets Sir Matthew's legitimate descendant, Sir Richard, which is one that displays the projecting bedrock of the area in the same way as the place where Mistress Mothersole was hanged. This tower provides a wide view of the landscape around it, connecting landscape, death and the pagan. The change from the lush countryside in which Sir Matthew is attracted to Mistress Mothersole to the more barren one into which Sir Richard arrives suggests the contamination of the land by the unjust death of the witch. It is as if her death has brought creeping death to the countryside. This includes also danger to livestock, including Sir Richard seeing a cow and, at another point a pheasant, lying dead in a field, and the locals keep their livestock under shelter over night. While the surviving print of the episode has a somewhat grey cast to it, the lushness of the artificial parkland of Sir Richard's estate certainly contrasts strongly with the harsher natural landscape around it, and the vegetation's full-leafed greenery suggests summer more than autumn.

While the original story is set in East Anglia, the adaptation was filmed in Cornwall, partly in Lawrence Gordon Clark's garden, which was the only place that they could locate a large ash tree close to an appropriate part of a building. (Clark, 2012a) This adaptation was written by David Rudkin, whose *Penda's Fen* was a close meditation on landscape and Englishness and the layering up of history and beliefs through the landscape. Clark notes that he and Rudkin both had more empathy for Mistress Mothersole than James had, and so more empathy for the pagan than the Christian or the Enlightenment or modern rationalist.

'The Ash Tree' opens with Sir Richard riding through first rough countryside, then steadily more cultivated landscapes until he arrives to take possession of his ancestral hall, Casteringham. The house had passed from Sir Matthew to his nephew, also Sir Matthew, to his nephew, Sir Richard, who hopes that the line of descent will be more direct from that point on, indicating that he does not intend on dying childless as they had. The prospects of this are enhanced by his already having a fiancée, Lady Augusta. On visiting Richard, Lady Augusta finds him clearing the old library of the house and installing his own. She discovers a copy of *The Adventures of Tom Jones* and reads the title aloud with mock shock, then flirtatiously refuses to relinquish her grasp on it. While there is no real indication that their relationship is already a sexual one, it is indicated that the couple are more modern and sexually open than the repressed Sir Matthew, whose guilt over his desire for Mistress Mothersole appears to have been part of what led him to deny her as a witch. That and seeing her in his ash tree at night, apparently stroking some sort of familiar.

Inheritance is central to this story, focused around Mothersole's dying cry that 'Mine shall inherit!', a prophecy borne out by the ending of the Squire's line at the fangs of her spider-like offspring. The emphasis on fertility and the connection between that and nature is compounded by the vision of Mothersole sitting in the titular ash tree, and the discovery of her charred and decayed corpse within the tree when it finally burns down. The corpse [slide] is clasping its ankles, its legs apart, clearly in a posture of childbirth, and also somewhat reminiscent of the figure known as the Sheila-na-Gig.

The key elements of the landscape and nature in relation to the *Ghost Story for Christmas* productions are woodland, water and a slight haze that softens detail and distance. Things become indistinct, in terms of losing their individuality. These are scenes of great beauty, but they all have the chill of the turn of the seasons, making them more liminal than the bright summers which dominate the heritage production, punctuated only by changes in the weather that suit emotional changes. Homes are never places of safety, but the horror is always shown as having to come from the outside, and is always associated with nature, with the one exception being 'Number 13'. Woodlands are places of concealment, and places that absorb human activity, while also retaining their symbolic place at the heart of 'Englishness', as the home of Robin Hood, as the source of the yews that made the bows that defeated the French at Crecy and Agincourt, and of the oak from which the ships were built that defeated the Spanish Armada and spread British rule throughout the world. Woodland is thus caught between nationalistic romance and the fear of the uncontrolled nature that lies beneath it, older than human activity and uncaring.

This paper has demonstrated that the representation of the seasons on the screen can be central to ideas of mood. However, this can go beyond simple pathetic fallacy and combine with genre and narrative in order to engage with other ideas, such as of nation. In such cases, the presence and use of the landscape and its relation to the seasons can emphasise particular themes within the narrative in order to provide a stronger, subconscious engagement. In terms of the horror elements of the *Ghost Story for Christmas*, this includes an emphasis with notions of history, and particularly the depth of human history, and the sense that the modern world is one that is passing, that is built on a series of earlier experiences and existences, and that will itself in turn be replaced.