Edited by Louis Bayman and K. J. Donnelly. *Folk Horror on Film: Return of the British Repressed*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023. 264 pp, hardcover. £90.00.

After a relatively fallow period since the 1970s, folk horror films are proving to be a staple of post 2010 horror. A retrofitted canon of the 'The Unholy Trinity' comprising Michael Reeves' *Witchfinder General* (1968), Piers Haggard's *Blood on Satan's Claw* and Robin Hardy's *The Wicker Man* (1973) was anointed in the BBC's *A History of Horror* (2010) by Mark Gatis, who as one of the co-creators of *The League of Gentleman* (1999-2017) is no stranger to the genre.

In Britain, cult films such as Ben Wheatley's *Kill List* (2011) and *A Field in England* (2013) established the burgeoning career of a promising director, and Edgar Wright's *Hot Fuzz* (2007) reminded many of the ways in which the genre can reveal and critique the dark idiosyncrasies of British cultural life. Robert Eggers' *The Witch* (2015) brought folk horror into the mainstream, helped considerably by its production under the banner of A24 (*Hereditary* [dir. Ari Aster, 2018], *Midsommer* [dir. Ari Aster, 2019], *The Lighthouse* [*Robert Eggers*, 2019], and *Men* [2022]). This played a significant role invigorating folk horror by fostering an environment where filmmakers can develop genre fiction in new ways whilst also invoking the traditions of previous generations.

As the folk horror genre has proliferated, so has the critical work which both re-evaluates the genre's extrapolative qualities and its historic cultural significance. The key academic monograph here is Adam Scovell's *Folk Horror: Hours Dreadful and Things Strange* which features significantly in the book reviewed here.[1] Edited works such as *Folk Horror Revival: Field Studies*, *Folk Horror: New Global Pathways* and *The Routledge Companion to Folk Horror* have furthered the critical dialogue surrounding the genre's past and present forms.[2]

A welcome addition to this comes in *Folk Horror on Film: Return of the British Repressed*, an edited collection which focuses on British film, and its interactions with the wider phenomena of folk horror on screen. This includes considering British folk horror film in relation to folkloric traditions and practices, socio/political change and Media, Literature and the arts, and transnational folk horror cinema. Central to this is the through-line that folk horror is a genre which involves a pull towards the future whilst being tethered to the spectres of the path. The well-worn nature of repression and its revenant nature evident in so many horror narratives, not least in the explosion of fin de siècle fiction (e.g. *Dracula* [1897], *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* [1886]). However, many of the contributors notice that folk horror deals with traumas and tensions which harken back much further than the pressing frustrations of Victorian sensibilities, such as the reverberations of ancient paganism, long-lasting religious strife and the English Civil War. The editors write, "folk horror films are a crucible from which disturbing repressions from Britain's past might be reborn, with these sedimented layers of pagan, premodern, superstitious, feudal and Celtic pasts coming the surface."[3]

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[1] Adam Scovell, *Folk Horror: Hours Dreadful and Things Strange* (Leighton Buzzard: Auteur, 2017).
[2] Andy Paciorek, Grey Malkin, Richard Hing, and Katherine Peach, eds., *Folk Horror Revival: Field Studies* (Durham: Wyrd Harvest Press, 2018); Dawn Ketley and Ruth Heholt, eds., *Folk Horror: New Global Pathways*, Horror Studies (Cardiff: University of Wales, 2023); Rob Edgar and Wayne Johnson, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Folk Horror* (Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2024).
[3] Louis Bayman and K. J. Donnelly, "What makes the folk horrific?" in *Folk Horror on Film: Return of the British Repressed,* edited by Louis Bayman and K. J. Donnelly (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023), 16.

The first section of the book deals with, at some length, Robin Hardy's *The Wicker Man* (1973) as both an influential text in a movement in British cinema, and an inspiration for subsequent films. These chapters explore the origins of the narrative of *The Wicker Man* and the contexts of its production, moving on to consider the film spectatorship and the ways in which the film offers a critical rendition of both Paganism and Catholicism, empowering the audience and their interpretive capacity. The final chapter in this section provides a Foucauldian approach, conducting discourse analysis of *The Wicker Man* and Neil Jordan's *The Company of Wolves* (*1984*) in order to scrutinize discursive parameters of canon formation. These chapters undoubtedly add to the substantial critical discourse which the film continues to generate and will be of significant use to scholars and students who seek to further understand this landmark film in British folk horror.

However, the capaciousness of this section, which forms the first third of the book, illustrates a potential problem that runs throughout the collection. *The Wicker Man* is indeed a seminal text and worthy of considerable analysis, but it dominates this collection not only in this opening part, but in its continuous presence in other chapters to such an extent that the film itself could be misread as *the* ur-text in the genre rather than an important part of the evolution of the British folk horror film tradition.

The second section of the book moves (to an extent) beyond the more canonical texts and takes into account some contemporary tensions and issues that are encountered in folk horror narratives. Essentially, these chapters consider the fragility of a fixed British identity, and the ways in which folk horror can destabilise this tenuous state, whilst retaining an ambivalence as pertaining to a secure alternative. For instance, Dawn Keetley's excellent analysis of *Doomwatch* (1972) rightly offers an alternative to the concretised 'Unholy Trinity' as *the* wellspring of British folk horror, noticing parallels that can be seen in *The Wicker Man*. This chapter also considers the genre hybridity (in this case horror/sci-fi) that is often ignored in the occasionally rigid parameters associated with the genre, and takes into account how, as a film dealing with Globalisation, folk horror can be simultaneously inward and outward facing.

Part three of this book is its most interesting and dynamic section. Lindsay Townsend considers the role of drums in folk horror films, stating "folk horror is a pivotal example of media that take advantage of [the] physical relationship between drums and ritual…[which] reflects an organic return to the instruments early, authentic roots."[4] This consideration of affect in film is the type of analysis that leaves the reader considering films that aren't mentioned in the piece itself (e.g. the use of percussion in diverse texts such as Merian C. Cooper and Ernest Schoedsack's *King Kong* [1933] and George Miller's *Mad Max: Fury Road* [2015]). I also found myself thinking that a dedicated section of music (folkloric music as a narrative device, diegetically and non-diegetically etc.) could have enhanced this volume as a whole.

This final section also contains the most ambitious and thought-provoking chapter in Andy Pacoriac's "Albion unearthed: social, political and cultural influences on British folk

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[4] Lyndsay Townsend, "Ritualistic rhythms: exploring the sensory affect of drums in British folk horror cinema," in *Folk Horror on Film,* 163.

horror, urban Wyrd and backwood's cinema." This chapter deftly charts the moral panics and cultural tides and dynamics of the day which frequently influence folk horror narratives and bridges a gap between the well-worn canon of the 1970s and more recent examples. In the final chapter of the collection Diane A. Rodgers, "Isn't all horror folk horror: a wyrd genre," begins by asking the question which forms the title of the chapter whilst quickly answering it with a resounding 'no'. Rodgers then suggests an intriguing notion that we should consider these incredibly versatile films, bound together by a deep narrative grammar, not as sub-genre, but as a mode of storytelling. This chapter proves that one of the main ways that scholars examine folk horror is by continually asking the question: what is folk horror? This is an essential part of this thought-provoking collection, which proves that there is space for nation specific analysis which complements the growing transnational scholarship concerning the history and evolution of folk horror.

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