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# Darkness in the Fields

## Thomas Hardy and the Folk Horror Tradition

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# Revenant

Critical and Creative Studies of the Supernatural

The first wave of folk horror extended from roughly 1968 to 1979 ... The second wave began in roughly 2008 ... [and] has moved in two directions— forward, shaping new incarnations, as well as backward, revisiting and reworking the defining folk horror texts from the late 1960s and 1970s.

Keetley, D (2020) Defining Folk Horror, Revenant Journal, 1



# Conflicts

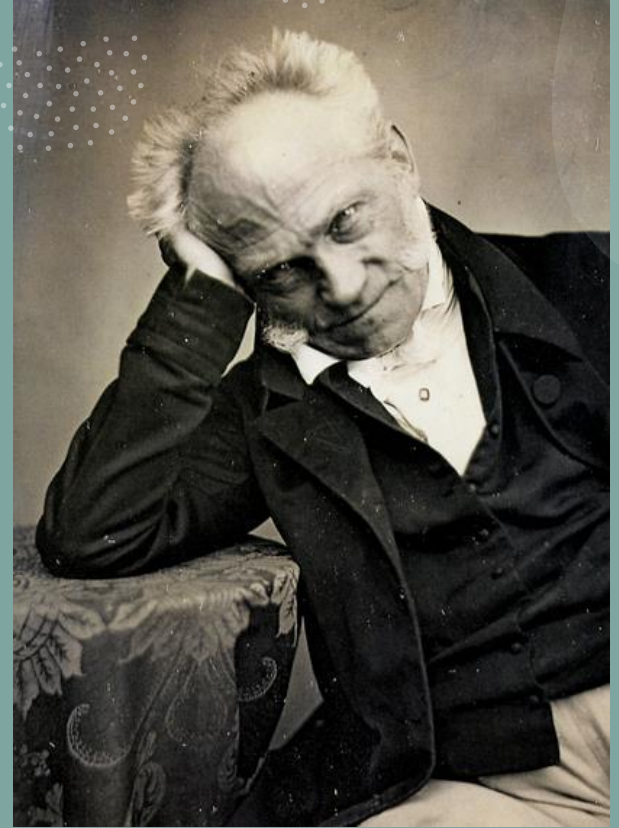
## Themes:

- Rural and Urban
- Rural spaces as threatening
- Tradition and 'Progress'
- Manual and Mechanical
- Past and Future
- Belief - Pagan and Christian
- The belief/faith in folklore



# Cultural Bereavement

- Victorian Pessimism
- The Death of God
- Social Darwinism
- Schopenhauer's 'Universal Will'



## Scovell's Folk Horror Chain:

The ambiguity of 'happening and summoning'.

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Landscape

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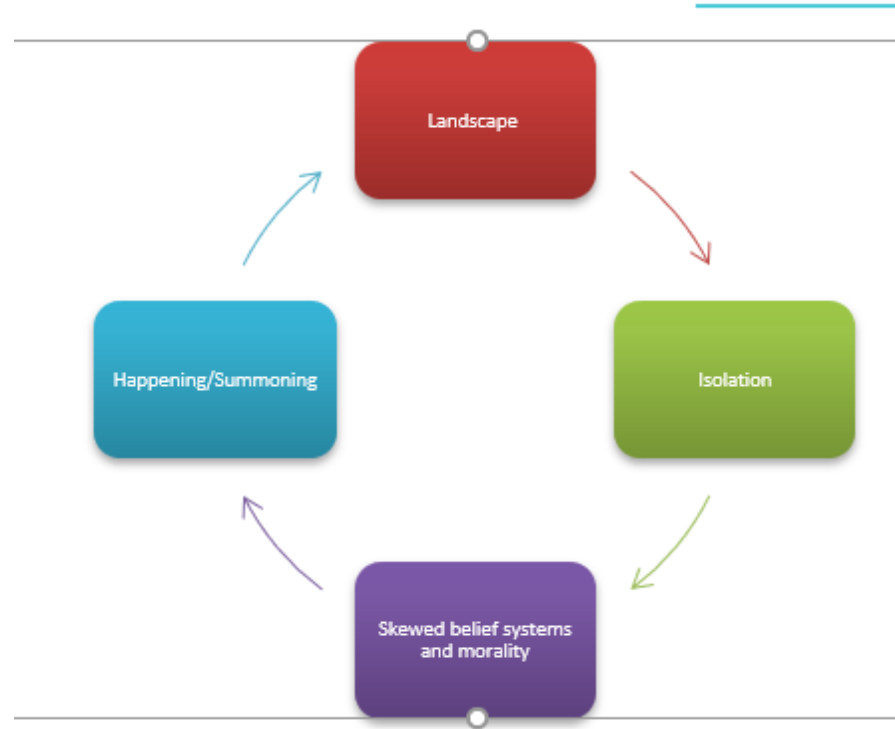
Isolation

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Skewed belief systems and morality

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Happening/Summoning



Howie grasps the wicker bars of his cage and addresses the islanders urgently. The camera intercuts close ups of Howie's face with those of his audience.

HOWIE

(shouting)

Men and women of Summerisle, consider what you're doing. You are committing murder. All of you will be guilty, and you will be doing it for nothing. This is a useless sacrifice. There is no Sun God. There is no Goddess of the orchards. Your crops failed because the strains failed. Fruit is not meant to grow in these islands. It is against nature. True, for awhile, with careful grafting and fertilising it did grow. But now these cultivations are exhausted. To have any chance of restoring them you must go back to the laboratory and renew your experiments. And back perhaps to the true God that no amount of science has yet disproved. Burning me to death will not bring back your apples, or your pears, or your apricots.



CLOSE-UP - LORD SUMMERISLE

His eyes reflect utter conviction.

LORD SUMMERISLE

(shouting)

But I know it will. It is the only way.

He makes a gesture to the flambeaux bearers who step forward and light the brushwood from huge buckets and barrels of flaming tar, and the flames leap upwards at The Wicker Man. We

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP - HOWIE'S FACE

in front of which smoke is already beginning to drift.

HOWIE

(shouting)

If the fruit fails again this year, you will need another blood sacrifice, and it will have to be a more important one than this one. Next year it may not be a stranger -- no-one less than the King of Summerisle himself will do. Do you hear me, Summerisle? If the crops fail your people will see to it that it is you who will burn next May Day.

CLOSE-UP - LORD SUMMERISLE'S FACE

For a fleeting moment it wears an expression of doubt and fear. Miss Rose regards him speculatively. We

CUT BACK TO:

# Thomas Hardy

1840-1928

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- Born in Higher Bockhampton, 3 miles east of Dorchester.
  - Rural upbringing, the son of a builder.
  - Spent 5 years in London in his early 20s before returning to Dorset.
  - Then a frequent visitor to London.
  - Conflicts for Hardy between the 'educated' London intelligentsia and the rural poor.
  - Published 14 novels, over 50 short stories and over 900 published poems.
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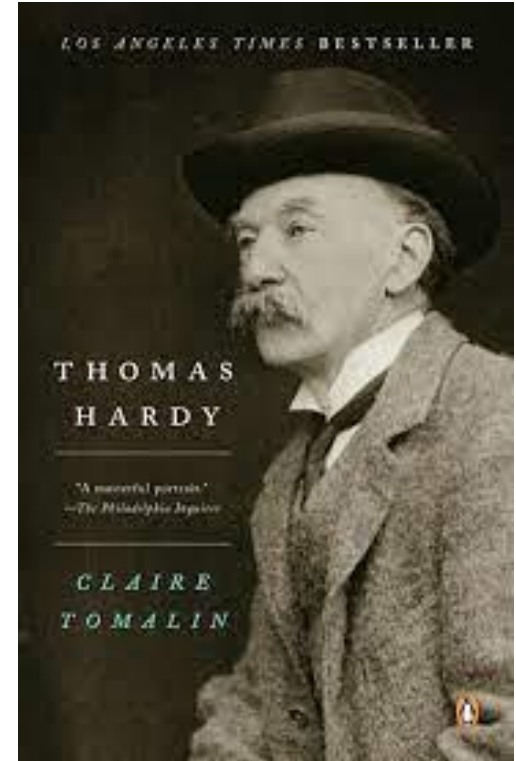






# Haunted Hardy

## The 'Time- Torn Man'



# Hardy and Heritage

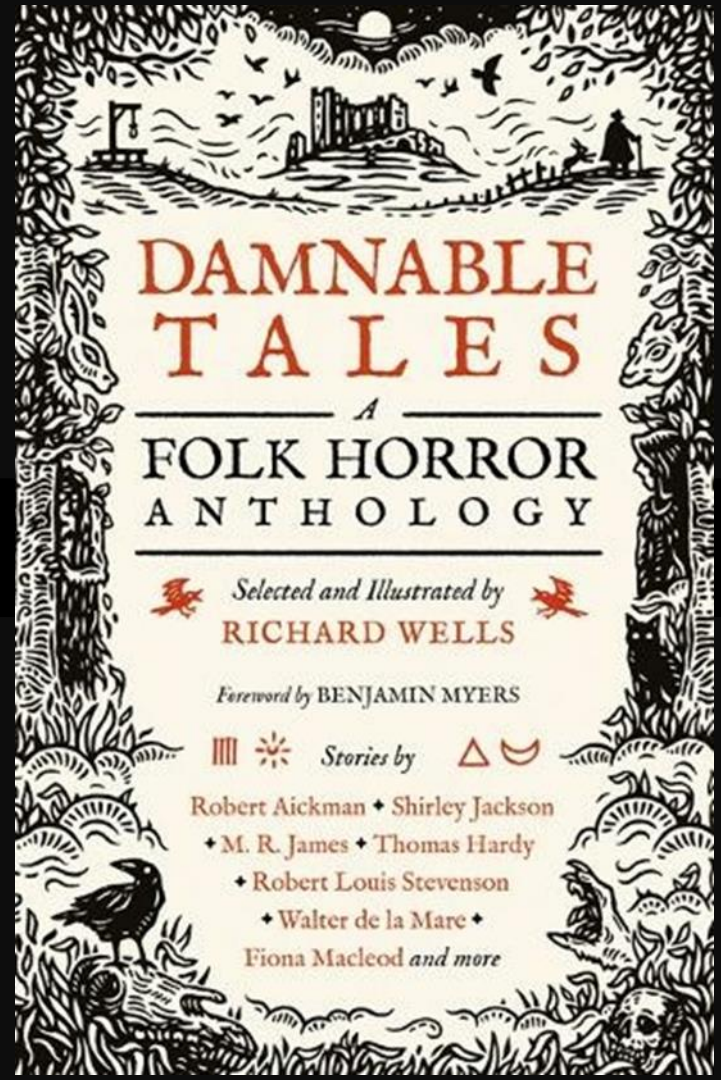


Successive Screen adaptations from 1967 onwards of Hardy's work have often been sanitised and softened often becoming little more than vehicles for pastoral romance.

# The Withered Arm

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- A discreet lineage can be seen in the work of Hardy.
  - *The Withered Arm* (as an example) draws on Dorset folklore.
  - It a tale of superstition as belief.
  - The central character of Rhoda believes she has been hag'rid by her former lover's new wife.
  - This leads to a physical ailment.
  - The story is then about the quest is to find a cure, via 'traditional' magical cures.
  - The 'cure' involves a hanged man.
  - (Hanging is a theme and gallows are often present).
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# WESSEX TALES

Strange, Lively, and Commonplace

BY  
THOMAS HARDY

AUTHOR OF 'THE WOODLANDERS,' ETC.

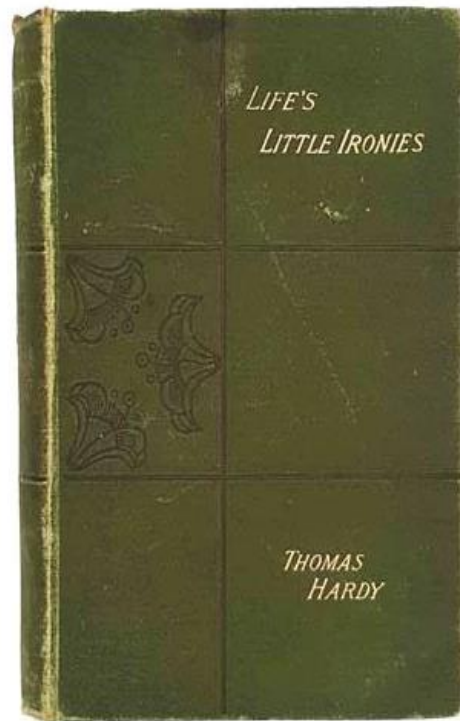
IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

London  
MACMILLAN AND CO.  
AND NEW YORK

1888

*All rights reserved*



‘Hardy’s diffusion of Gothic motifs and taste for macabre folktales meant that he was able to provide much more concentrated instances of the bizarre and improbable than he could in his novels. Withered arms, devilish fiddle players and hideously defaced statues which make wives scream and faint are not the fare of general popular fiction.’

Hayes, T. (2014) [When Thomas Hardy Met M.R. James: An Evening of Ghosts and Gothic](#) *The Hardy Society Journal*, 51-58



‘[The] function of folklore in folk horror texts is complex but it is nonetheless critical to the task of defining folk horror ... One must not, however, take the ‘traditions’ of folk horror at face value. They are typically not ‘authentic’ traditions, although they may well be presented as such in the text.’

Keetley, D (2020) Defining Folk Horror, *Revenant Journal*, 4

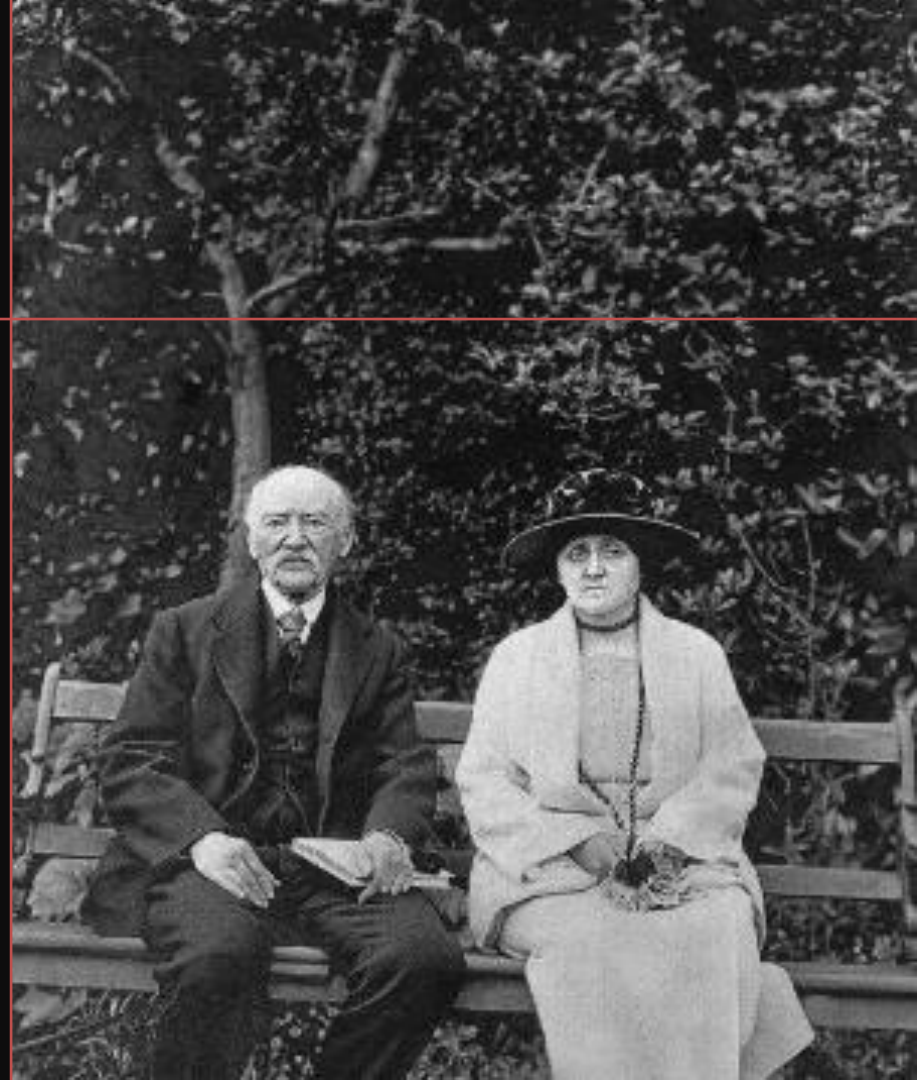


# Hardy, Superstition and Folklore

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'I must say, once and for all, that every superstition and custom described in my novels may be depended on as true records of the same and not invention of mine.'

'To your question, if the legendary matter & folklore in my books is traditional & not invented, I can answer yes, in every case; this being a point on which I was careful not to falsify local beliefs and customs.'



# 'Re-Enchantment'

Edward Burnett Tylor *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art and Custom* (1871)

Tylor's theory of 'survivals' or 'remnants':

'...processes, customs, and opinions, and so forth, which have been carried on by force of habit into a new state of society different from that in which they had their original home, and they remain as proofs and examples of an older conditions of culture out of which a newer has been evolved'

Tylor, EB, *Primitive Culture*, 1871/1920, 16







Wessex as Simulacra

## Landscape

As in much of folk horror, landscape, as Adam Scovell comments is: 'essentially the first link, where elements within its topography have adverse effects on the social and moral identity of its inhabitants'.

As Andrew Radford stated such landscapes and its people show:  
'The continuing existence of the past as a mythically relevant force in the present'.



## **Egdon Heath's Mephistophelian Visitants**



# Diggory Venn: The Reddleman

His job was to mark sheep in preparation for them to go to market.



# Fiddler of the Reels

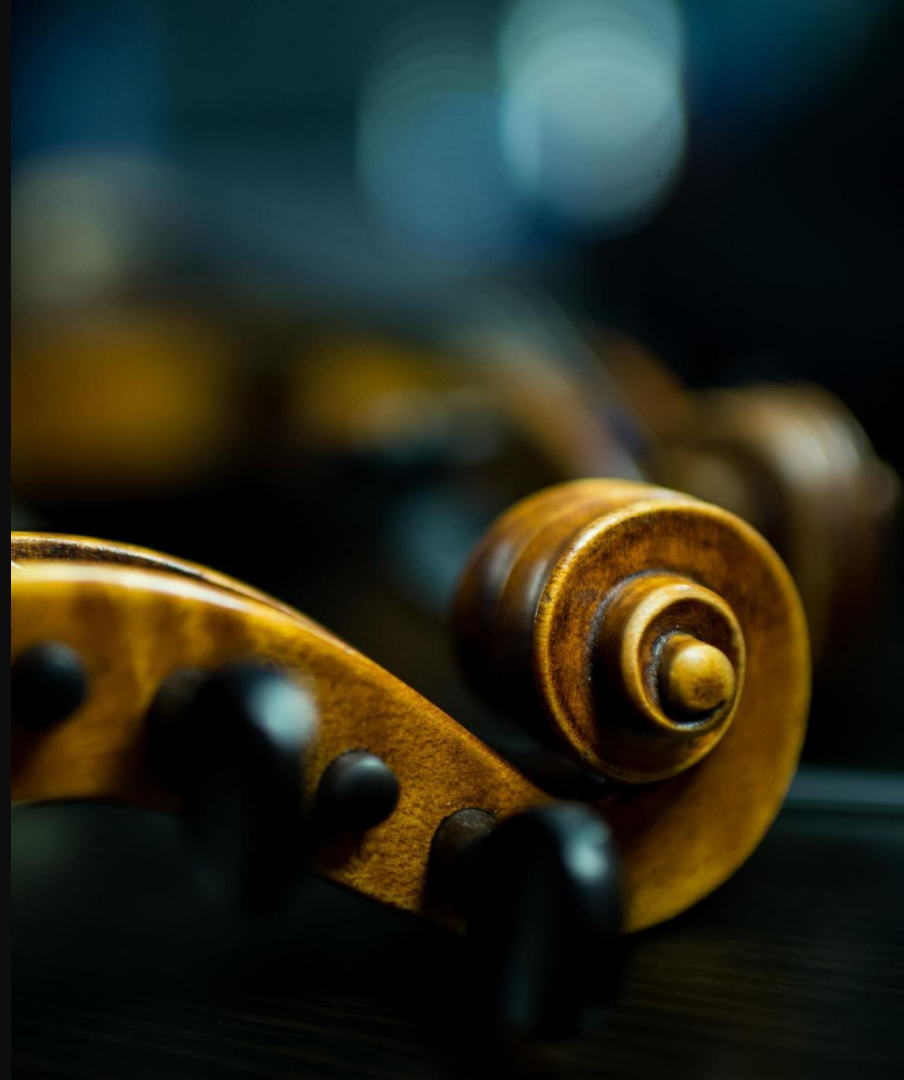
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Mop Ollamoor is a devilish fiddle player with the ability to reduce children to tears and make women weep with want.

He seems to have the ability to appear and disappear.

Hardy links him to Paganini who reputedly sold his soul to the devil.

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# Hauntology

We can equate this to being haunted by ghosts of our own past and the spectres of the collective cultural past.

Mark Fisher suggests that:

*“it doesn’t feel as if the 21st century has started yet. We remain trapped in the 20th century... in 1981, the 1960s seemed much further away than they do today... cultural time has folded back on itself, and the impression of linear development has given way to a strange simultaneity”. The ghost here, is a “spectre understood not as anything supernatural, but as that which acts without (physically) existing.”*

Fisher, Mark (2014) *Ghosts of My Life*, Zero Books, 5



**Lucie  
McKnight  
Hardy**

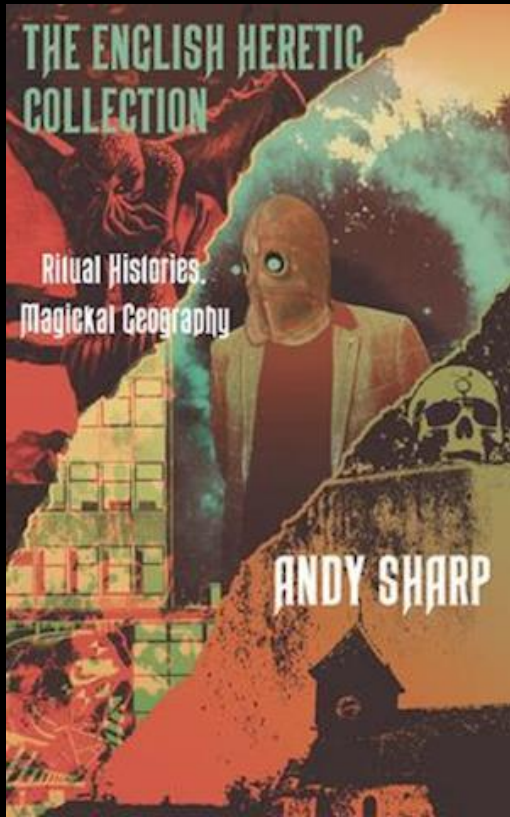
# Water Shall Refuse Them

'A coming-of-age story where the threat  
of violence shimmers like a heat haze.'  
Andrew Michael Hurley, *The Loney*

# ENYS MEN

WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY MARK JENKIN

QUINZINE  
DIRECTORS' FORTNIGHT  
CANNES 2022



‘Our perennial ruminations on war mean we are always just a heritage open day away from a sandbag and bunting re-enactment, overseen by the military gimp of an air-raid warden role-player. Rather than the faux pagan festivals of straw bears and hobby horses, the new land rites are happening on our D-Day visits to costal forts.’

Sharp, A. (2020) *The English Heretic Collection*, Repeater, 51



## Hookland:

It's the psychogeography of a place that doesn't exist built around the real myth circuits, Albionic shadows and actual places of a 1970s childhood. Stories told in the form of the sort of travel that used to be given away at petrol stations, a cultural artifact from when the TV news carried UFO sightings and ghosts on their nightly bulletins along with reports of IRA bombs.

<https://hookland.wordpress.com/about/>

"We are the Children of the Hum. We see differently because we hear differently. We hear The Hum." - Dee-Dee, Pylon Person, 1973



# Towards a Hardyian Folk Horror

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- The perpetual co-existence of two or more different states of being or philosophical positions.
- The absence of the supernatural or summoned but the perpetual belief in this. Folklore is given equivalent status to science or established religion.
- The landscape as threatening because of its pastoral quality.
- The creation of a story world as a simulacra, where not only is there a difficulty in seeing the line between the real and the fictional but where the two fade between each other.
- People haunt themselves by engaging with the recent past; that which is within living memory.
- The creation of a world by reference to what is within living memory, thus conferring a sense of authenticity.
- There is an inclusive narrative where the boundaries of the world exist beyond the edges of the text.

