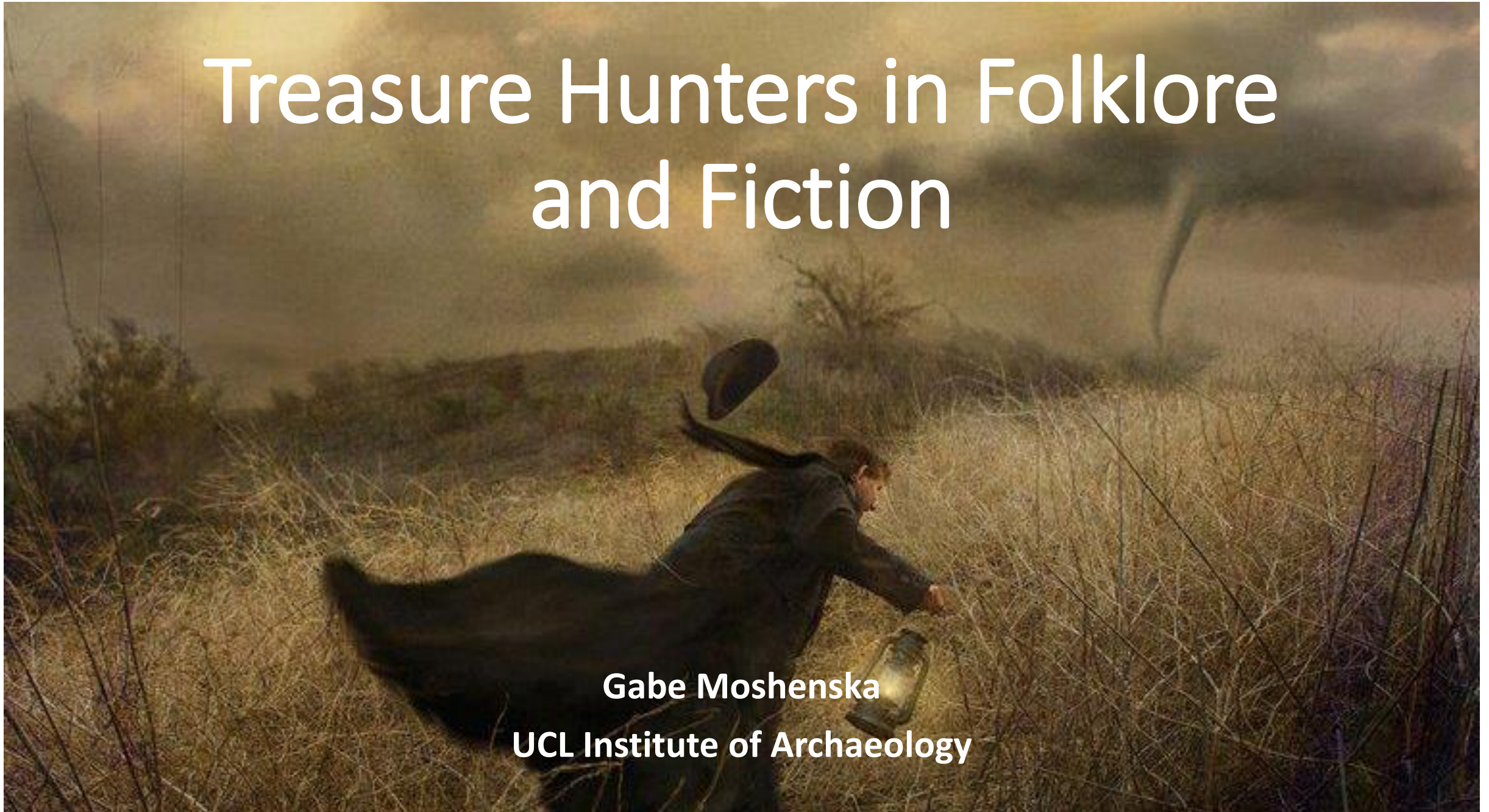


Treasure Hunters in Folklore and Fiction

Gabe Moshenska

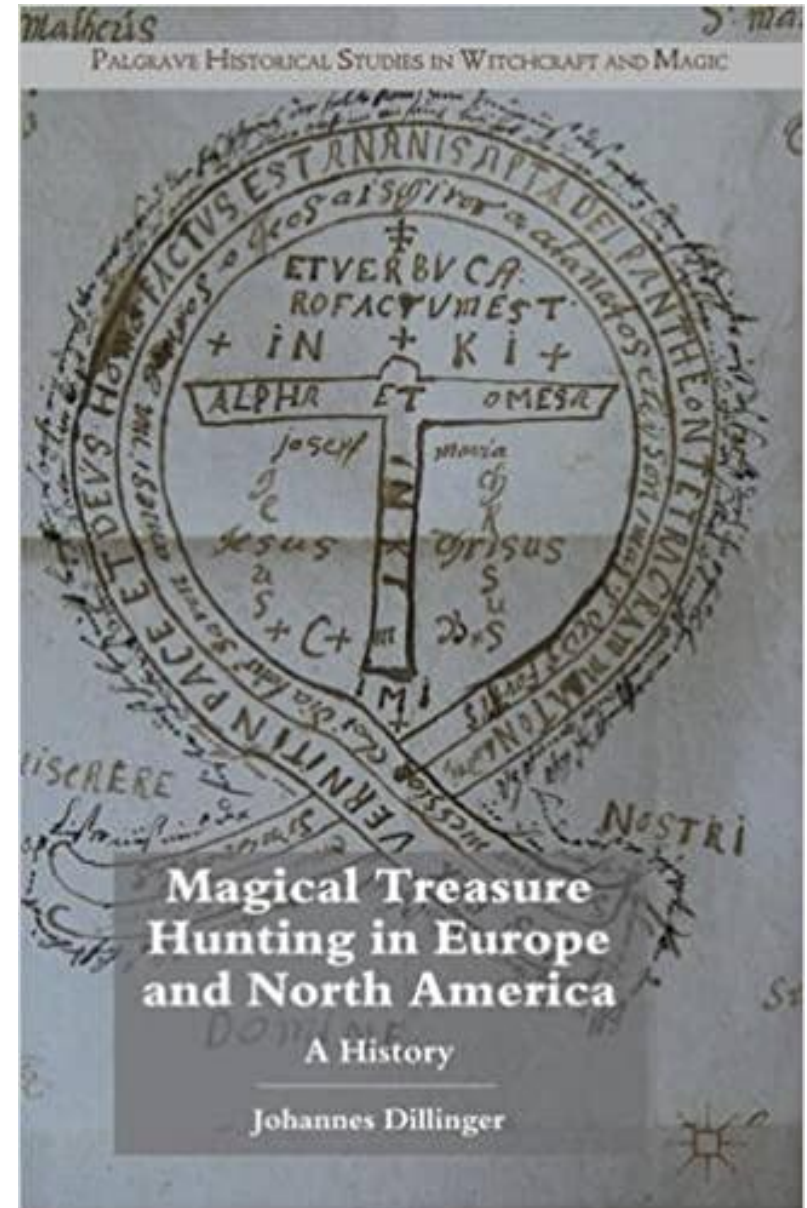
UCL Institute of Archaeology





The Doomed Digger

“Early modern everyday culture took the connection between ghosts and treasures for granted.”
(Dillinger 2012: 74)



Just published, very topical, highly recommended!



Strange Relics

Stories of Archaeology and
the Supernatural, 1895–1954

Edited by Amara Thornton & Katy Soar



SCRIPT
MATT
GIBBS

ART
V.V.
GLASS

LETTERS
MIKE
STOCK

IN THE COLD DARK



IT'S SO
HOT...

...I'M
SWEATING
BUCKETS!



WHAT HAVE
YOU DONE?!
YOU BASHED
THEIR HEAD
IN--

WHAT?!
NO... I MEAN,
IT'S NOT LIKE
WE KILLED
THEM!

‘We need to give it back. Give back her pieces of shell!’



THEY LOOK IN PRETTY GOOD CONDITION, ALL THINGS CONSIDERED.

I'M SO, SO SORRY! IT WAS... I MEAN, IT JUST--

IT'S NOT HOLLY'S FAULT, I DISTRACTED HER.

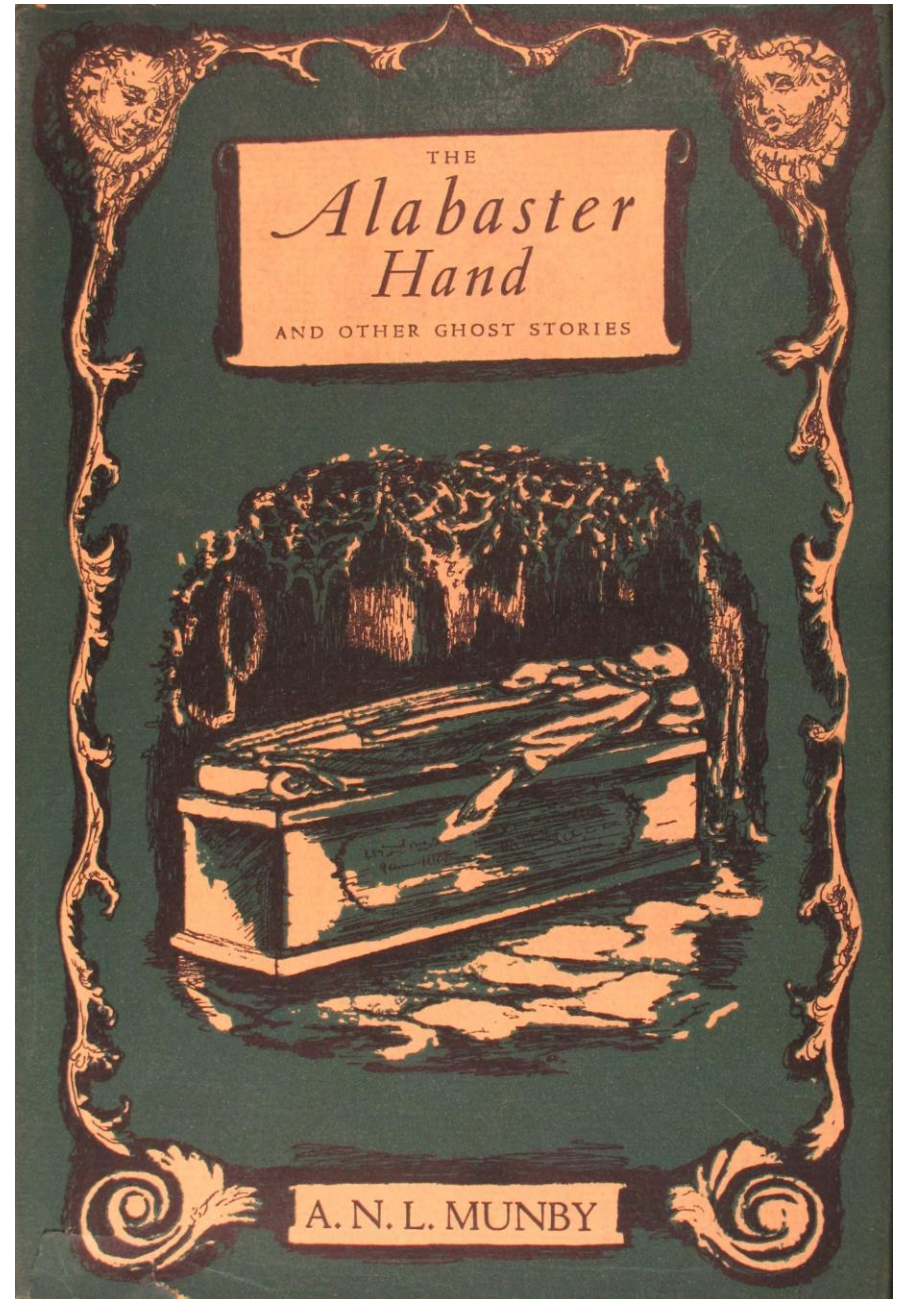
HONESTLY, IT'S FINE! SKULL'S NORMALLY THE HIGHEST POINT, AS EVERYTHING ELSE COLLAPSES, AND IT CAN BE A HOLLOW CAVITY... HENCE THE POP WHEN YOU HIT IT.

ANYWAY, TRY TO GET THIS RECORDED AND LIFTED TODAY.

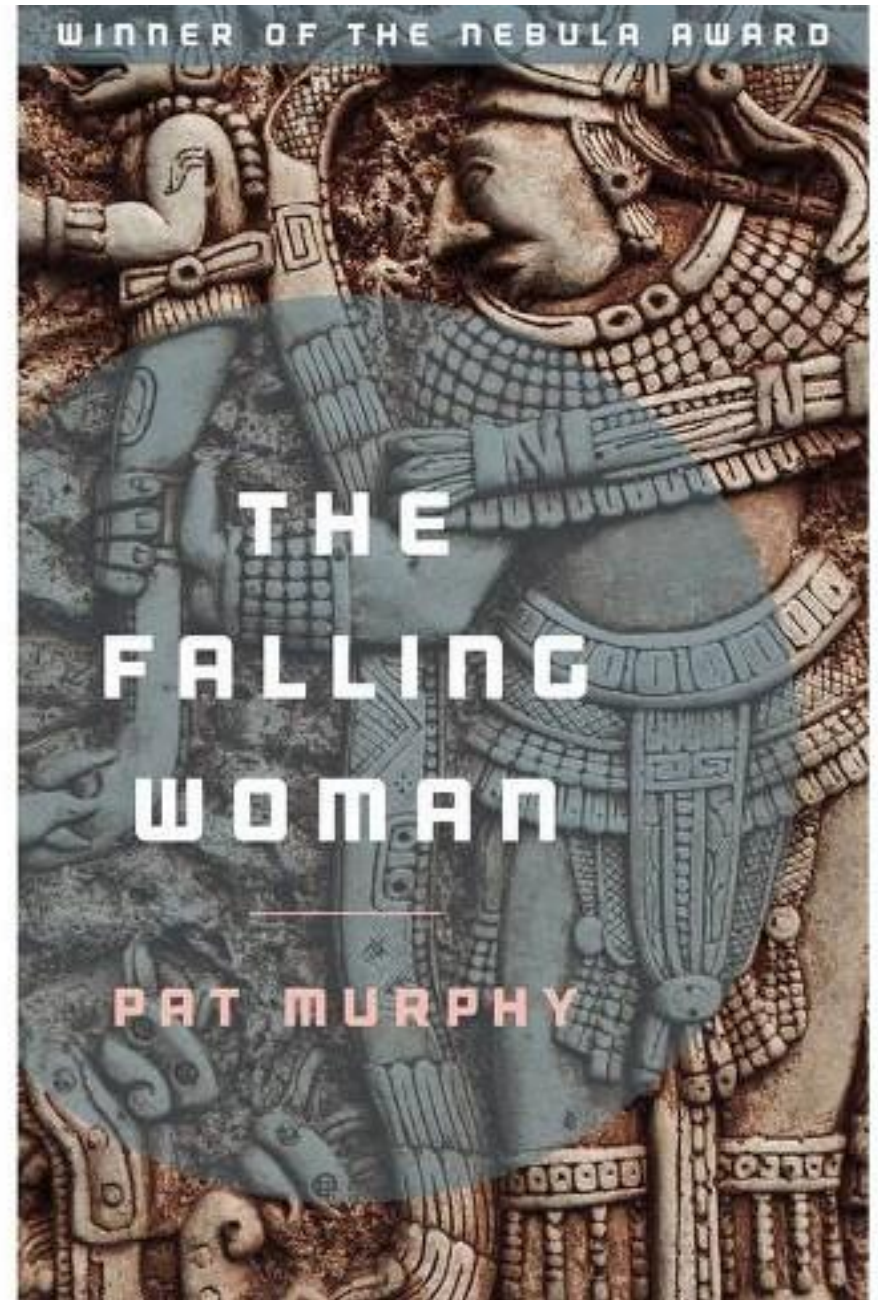
‘he had excavated several late Bronze Age urn-fields in Dorset ... and the results were published – either in *Archaeology* or *Antiquity*, I forget which.’

‘he must have opened scores of graves in his time’.

‘In a sense, I suppose, the archaeologist could be described as a latter-day resurrection man’



Psychic archaeologist
Elizabeth Butler follows the
ghosts of the Maya through
the ruins of their city, and
watches where they bury
their treasures



GLASTONIENSIS
Oppidi, ab editiori septi Werialesis par-
te, dimidio ab oppido lapide in Africu di-
stantis, prospectus,



- A. Fundi A.
- B. Ioseph.
- C. Ecclesia.
- Magna &
Chorus.
- Totius F.
- D. Aula ca.
- E. Culina (
- angulo



latum,
xxx ped:
d,
colibet
adras.



- H. S. Iohannis Ecclesia.
- I. S. Cuthberti Ecclesia.
- K. Platea ad wellam, qu
- L. Titulis S. Michaelis,
- tia vna perijt) r
- Whitingus, vltim
- Regio agnoscendo
- nus Regias (pro n
- suspensus) vitam tenuit.
- M. Iter ad Egglejam.
- N. Abbatis horreum.



Ric. Newcourt delin:
W. Kollar sculp



Depositum custodi

“Keep that which is
committed to thy trust”

“It was common knowledge in Old European culture, that is, the culture of Britain and the Continent before the onset of the Industrial Revolution that spirits guarded treasures and sometimes gave their riches to men.

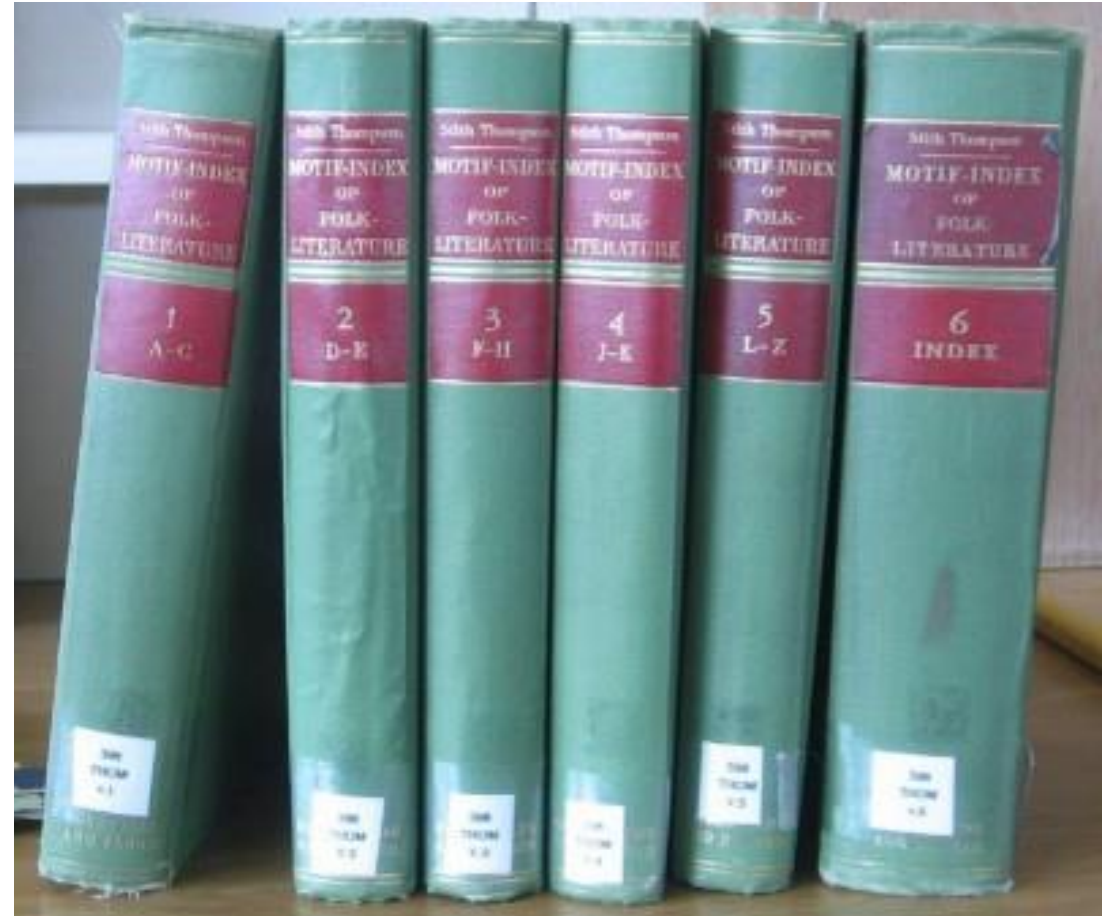
Some treasure seekers had visions in their dreams that helped them to find what they were looking for. Others tried to divine where treasures were buried.

All these beliefs and practices belonged to the large and complex field of magical treasure hunting.” (Dillinger 2012)

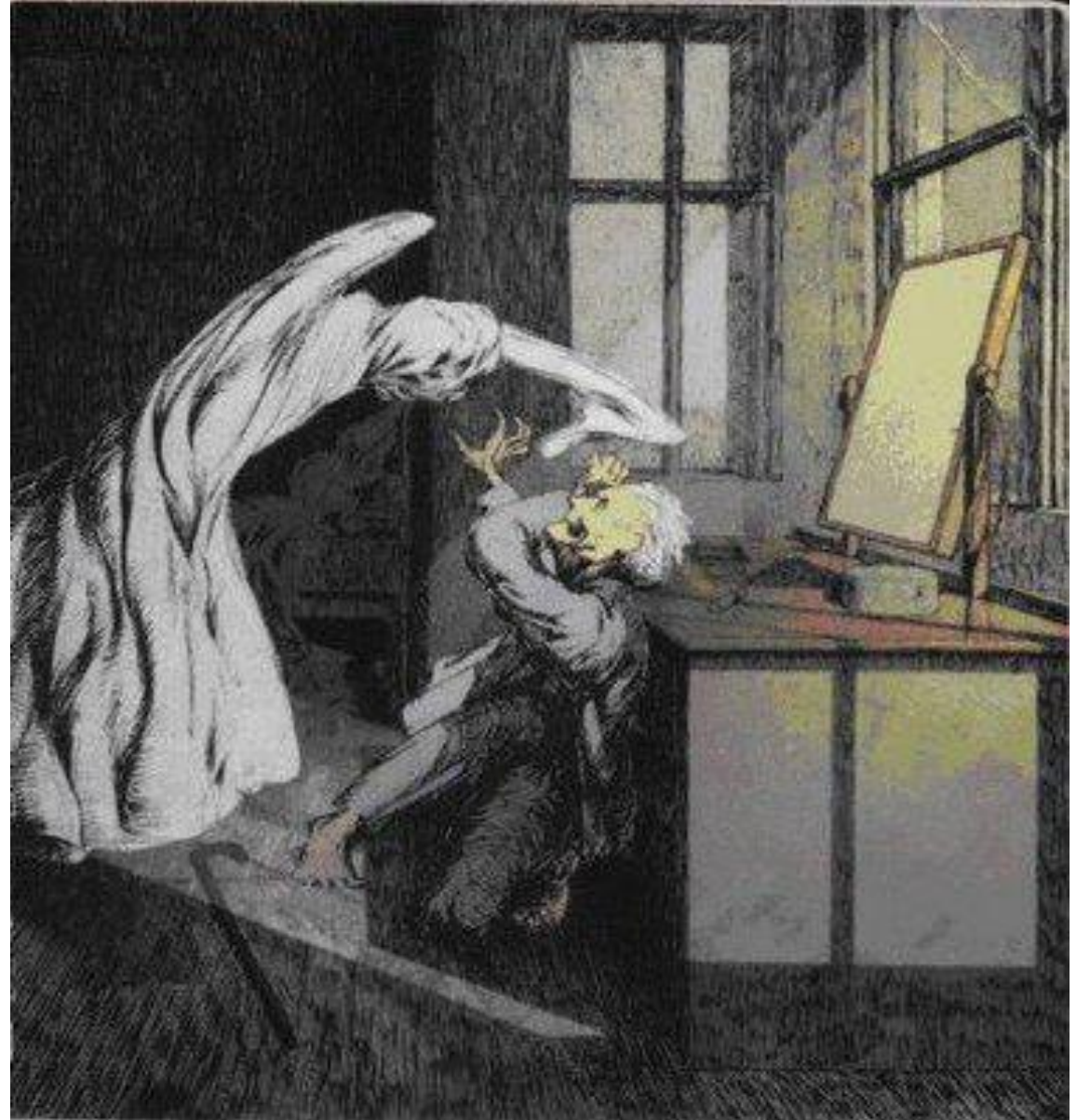
Folklore motifs:

E291: 'Ghosts protect hidden treasure'.

'Cross diggers' and 'hill diggers'



‘So dig, that ye may obtain’



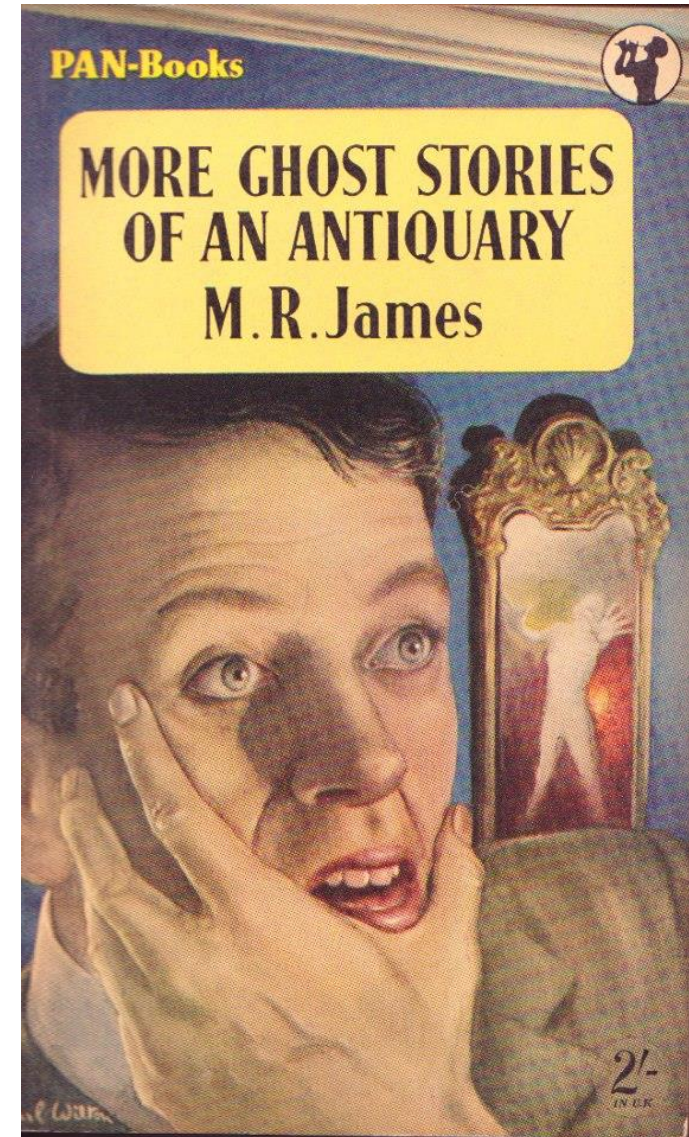
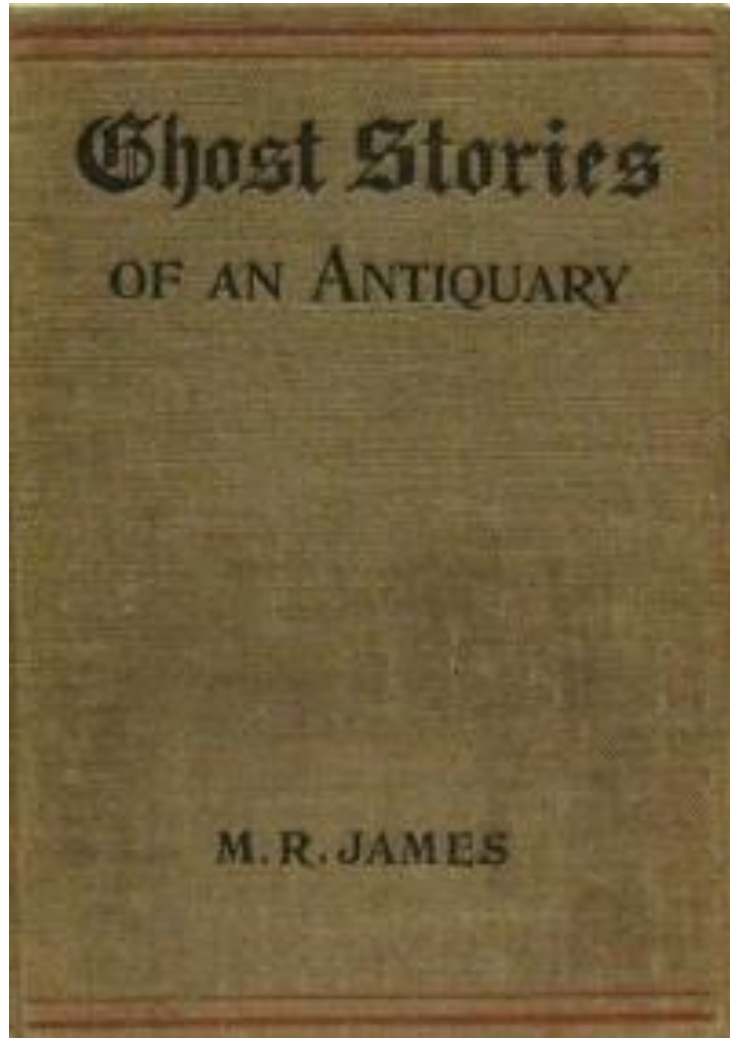
William Lilly, 1634:

upon a sudden, (there being no wind when we began) so fierce, so high, so blustering and loud a wind did rise, that we verily believed the west-end of the church would have fallen upon us; our rods would not move at all; the candles and torches, all but one, were extinguished, or burned very dimly. John Scott, my partner, was amazed, looked pale, knew not what to think or do, until I gave directions and command to dismiss the dæmons; which when done, all was quiet again

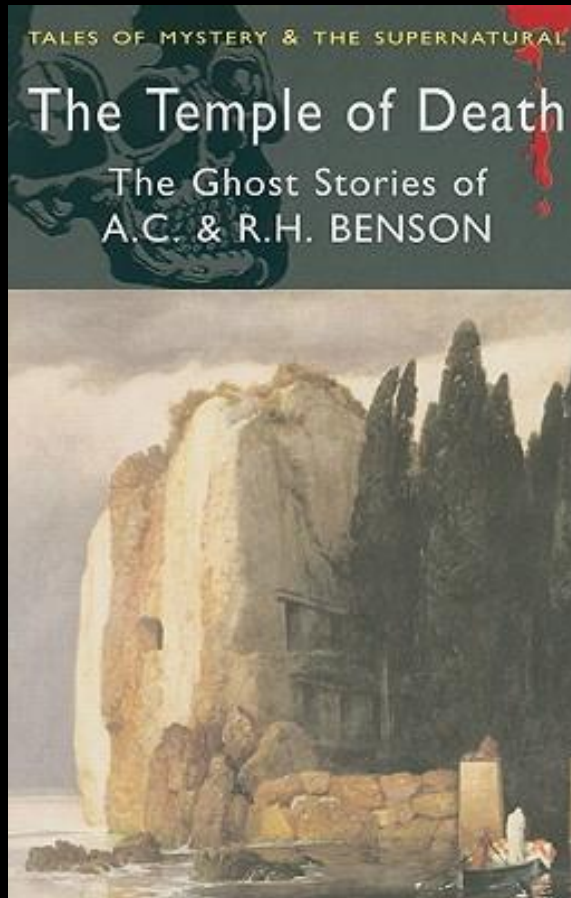
“A demonic tempest” –
John Dee



On to the ghost stories...



'The Red Camp', A.C. Benson, 1903

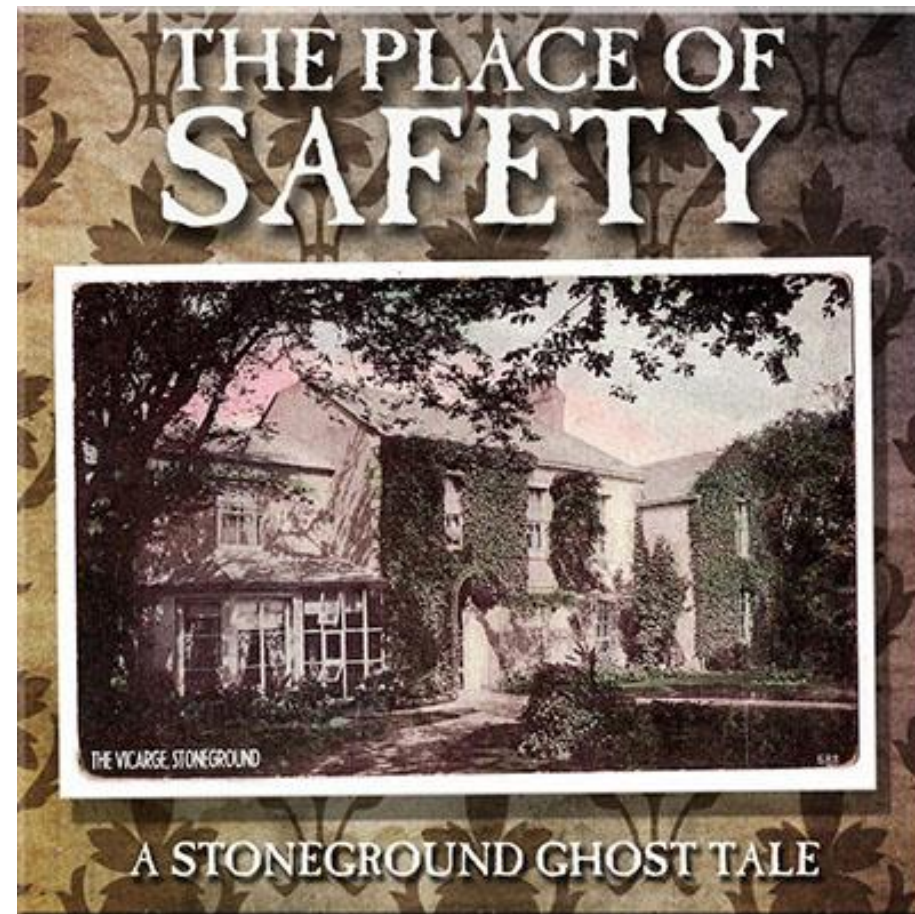
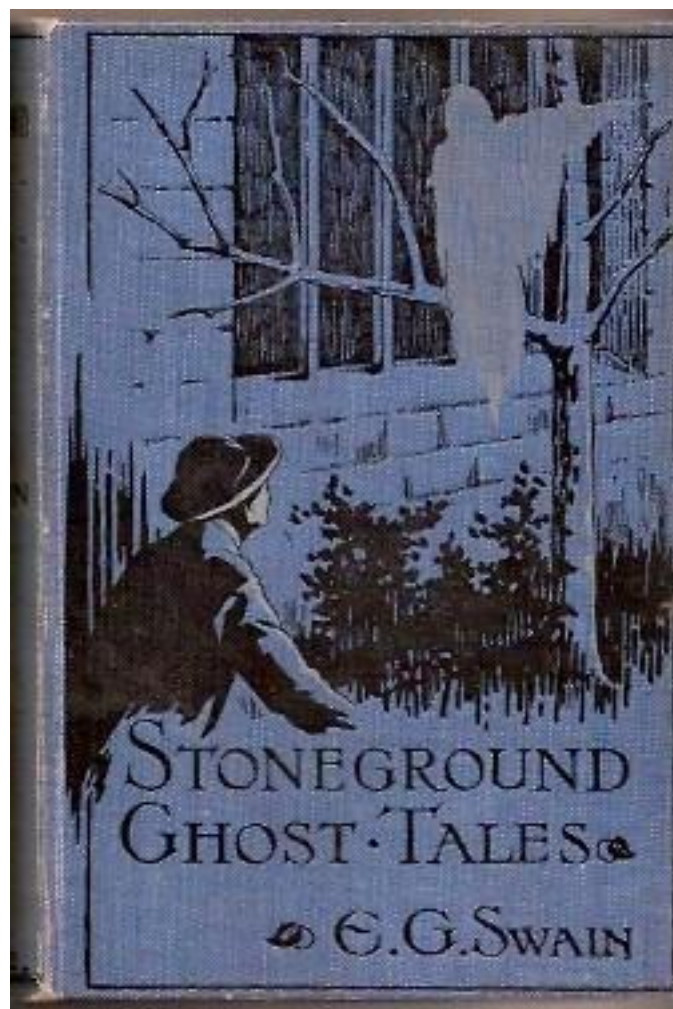


‘a great treasure of gold, cups and plates and pitchers all of gold, with bars of the same’.

‘if I were you, Mr. Wyatt, I would have the place cleared and trenched, and would dig the gold out; for it is there as sure as I am a Christian man and a lover of the old days.’

“it seemed to him that, as he was bending to the pit, something came suddenly behind him and stood at his back, close to him, as though looking over his shoulder. For a moment the horror was so great that he felt the hair of his head prickle and his heart thump within his breast; but he overcame it and turned, and saw nothing but the trenches, and above them the ragged sky”

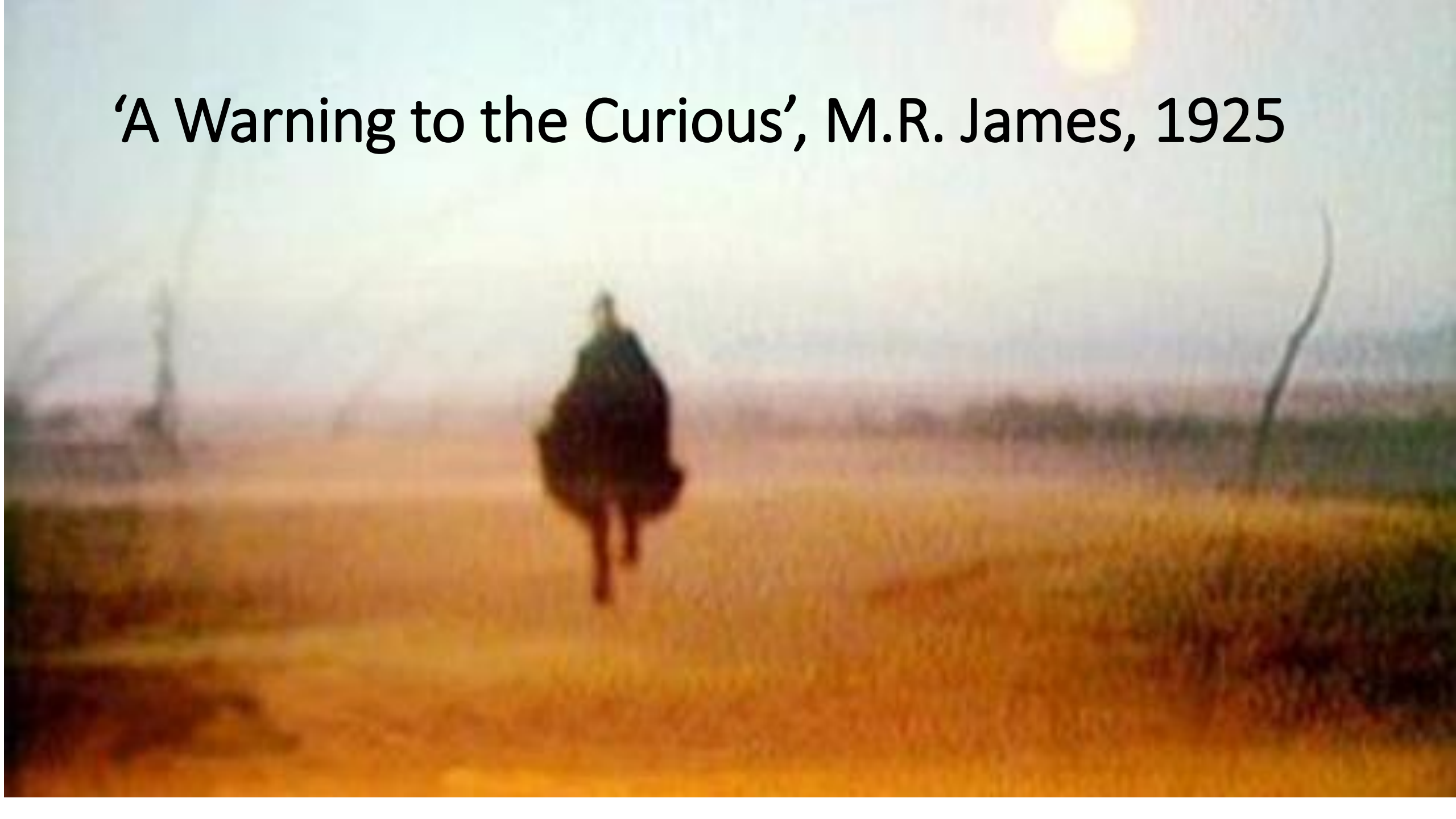
'The Place of Safety', E.G. Swain, 1912



The traditional warning:

‘The things are here, I daresay, if they are anywhere; but they are not yours, and you have no business to meddle with them.’

'A Warning to the Curious', M.R. James, 1925



'the last of the holy crowns, if it's there, has no guardian now'

'I know something about digging in these barrows: I've opened many of them in the down country. But that was with owner's leave, and in broad daylight and with men to help'

'he's light and weak, but all the same I daren't face him'



‘Whether the focus is the foolishness of a modernity that tries to reproduce its past or that builds from the ruins of the past, or the foolishness of an antiquarian who delves into that past, the reason both are foolish is that **the past is dangerous**’ (Hay 2011)



Further motifs

E235.4.3. Return from dead to punish theft of bone from grave.

E235.6. Return from dead to punish disturber of grave.

E236.1.1. Return from dead to demand ring stolen from corpse.

(Thompson 1955-8)



