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Edgar, Robert (2023) Folk Horror. In:
Leeds Salon, 21st June 2023, Carriageworks Leeds. (Unpublished)

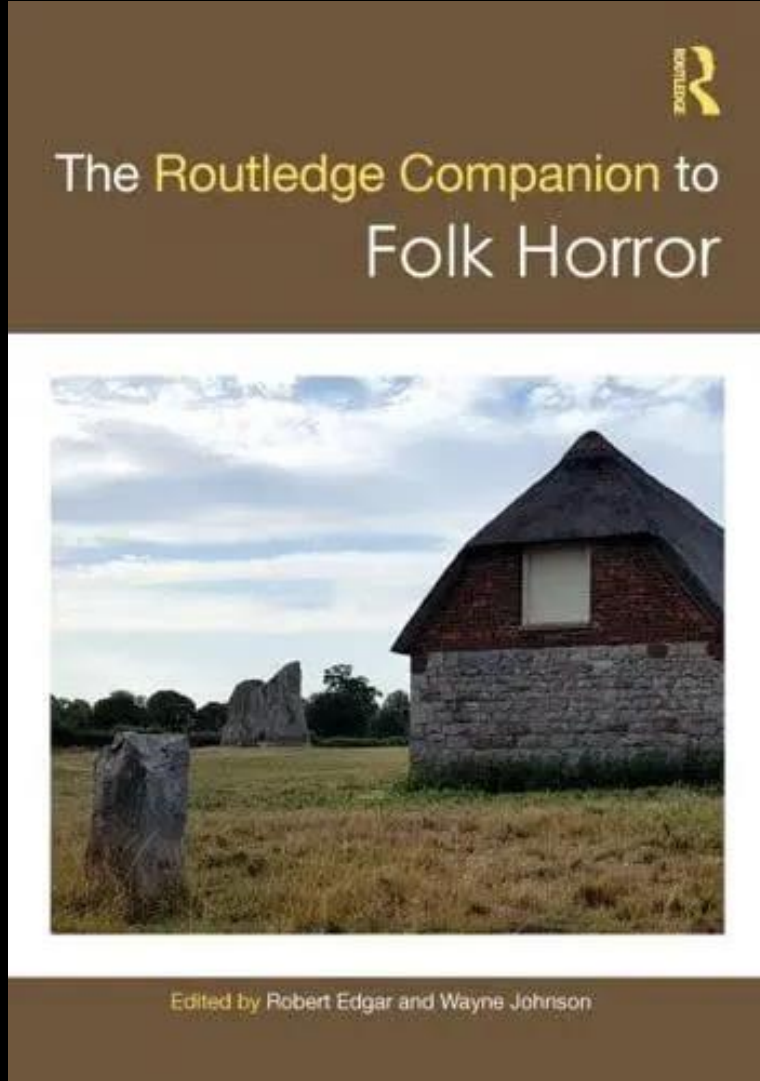
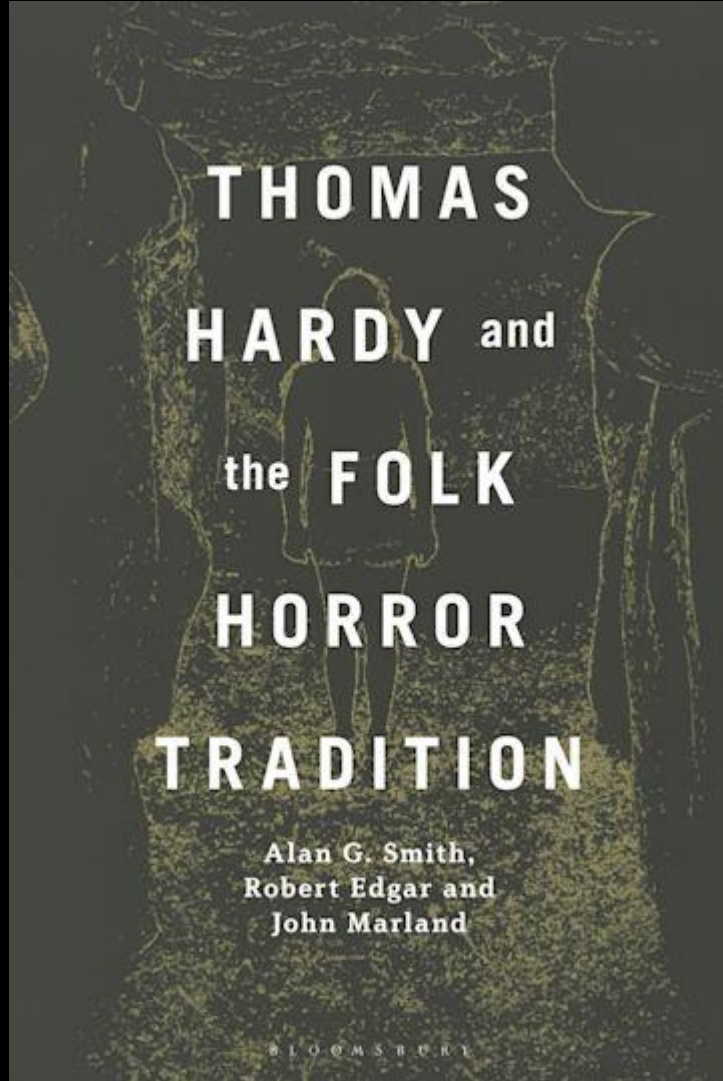
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Robert Edgar

Professor of Writing
and Popular Culture

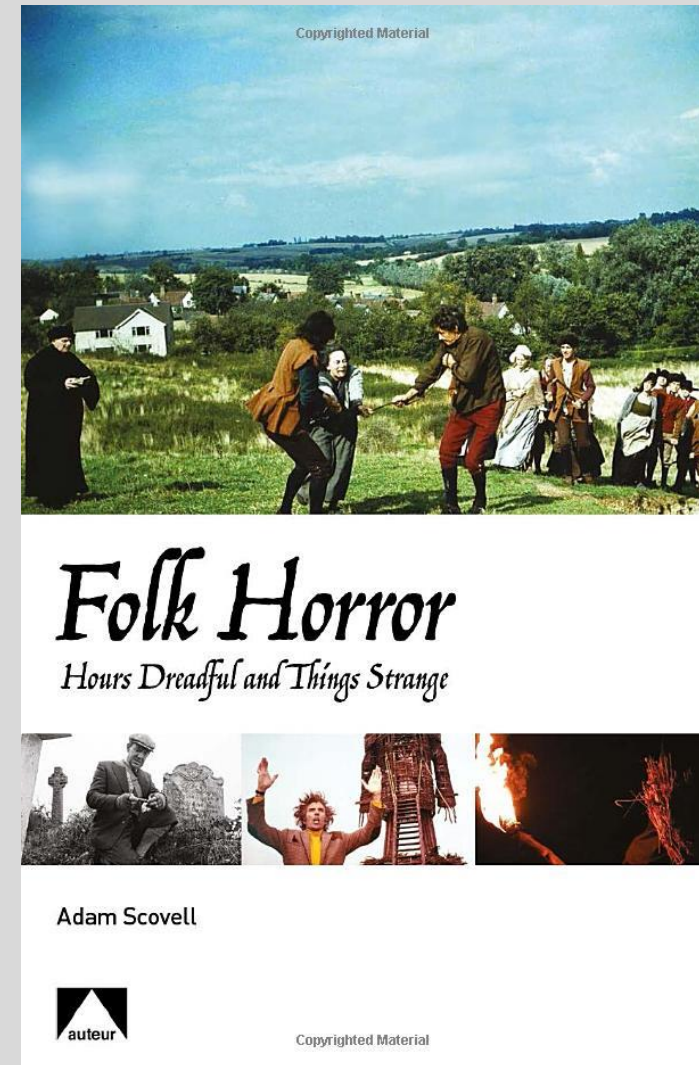
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York St John University

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Folk Horror: Definitions

Folk Horror is best seen, not simply as a set of criteria to be read with hindsight into all sorts of media, but as a way of opening up discussions on subtly interconnected work and how we now interact with such work. If anything, its genealogy is less important than its stark ability to draw links between oddities and idiosyncrasies, especially within post-war British Culture.

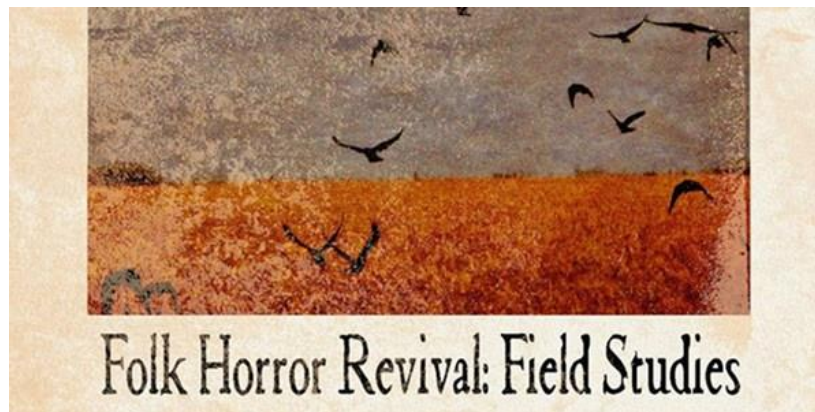
Scovell, A. (2017) *Folk Horror*, Auteur Press, 5-6



Folk Horror: Origins – Defining the Genre

Scovell identifies the term was first used by Piers Haggard in respect of Blood On Satan's Claw (Fangoria Magazine, 2003).

Scovell notes that the term was popularised by Mark Gatiss via the BBC4 series, A History of Horror in 2010.





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

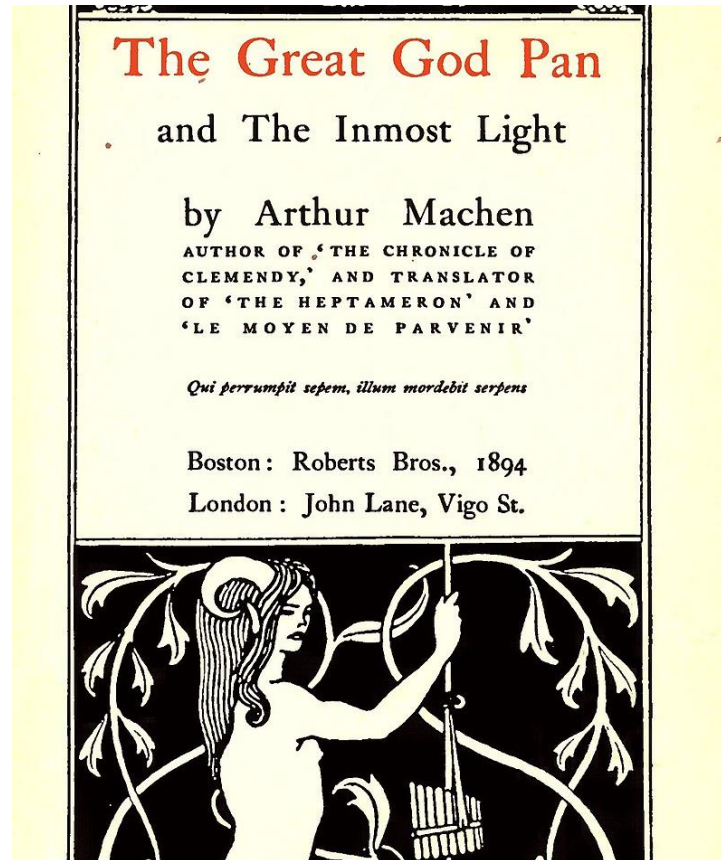
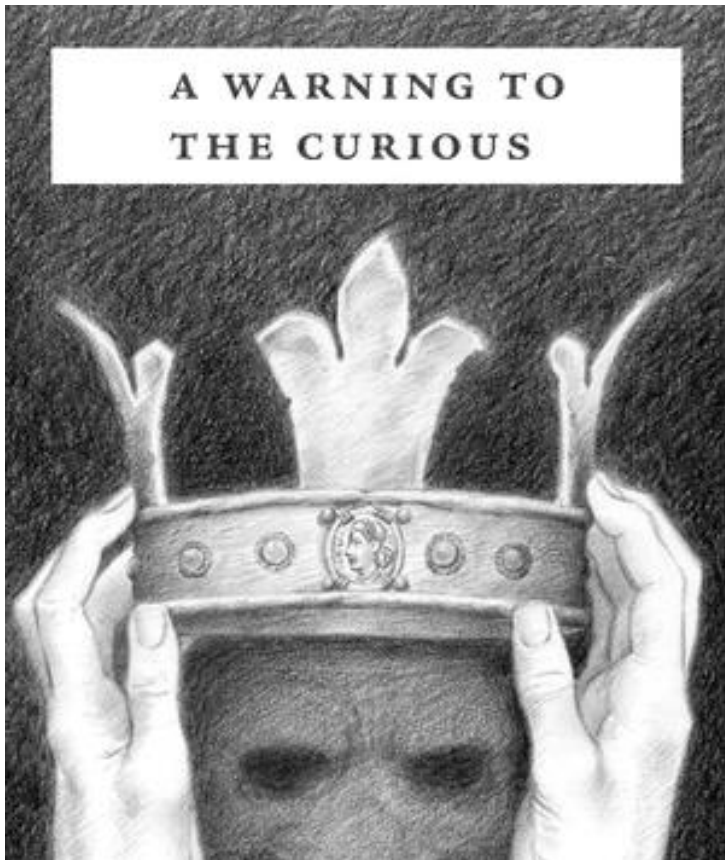
Conflicts



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

Victorian Origins



MR James – A Warning to the Curious/Oh, Whistle My Lad and I'll Come To You

Algernon Blackwood – The Centaur/The Willows/The Wendigo

Arthur Machen – The Great God Pan

Margery Lawrence – The Terraces of Night

Thomas Hardy

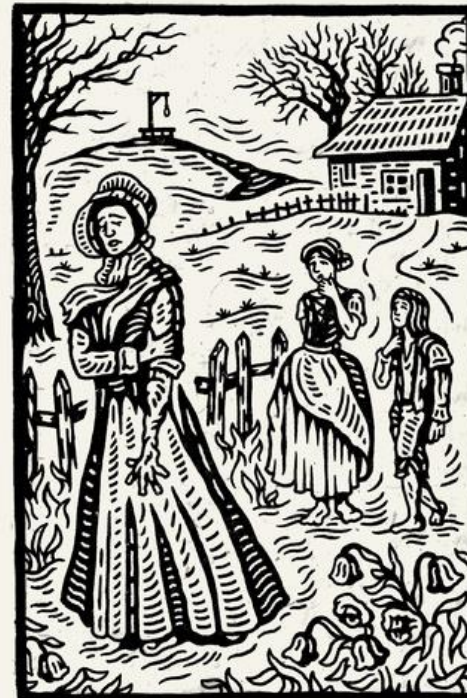
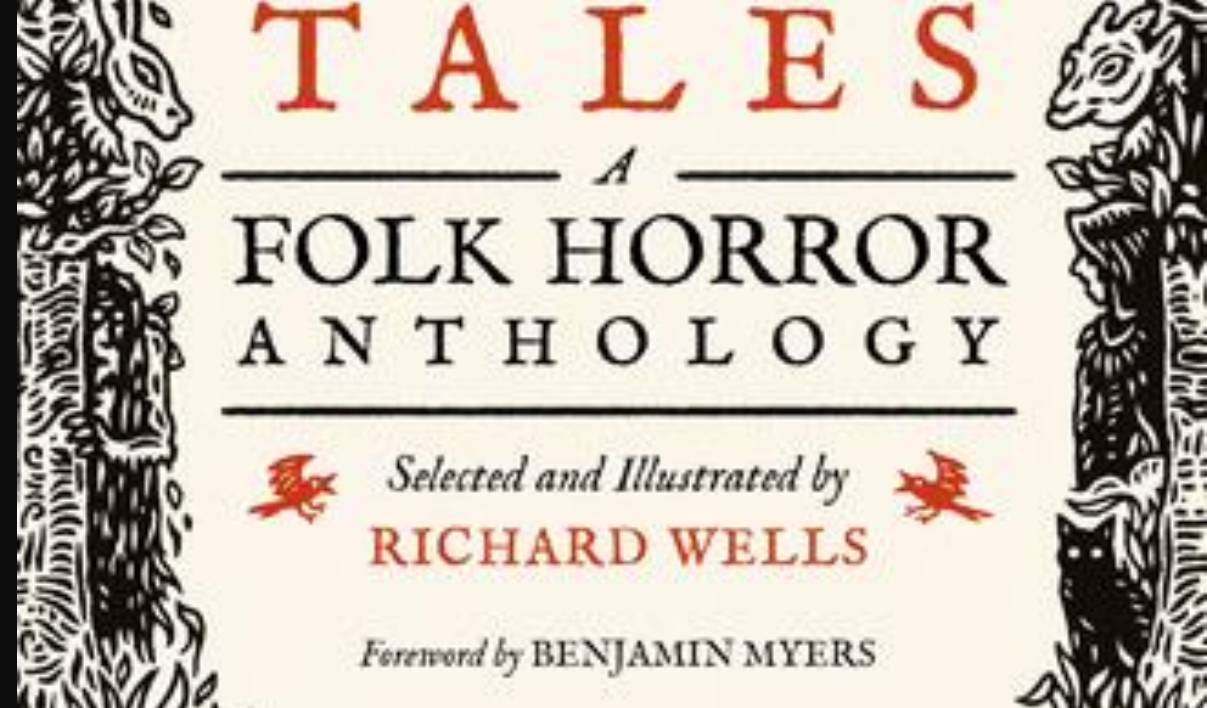
1840-1928

- 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.
-



The Withered Arm

- 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).



THE WITHERED ARM

By
Thomas Hardy

First published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*,
1888

I
A LORN MILKMAID

IT WAS AN eighty-cow dairy, and the troop of milkers, regular and supernumerary, were all at work; for, though the time of year was as yet but early April, the feed lay entirely in water-meadows, and the cows were 'in full pail'. The hour was about six in the evening, and three-fourths of the large, red, rectangular animals having been finished off, there was opportunity for a little conversation.

'He do bring home his bride tomorrow, I hear. They've come as far as Anglebury today.'

The voice seemed to proceed from the belly of the cow called Cherry, but the speaker was a milking-woman, whose face was buried in the flank of that motionless beast.

'Hav' anybody seen her?' said another.

There was a negative response from the first. 'Though they say she's a rosy-cheeked, tisty-tosty little body enough,' she added; and as the milkmaid spoke she turned her face so that she could glance past her cow's

The Box of Delights

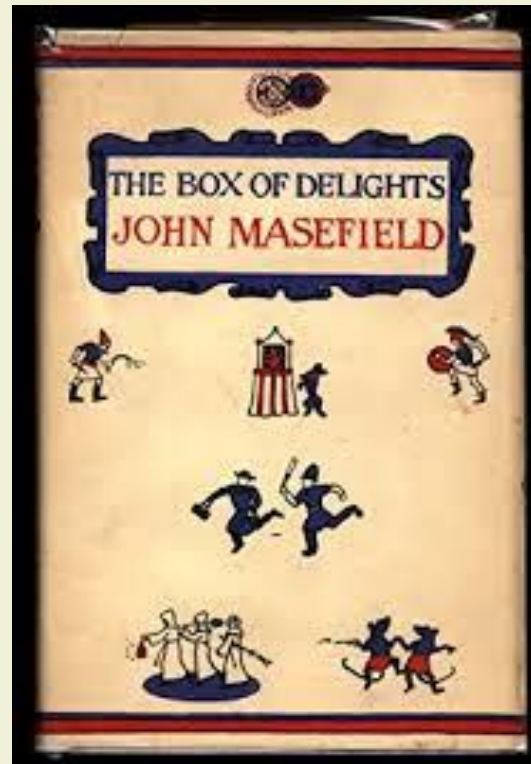
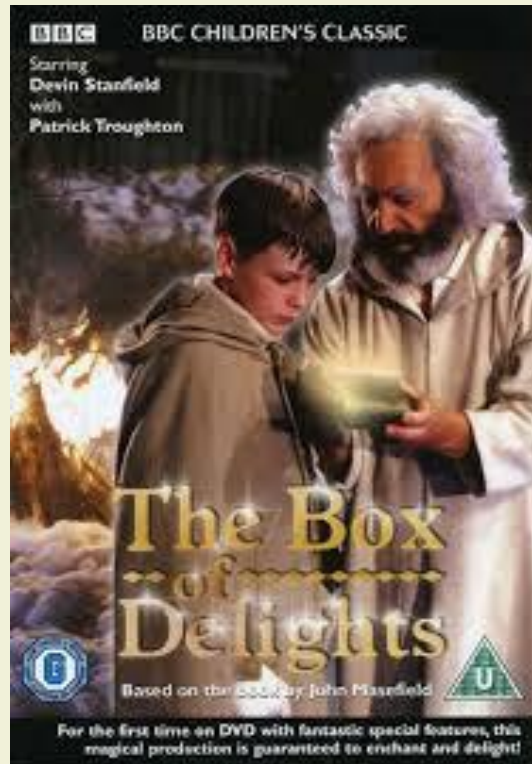
The Box of Delights was first published in 1935.

It features eclectic characters from folklore including:

- Ramon Lull
- Arnold of Todi
- Herne the Hunter
- The Waterfall Boy

- As well as characters who could turn themselves into animals – and vice versa.

It was adapted into an enduring BBC TV series in 1984 and is often cited as a horror influence by many writers.



Scovell's Folk Horror Chain:

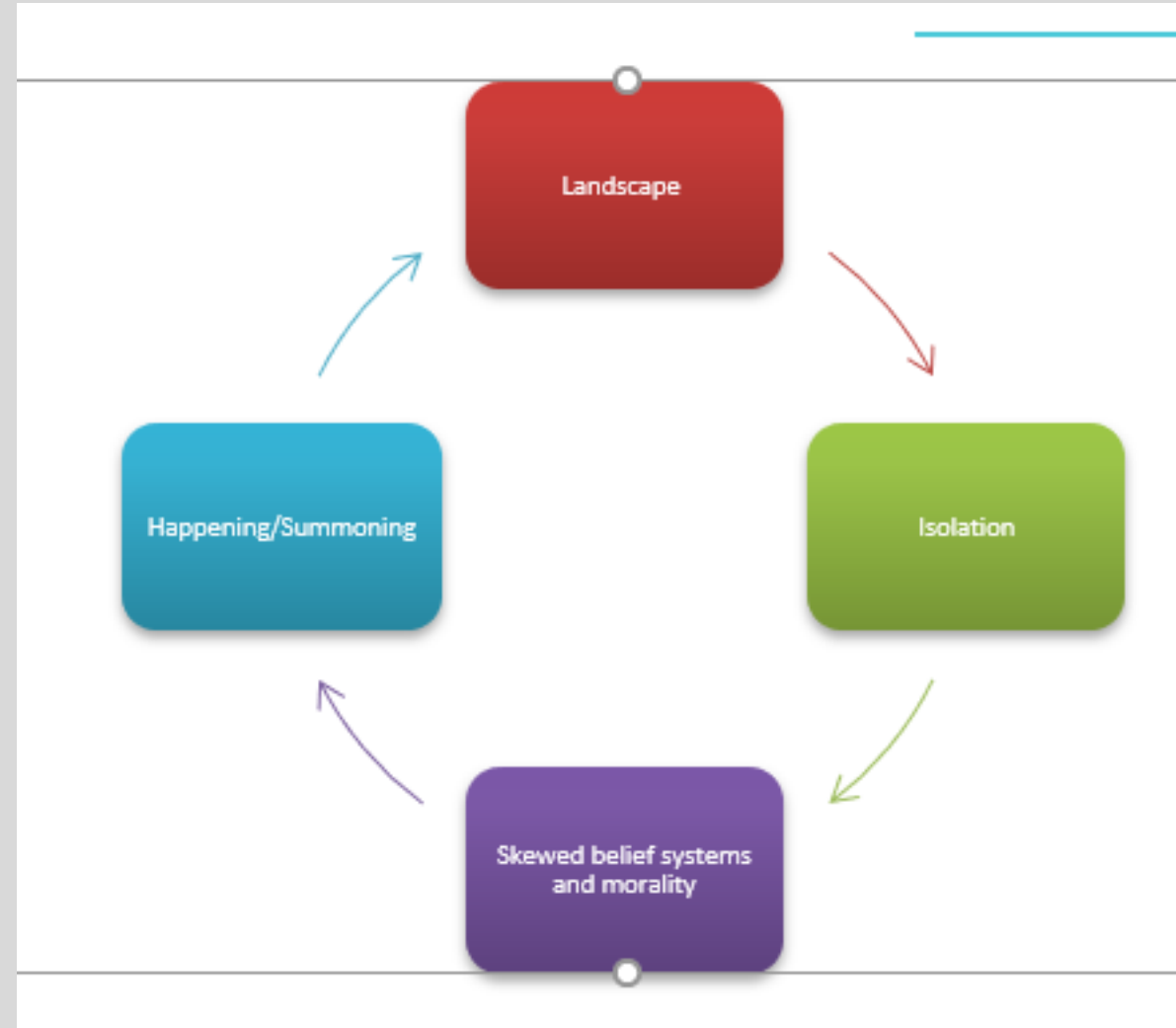
The ambiguity of 'happening and summoning'.

Landscape

Isolation

Skewed belief systems and morality

Happening/Summoning



The Unholy Trinity:

- *The Witchfinder General* – Michael Reeves (1968)
- *The Blood on Satan's Claw* – Piers Haggard (1971)
- *The Wicker Man* – Robin Hardy (1973)

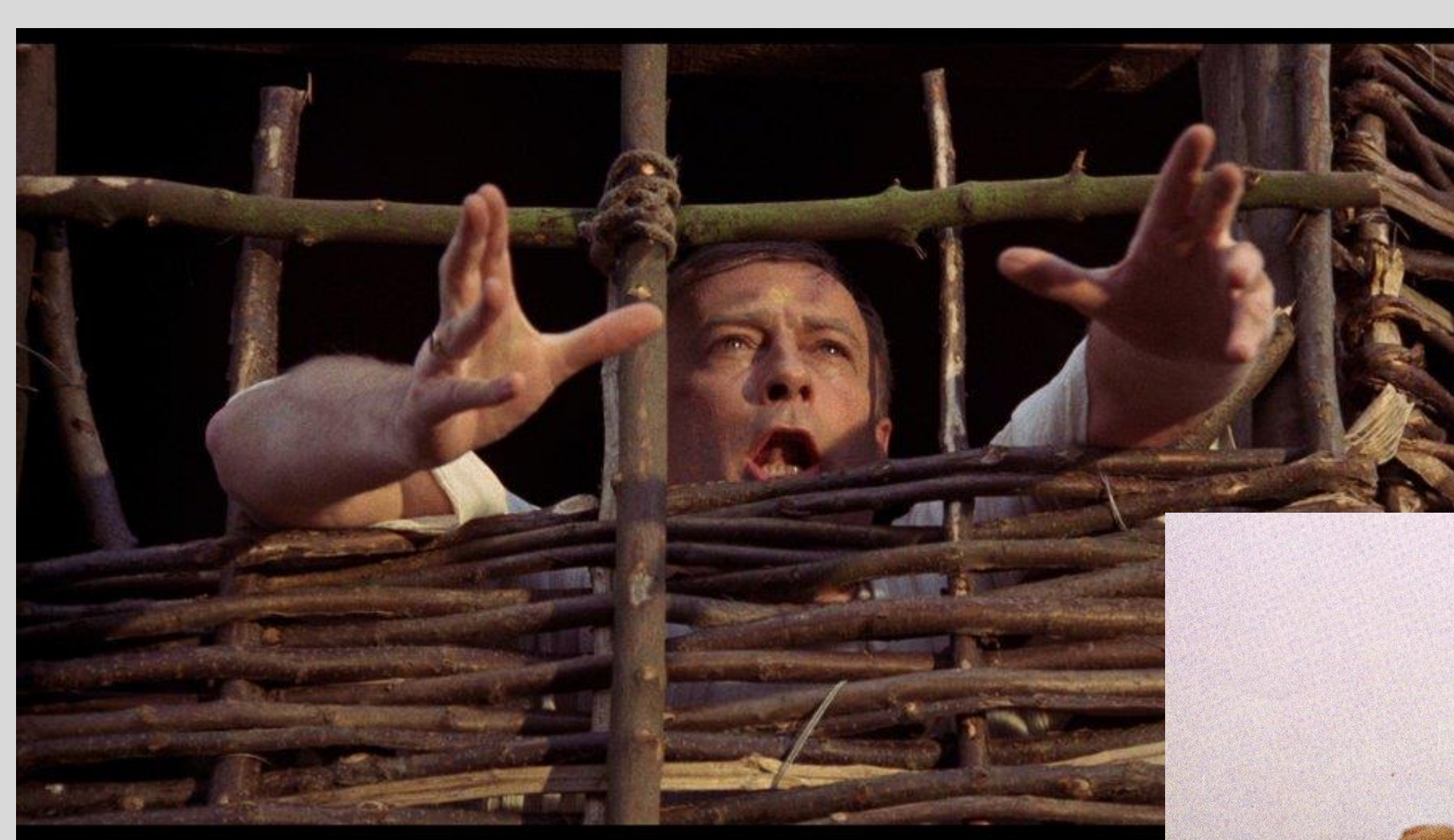


Symbolism in *The Wicker Man*



May Day celebrations
The Hare
Fire Jumping
The fire dance
The Maypole
The Hobbyhorse/Guiser
Punch
The Green Man
Temptation
Hedgerows/Borders
(The corruption of nature)





In the end they return to the
battle of faiths.



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

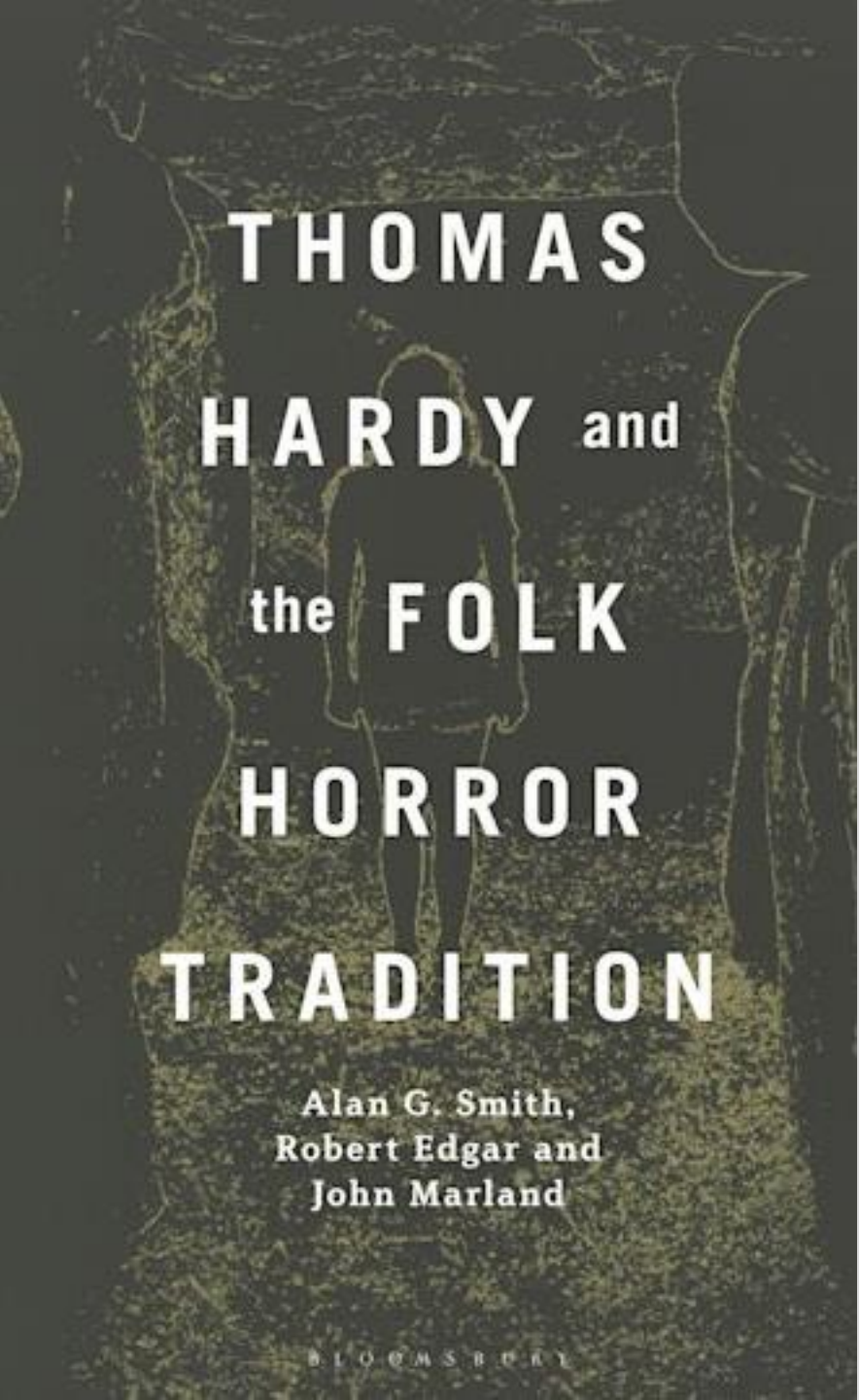
CUT BACK TO:



The horror happens in daylight

The danger of the past

When 'the folk' return it is first as parody with television such as *The League of Gentlemen*. What resurrects their malevolence is the post banking sector crisis and with it a collapse in the belief in neo-liberal social progression. The rise of the right and other forms of extremism evokes the 1970s. The rise of a second wave of folk horror can be mapped against ... the rise of political parties who conjure a view of the past as nostalgia. As with Hardy, writers, filmmakers and artists of today know that this view of the past hides a dark reality. Britain is increasingly haunted by its past and this can be seen politically in the evocation of a history in the Second World War, which is now too distant to touch and therefore is easily weaponised. Folk horror takes us to a different past, one often of memories of childhood. This is a haunting – a past within living memory. The effect of this is to establish contemporary 'folk tales' as they are forged in the mind of the young and exist in the memory of the adult.



**THOMAS
HARDY and
the FOLK
HORROR
TRADITION**

Alan G. Smith,
Robert Edgar and
John Marland

BLOOMSBURY

As a concept this is derived from Jacques Derrida's Spectres of Marx (1993).

Hauntology

We can define Hauntology as:

- Being haunted by the ghosts of a future that never happened.
- and
- This can equate to being haunted by our own ghosts or the spectres of our cultural past.

Mark Fisher defines this as:

"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." (Ghosts of My Life, 2014)





Nostalgia for ‘Lost Things’

The idea of tracts of our collective childhoods being ‘lost’ is one I find hugely affecting. Important things from our childhoods ... now exist only in our heads

I think the melancholy of ‘lost things’ is crucial to ‘the feeling. Its even there in Bagpuss. Emily finds ancient ephemera that other people have lost and she brings these weird nick-nacks to Bagpuss in his shop, where strange rustic stories are weaved around them. There is something intrinsically melancholy about that, and even as a four year old I knew that there was something very sad about a child’s toy finding its way into this strange, wood panelled Edwardian room. So Bagpuss is almost a manifestation of the specific sense of loss I’m talking about. Those bits of our childhood that we cannot get back, no matter how hard we try.

Bob Fischer (as told to Robert Edgar), “That Haunted Feeling’: Analogue Memories’, Robert Edgar and Wayne Johnson (2024) *The Routledge Companion to Folk Horror*, Routledge: London

The Mood of the '70s – Scarred for Life

- 1950s adult horror recycled for children
- Hammer Horror on TV
- Children's TV adopting tropes previously for adult TV.
- Popular culture obsessing with past horror representations.
- Cold War unease normalised.
- Social unease in Britain.
- The 'Winter of Discontent'.

Discovering Scarfolk

For tourists & other trespassers



With free
map* & rabies
hand wipes
*map is not of
Scarfolk

Richard Littler

COUNCIL CHRISTMAS BOY

is operating in your area

If you are a parent or have borrowed a child, you may be visited by a council Christmas Boy.

He is trained to assess how content you and your family are during the festive season.

If you hear his flute, you are legally obliged to let him into your home. Face the wall. Do not look him directly in the eye.

If you fail to meet the minimum contentment requirement you risk prosecution and even chemical sterilisation. One or more family members may be removed for further tests.

Don't be content with discontent



For more information please reread

e

Bats flitting outside an old, deserted house are believed to be evil omens.

The sudden hoot of an owl is a warning that misfortune is about to strike.

are often thought to be the spirits of the dead. Legend has it that a black cat walking under your feet is a bad omen.

1 **2** **3** **4** **5** **6** **7** **8** **12**

Why ghosts pass through walls

Route of ghost

Floorplan of house 1878 Floorplan of offices 1978

Ghosts continue to follow the routes they used when alive, even if the house has been rebuilt since that time. This is why they seem to climb up stairs that no longer exist or are able to glide through walls.

Corpse lights are small flames flickering just above the ground. Especially common in graveyards, they are said to show the way that a funeral procession will soon pass.

The World of the Unknown

ALL ABOUT GHOSTS

PTV The World of the Unknown

ALL ABOUT

GHOSTS



THE STORY OF GHOSTS

What is a ghost?

Ghosts are supposed to be the appearances of the spirits of the dead in a form visible to the living.

According to those who have claimed to see ghosts, they usually look pale and cloudy. They can pass through solid objects such as doors and walls. They appear and vanish leaving no trace.

Whether they really do exist is still a complete mystery, but perhaps this book will help you to make up your mind.

The story told below has many features associated with the creation of a ghost.

Tom Colley's ghost

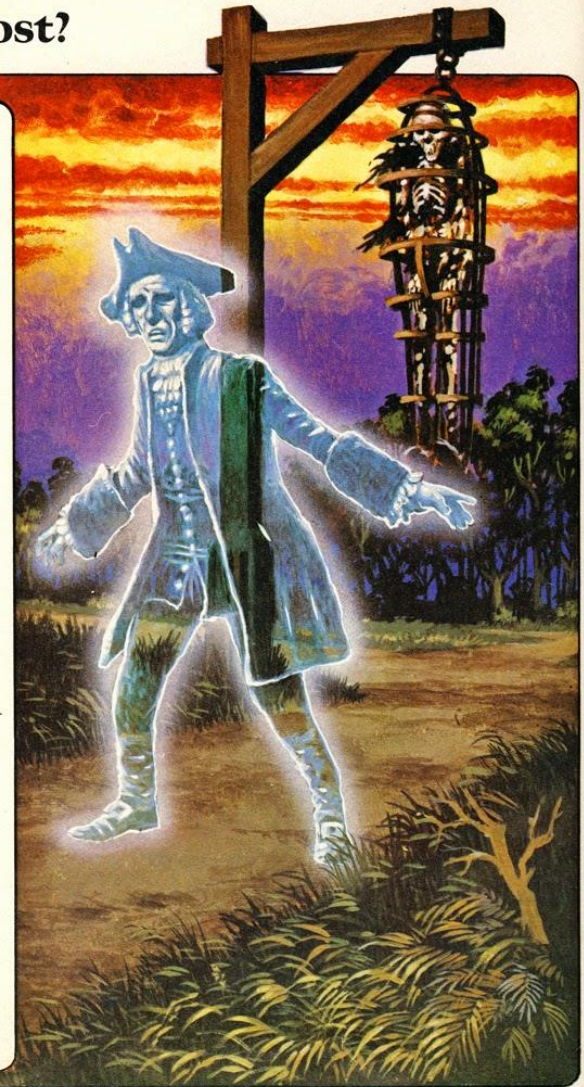
In 1751, near the town of Tring in England, an old couple were beaten and drowned by a frenzied mob who thought they were witches. The leader of the mob, Tom Colley, was later arrested and sentenced to death by hanging. When he was dead, his body was suspended from the gallows (like that shown on the right) inside a gibbet – a cage of iron hoops and chains. It was left to dangle there as a gruesome warning to other lawbreakers.

People believed that a person's spirit could not leave the Earth to go to the afterlife – heaven or hell – without a burial ceremony. So Colley's ghost would haunt the spot where he was left to rot. Other ghosts were thought to be the spirits of people who had been murdered or who had died very suddenly.

Warding off ghosts

Colley's body, in its gibbet, was suspended at a crossroads. It was thought that his ghost would be confused by all the roads. Therefore, it would not be able to find its way back to take revenge on the people who had hanged him there.

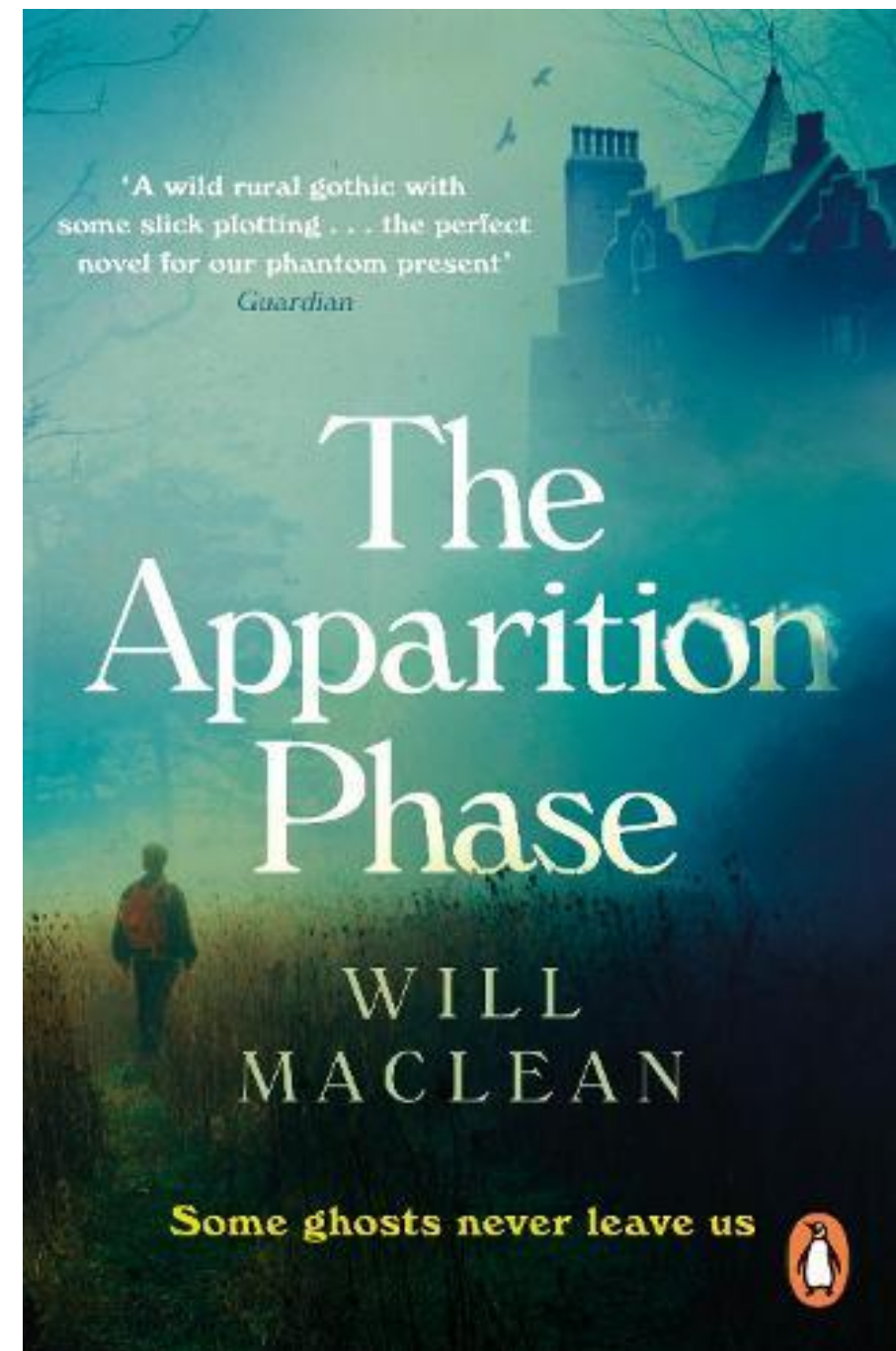
His ghost is still said to haunt the place of the hanging. Recent stories say that his ghost now appears as a large black dog.





1. The Ghost Monk of Newby

The Church of Christ the Consoler, Skelton-cum-Newby, Yorkshire: a black-and-white image of a church altar. Standing on the right-hand side of the image is a figure, brazen and almost defiant, dressed in a long black monk's cowl. It is tall, this figure, and very *long*. Everything about it implies *length*, as if it's been stretched somehow. It is transparent, and the altar steps and the rear of the church are visible through the figure's outline. But those are things you only notice later, if you dare, because the first thing that strikes you is the face. The face – such as it is – is a piece of white cloth with ragged eyeholes, like thumbholes in rough clay, with nothing human to refer to at all. Just that horrible, faceless gaze.



SHOWING UP IN THE DARK SIDE OF THE DECADE
SCARRED FOR LIFE
VOLUME ONE: THE 1970s

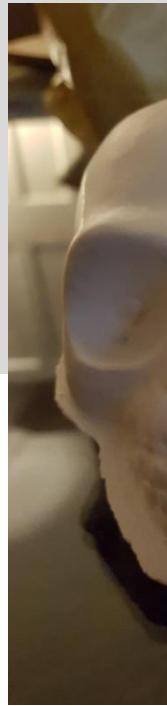


STEPHEN BROTHERTON AND DAVE LAWRENCE



INTRODUCTION BY JOHNNY MARSH

PLUCKY INFORMATION, READ
EASILY FOR THE MUM, DAD AND
YOUNG MONSTER
WORKING BY DAY AND
NIGHT, DURING THE 1970s
THEY WROTE THE BOOKS
AND ALL YEAR TELLING US

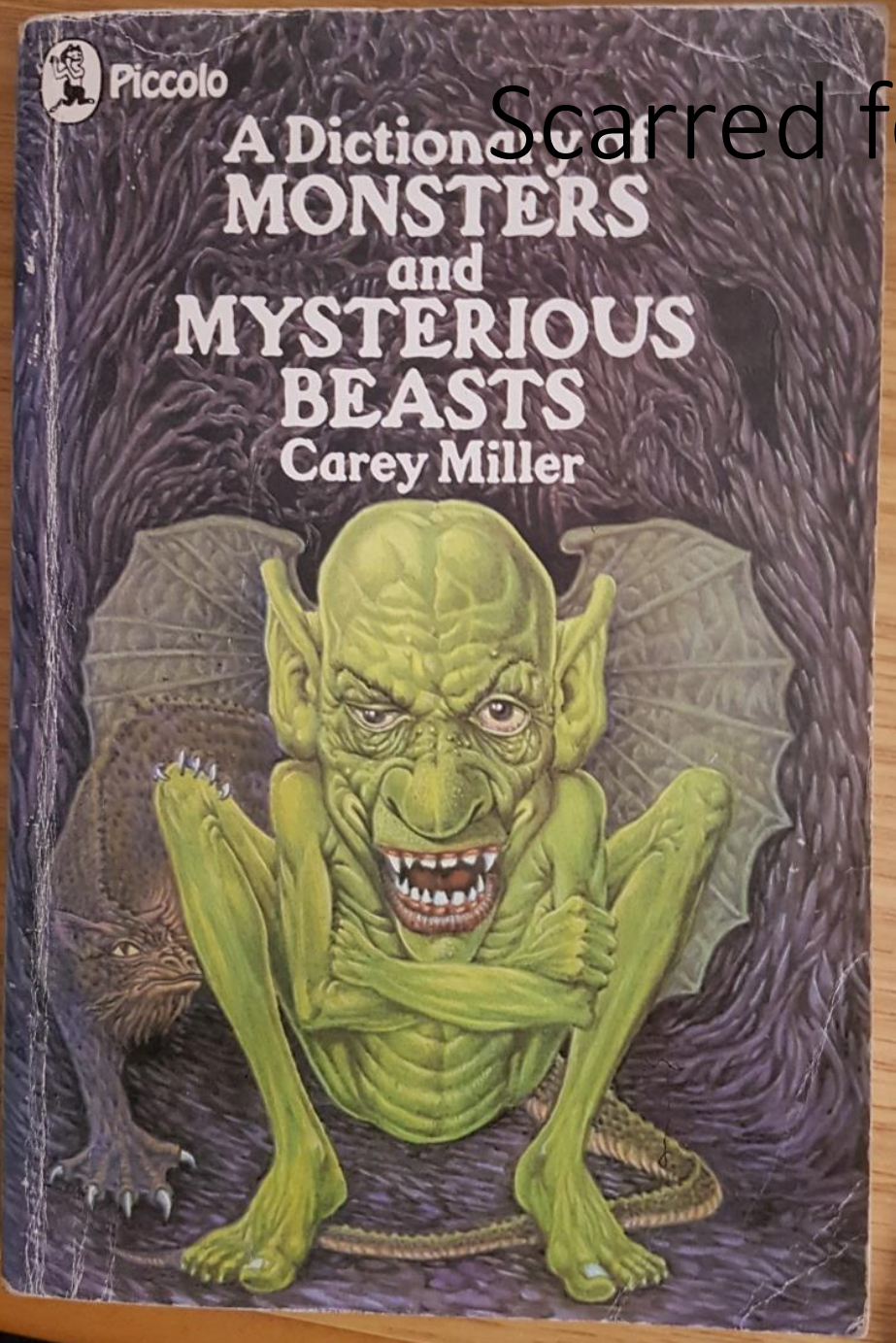


Skull

A craft wh
at making nast
Although easy
take a lot of pa
And it's worth
The unique Cr
the mould is fit
Rotary Casting
'head' can be s
child has to do
finished mould

Make Skull
Shrunken Hea

Reference No.
Pack Quantity

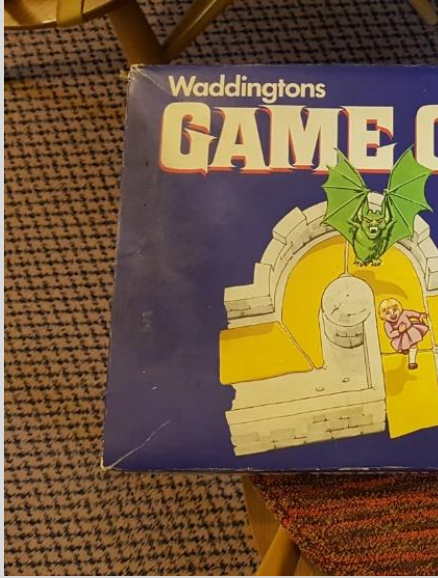


Scarrred for Life



ons.com

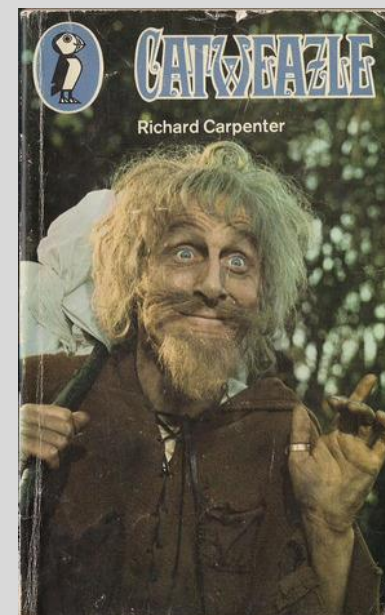
Bob Fischer

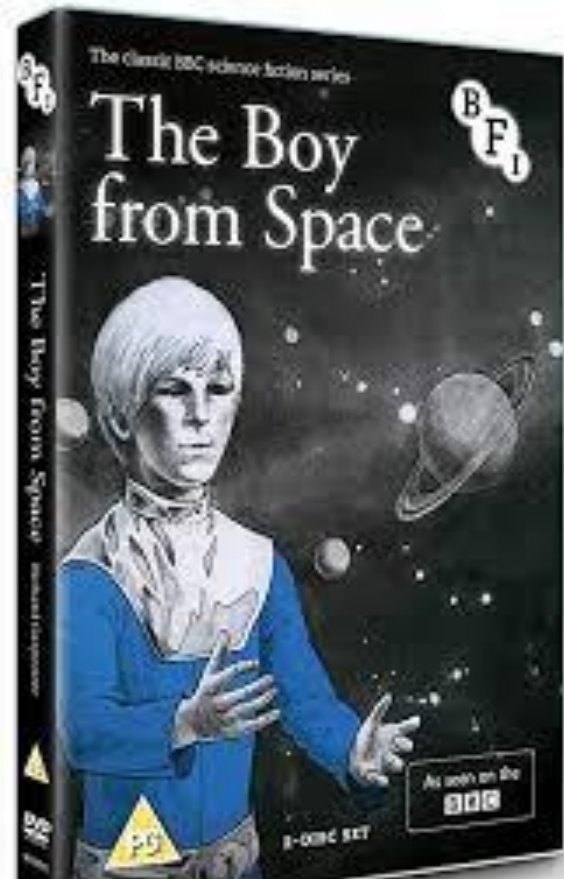


<https://hauntedgeneration.co.uk/>



The Bells of Astercote: Temporal and Dimensional Slippage

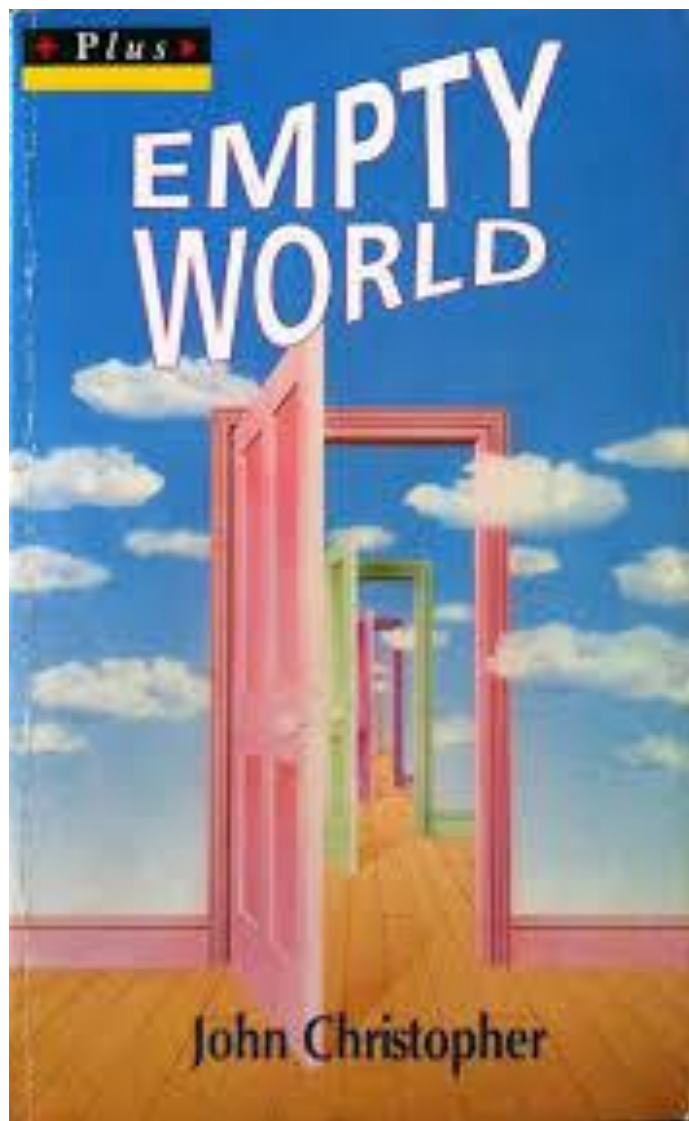
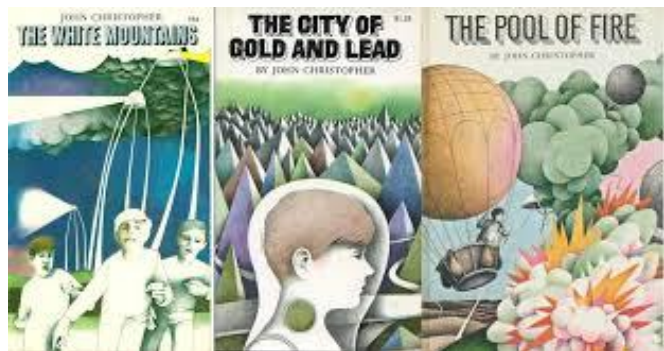


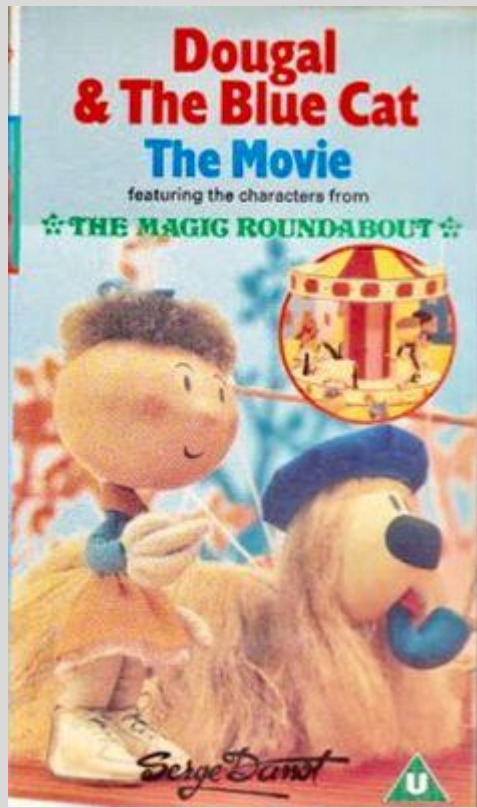


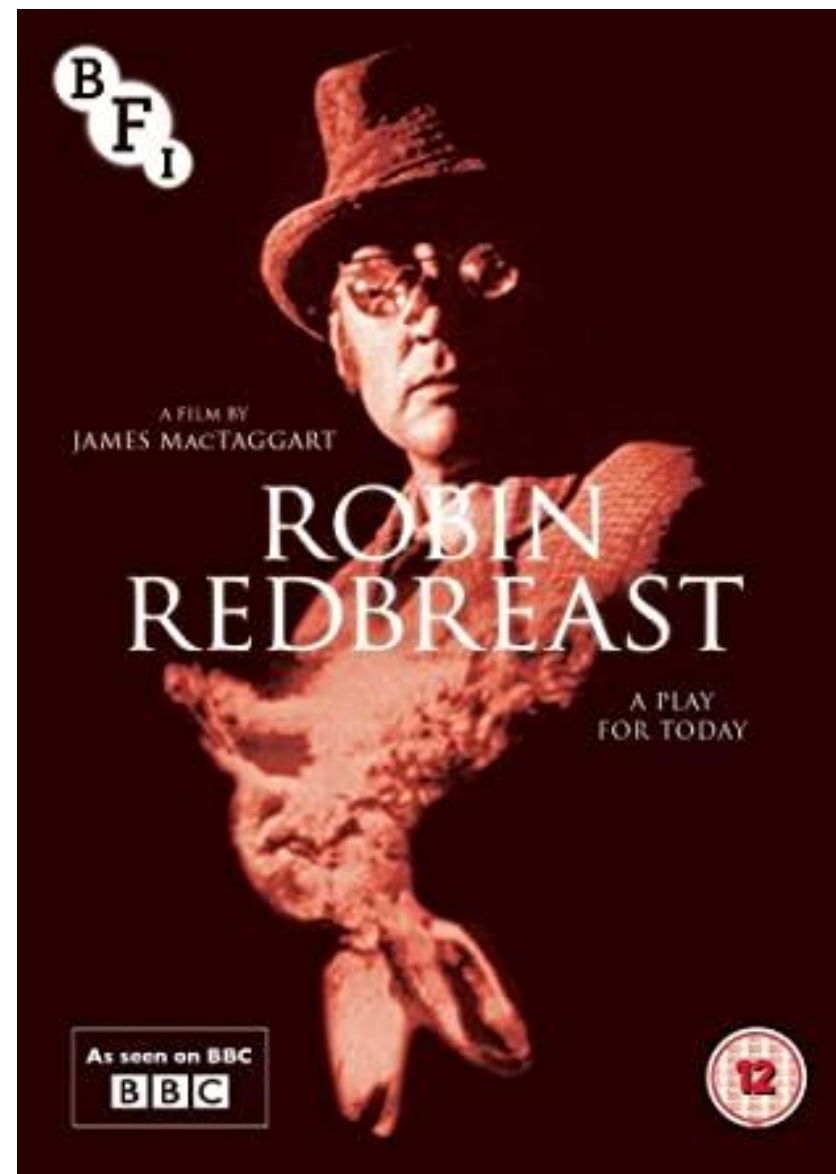
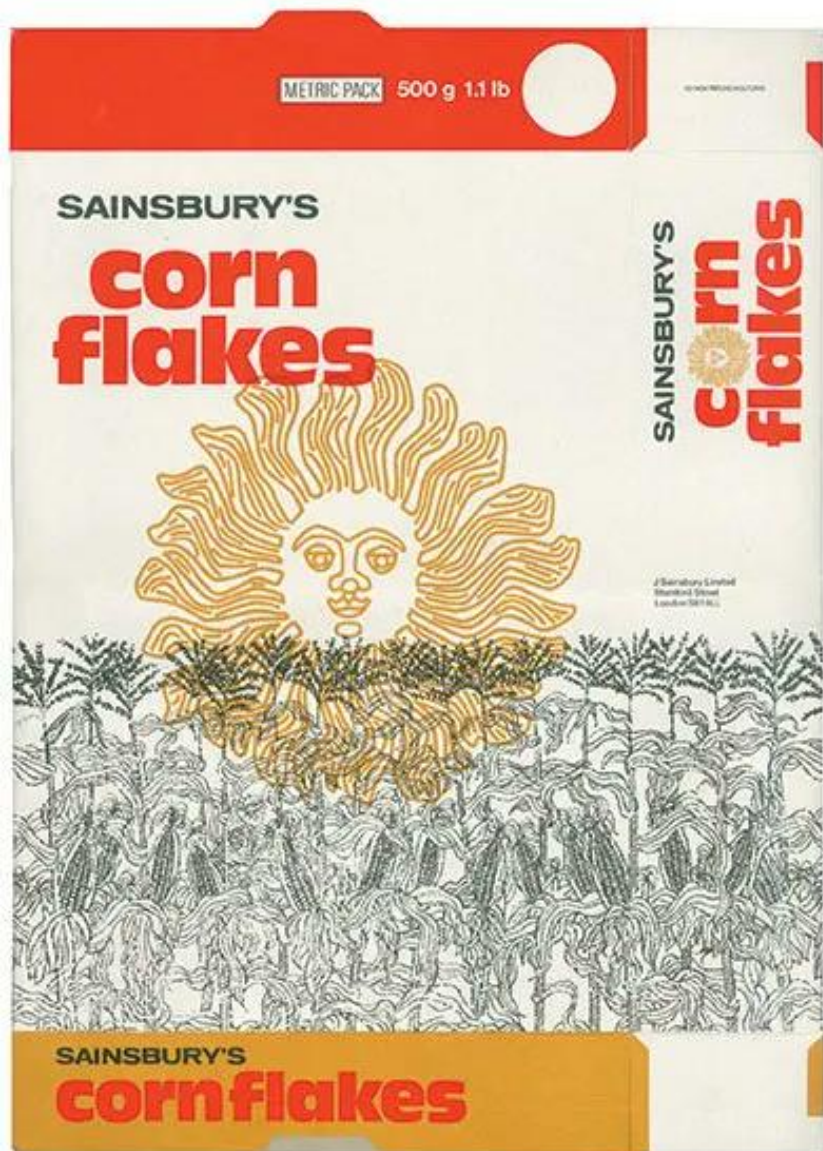
The Ghost in the Machine

Space and technology as aspects of the weird and the eerie.

Quatermass, The Boy from Space, Sapphire and Steele, the Tomorrow People, The Boy Who Turned Yellow.







Mark Fisher - the Weird and the Eerie

Fisher differentiates between the weird and the eerie but identifies what they have in common – the strange rather than the horrific.

In doing this he reconsiders contemporary views of Freud's 'uncanny'.

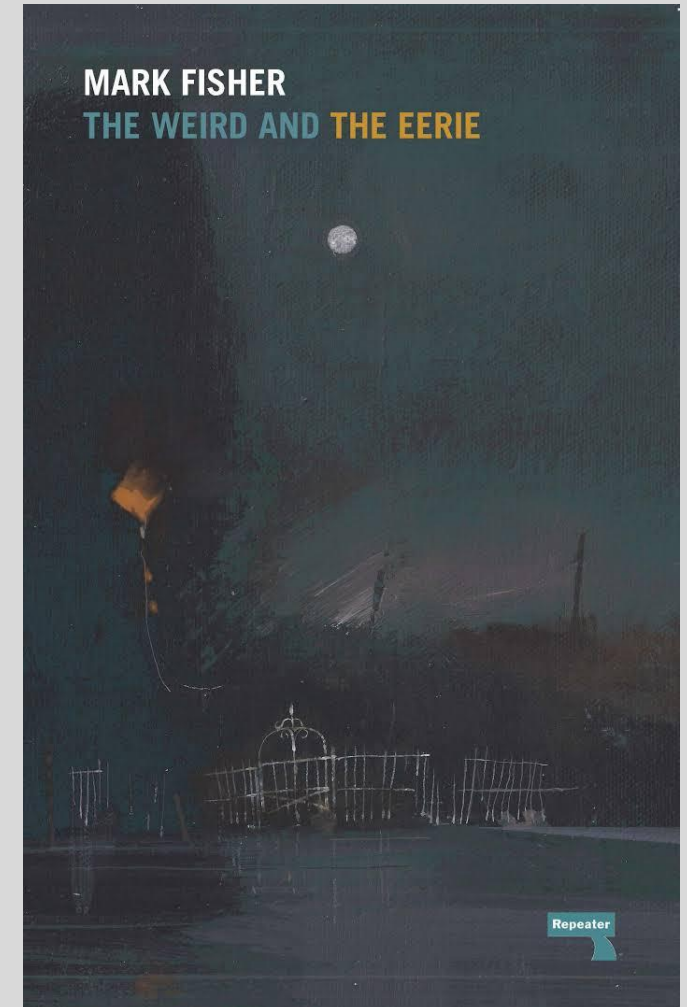
'The fascination for the outside, for that which lies beyond standard perception, cognition and experience.' (page 8).

'[The weird, eerie and uncanny] are all affects, but they are also modes: modes of film and fiction, modes of perception, ultimately, you might even say, modes of being. Even so, they are not quite genres.' (page 9).

- The uncanny is making the familiar strange.
- The weird suggests something outside which cannot be known.
- The eerie is also to do with the outside but is 'more readily in landscapes partially emptied of the human.' (page 11).

This last point we might want to read as humanity.

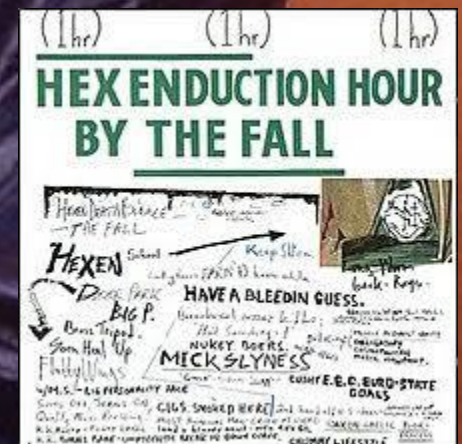
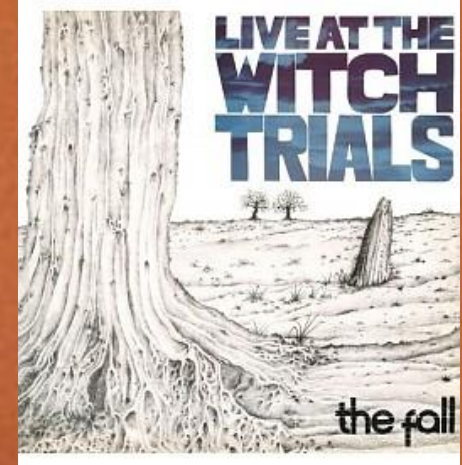
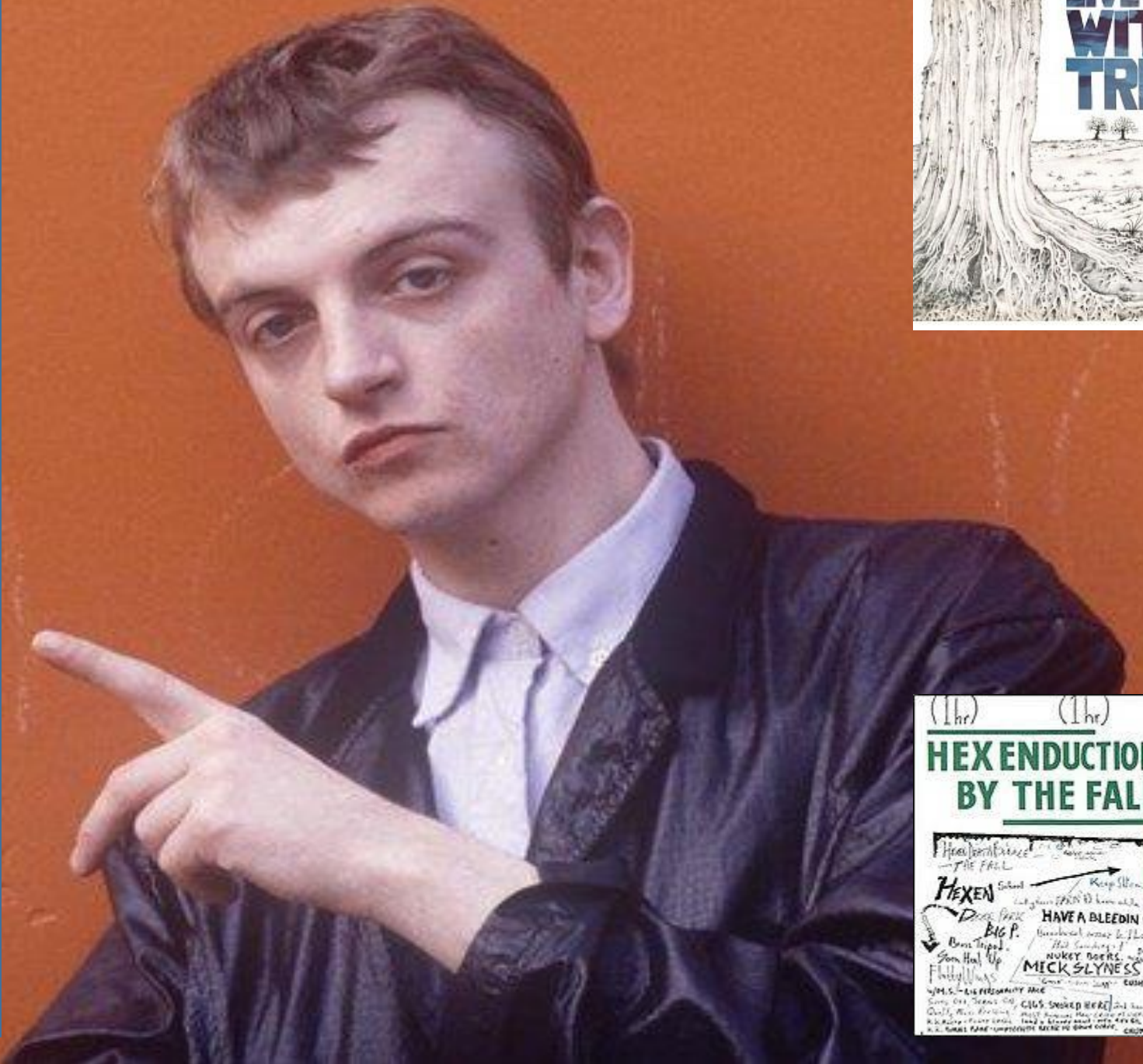
*This translates in some texts to images of borders – liminal spaces:
hedgerows, open doorways, etc.*



The grotesque as connection of the weird with that which is 'laughable'.

The weird is that which does not belong.

- Fragments, of texts.
- Intrusions of one state of being in to another.
- That which brings in to view something which should lie beyond it.



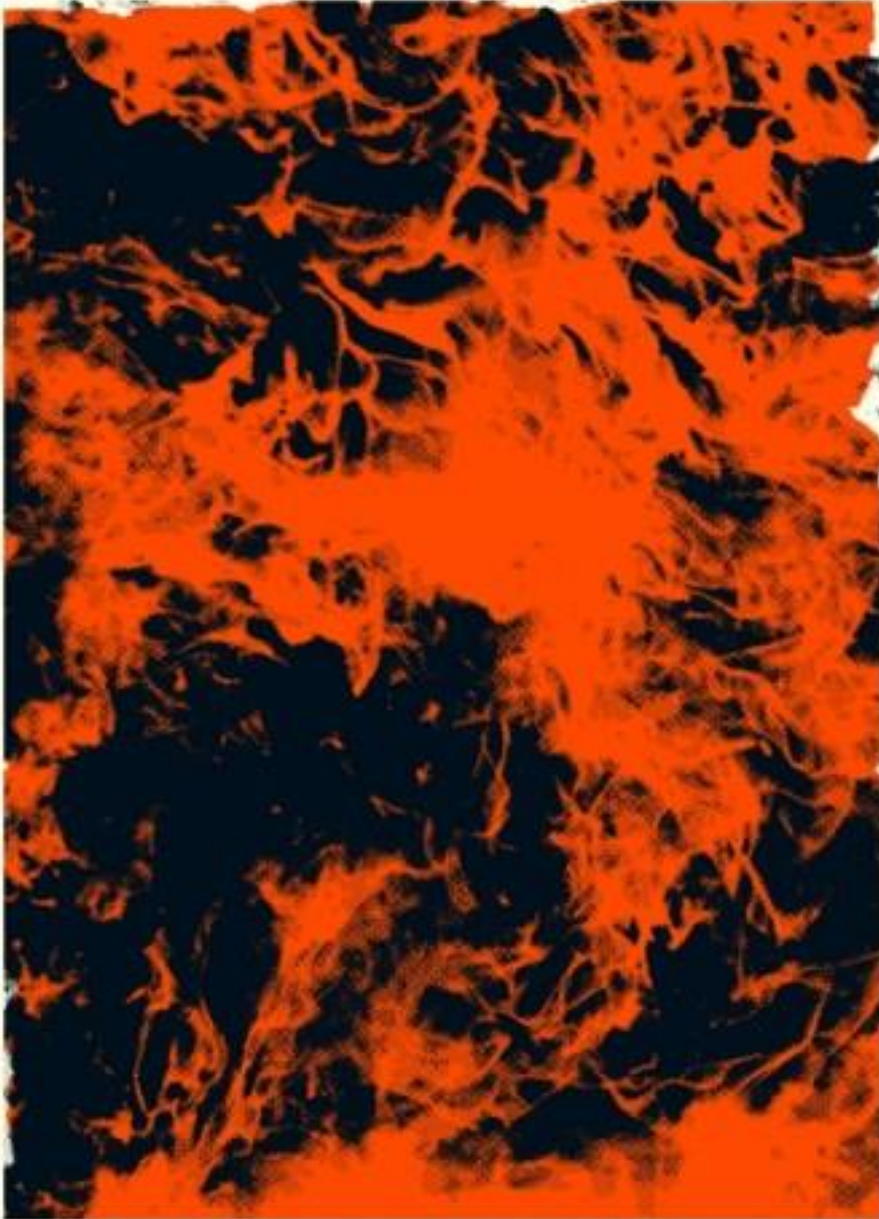
The League of Gentlemen



Growing up in the '60s and '70s

Writing Folk Horror in the '90s and beyond

DAVID PEACE 1974



Folk Horror Revival: Darker Turns

David Peace - 'Red Riding'

- Peace re-characterises the 1970s.
- An adult perspective takes over the popular cultural references to the period.
- The perspective is one where the book starts before the presence of the Yorkshire Ripper is felt but from the perspective of writer and reader the Ripper is imminent.
- There is an inherent and perpetual sense of threat and unease that runs throughout the series.
- This is not just murder but corruption.
- The 1970s have become tainted.

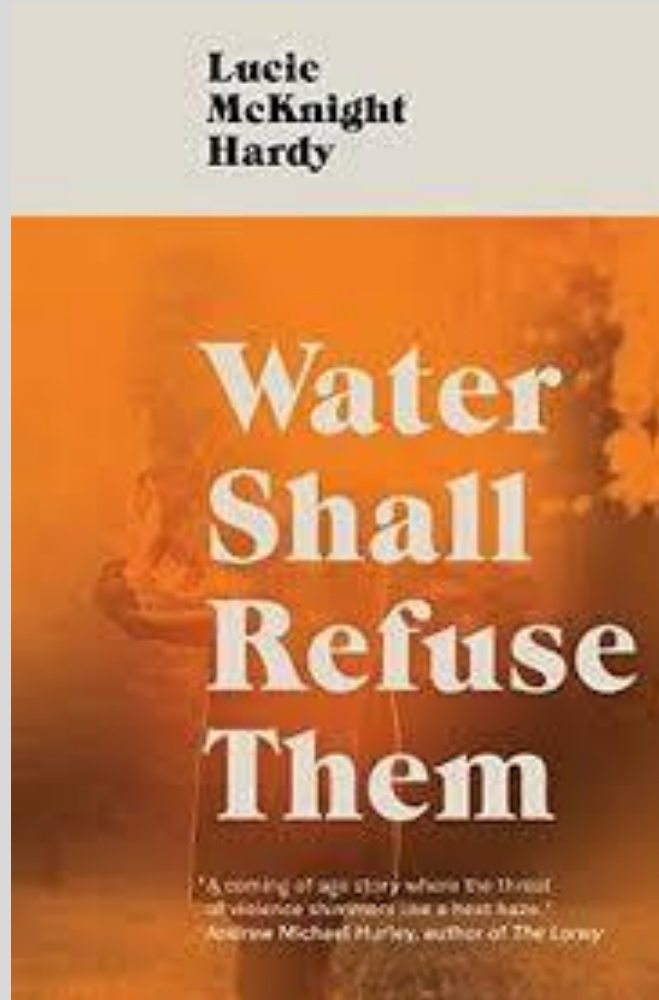
Folk Horror Revival: Even Darke

- The representation of the past changes post-Saville.
- That which was always eerie in the '70s and early '80s is confirmed as genuinely dark.
- This corrupts that which went before.
- The world starts to become slightly darker.

- And suggests that the 'demons' walk amongst us.
- As *The Wicker Man* suggests – the fear is not of a demonic presence but rather what people will do to other people.



The 1970s as cultural location



Lucie McKnight Hardy uses the 1970s as a backdrop. This is a period in time which is characterised as isolated – no one discussed their problems.

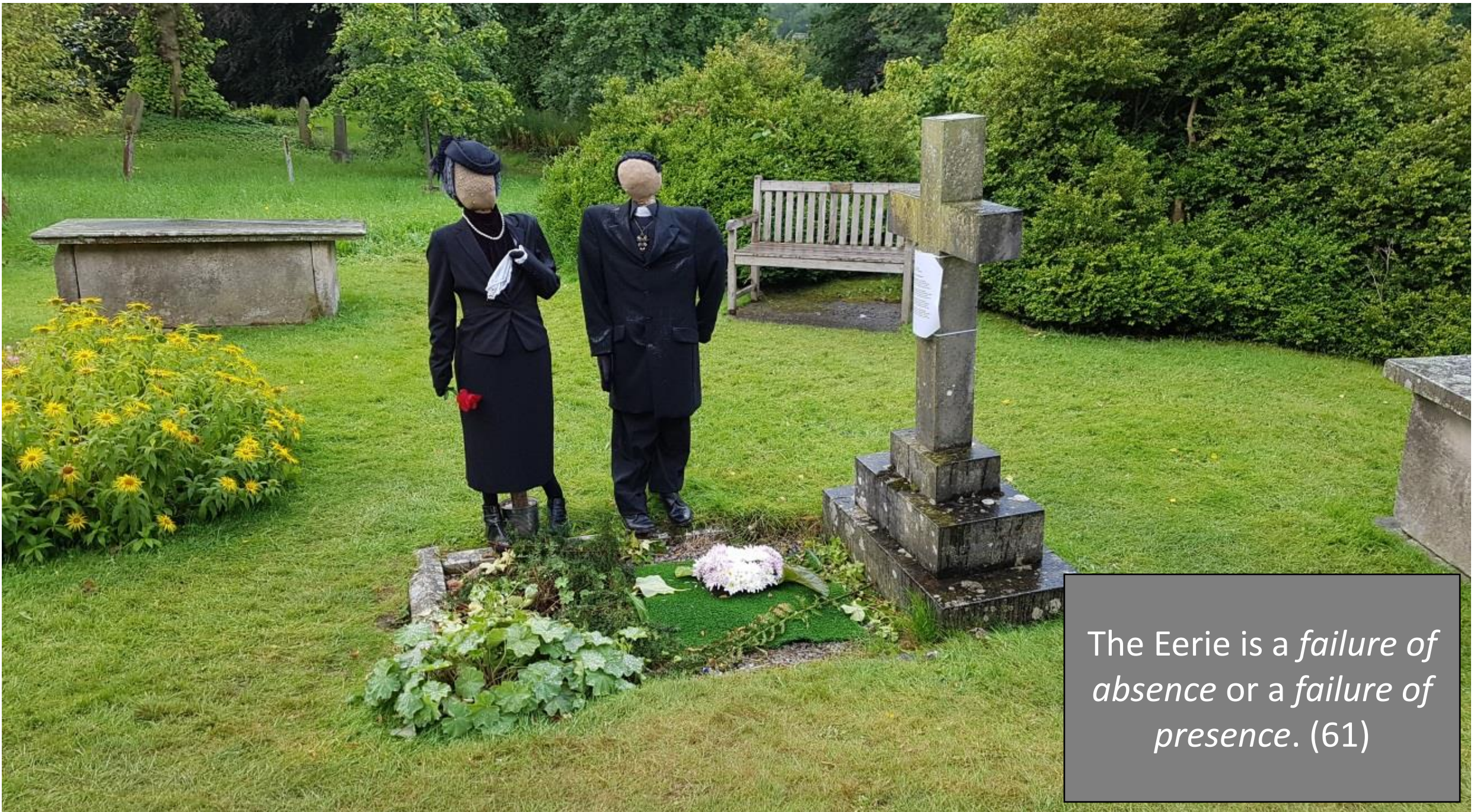
Questions:

- How is childhood presented?
- What draws Niff to her belief system?
- What does this suggest about innocence and experience?
- Do you think there is something even creepier about the inclusion of children?

- How is the 1970s characterised?
- What visceral details about the period are drawn out and what is the effect of these on the reader?



- Is the sub-genre created when the Eerie is mixed with 'verifiable' folklore and or folk histories?
- Do these 'histories' and traditions represent the past as traumatic?
- Is Folk Horror a valuable counter to nostalgia?

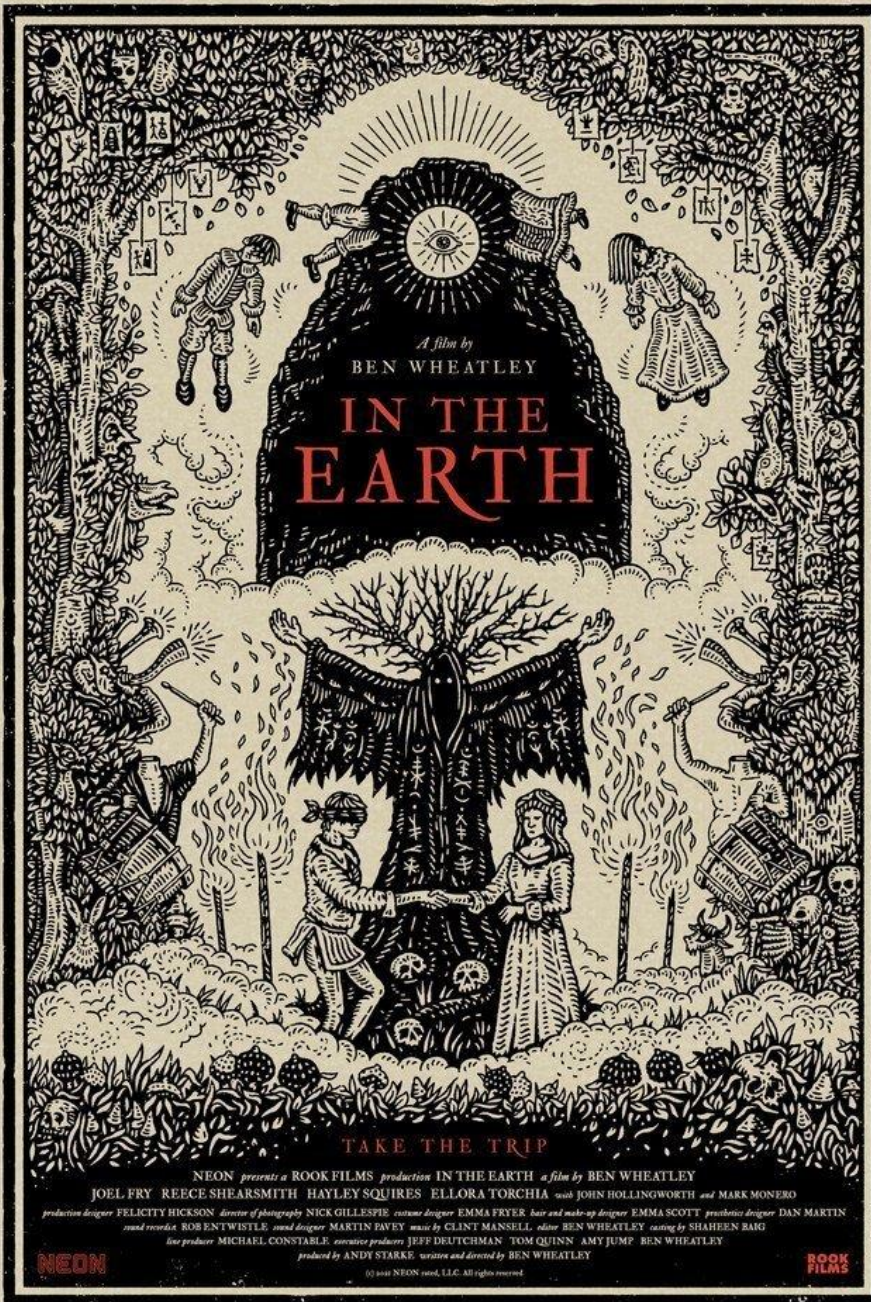


The Erie is a *failure of absence* or a *failure of presence*. (61)

Sites of Trauma



A Field in England – the past is redefined.



A film by
BEN WHEATLEY
**IN THE
EARTH**

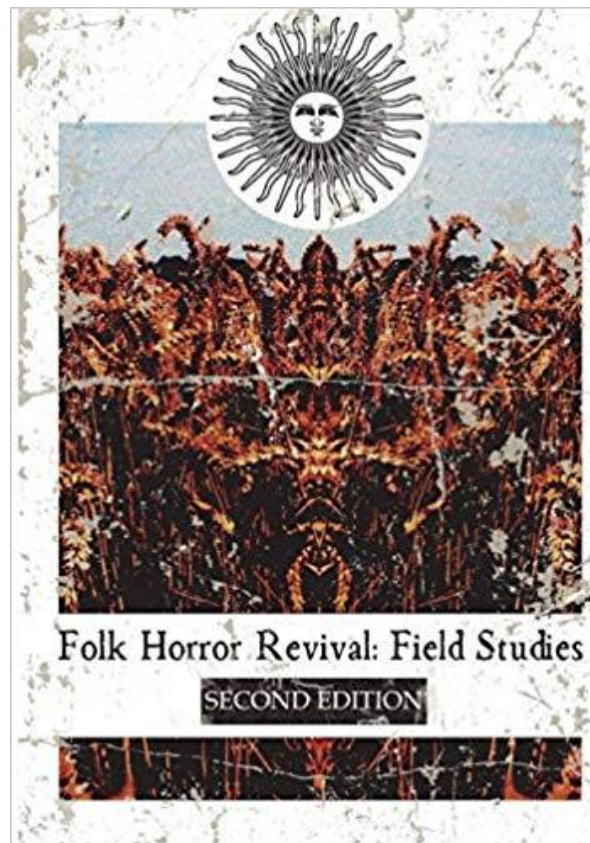
TAKE THE TRIP

NEON presents a ROOK FILMS production **IN THE EARTH** a film by BEN WHEATLEY
JOEL FRY REECE SHEARSMITH HAYLEY SQUIRES ELLORA TORCHIA with JOHN HOLLINGWORTH and MARK MONERO
production designer FELICITY HICKSON director of photography NICK GILLESPIE costume designer EMMA FRYER hair and make-up designer EMMA SCOTT prosthetics designer DAN MARTIN
sound recorder ROB ENTWISTLE sound designers MARTIN FAVEY music by CLINT MANSELL editor BEN WHEATLEY casting by SHAHEEN BAK
line producer MICHAEL CONSTABLE executive producers JEFF DEUTCHMAN TOM QUINN AMY JUMP BEN WHEATLEY
produced by ANDY STARRKE written and directed by BEN WHEATLEY

NEON

ROOK
FILMS

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Current trends in Folk Horror

A SUMMONING OF ANCIENT TERRORS

HELLEBORE

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THE SACRIFICE ISSUE

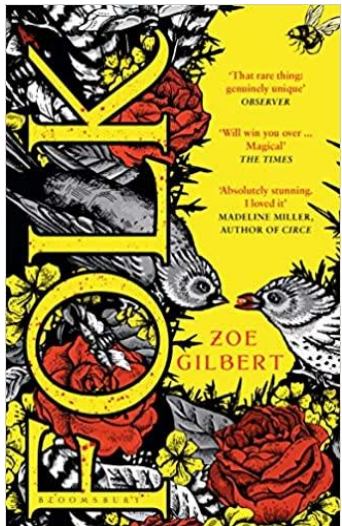
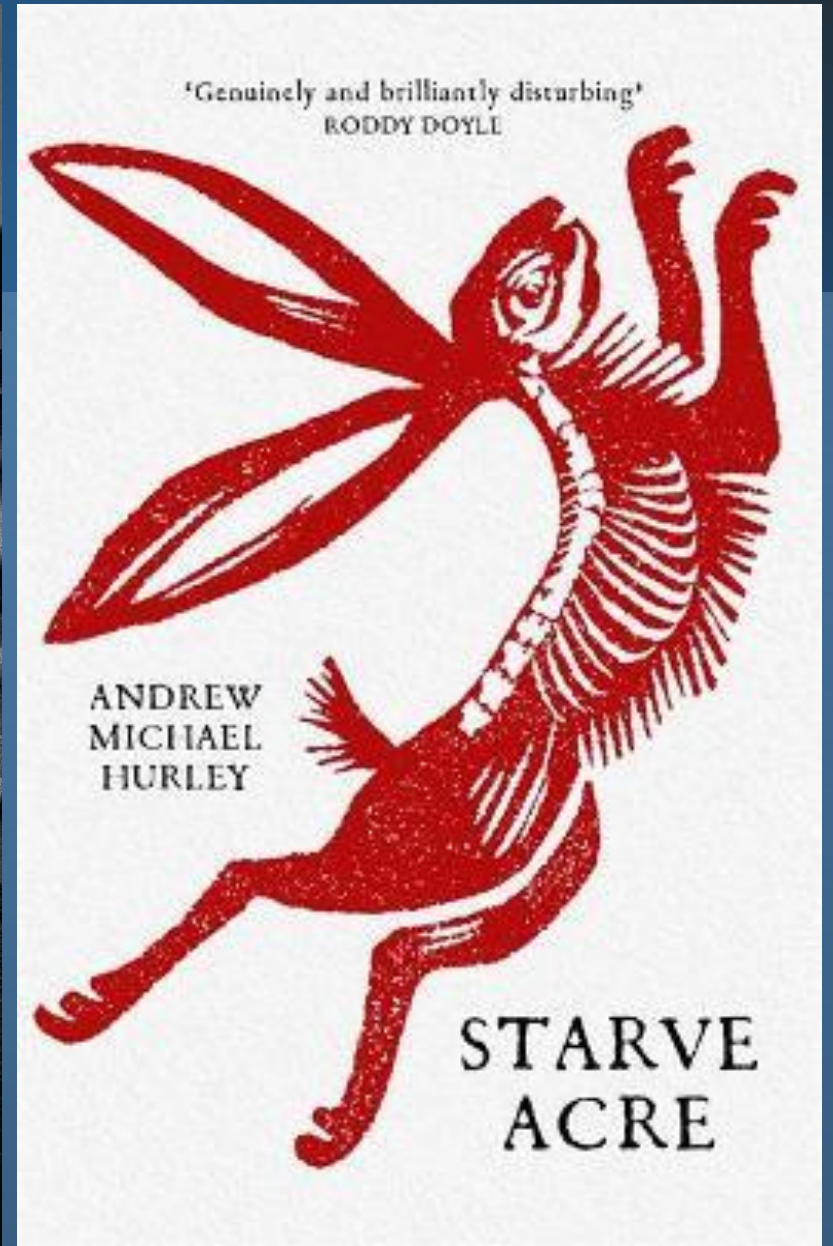
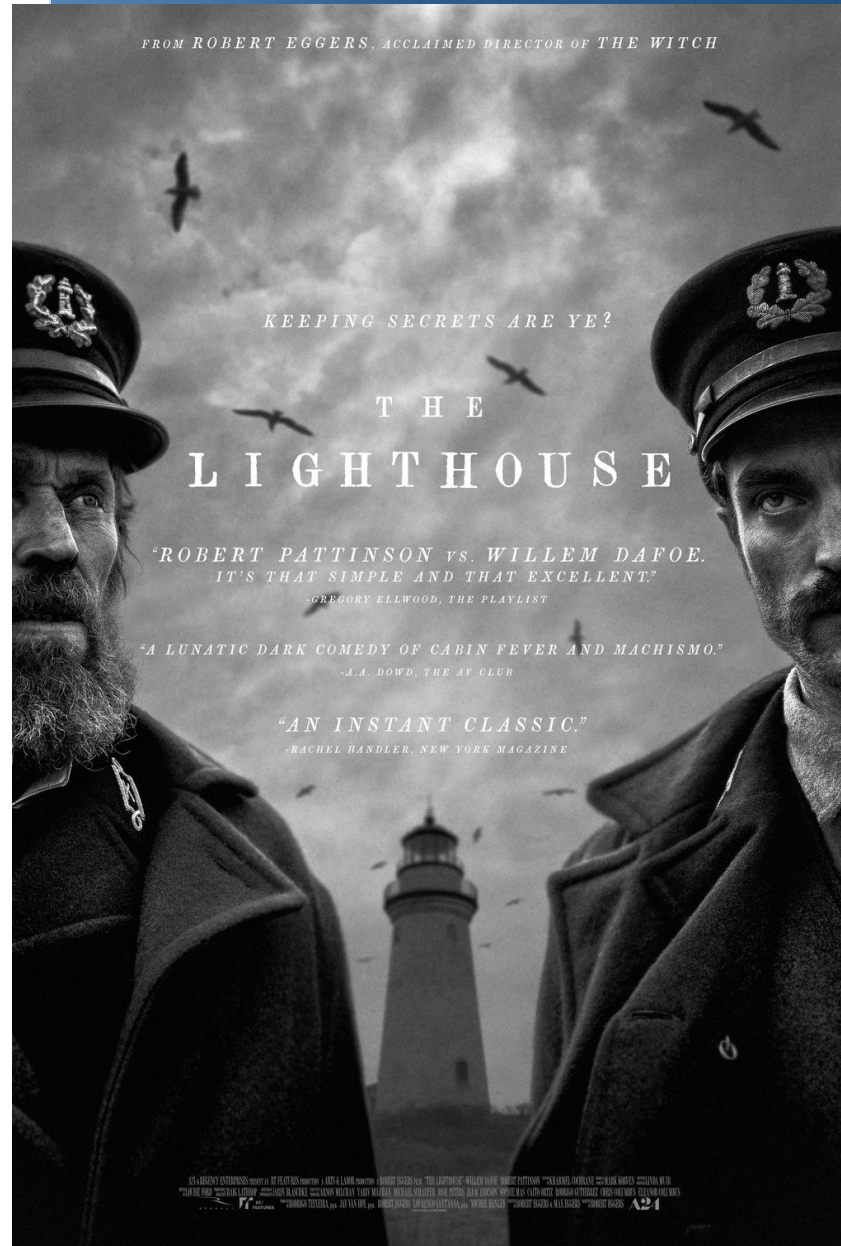
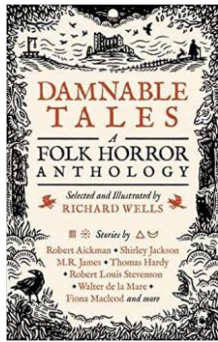
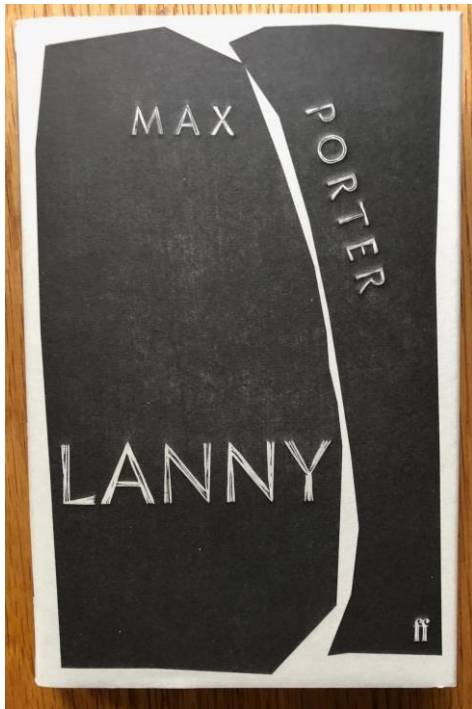
"From His Blood the Crops Would Spring"

RONALD HUTTON on FOLK HORROR

The BONES of the LAND — SUFFOLK'S KING of TERRORS

Current Trends in Folk Horror

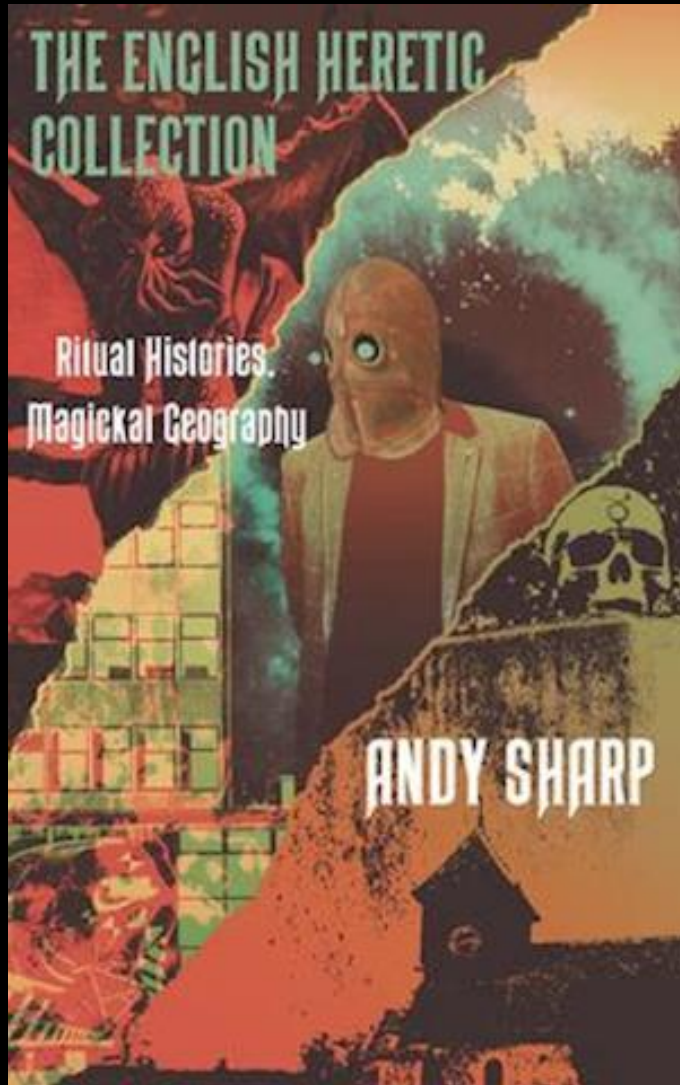






A Malkin an all I seen malkins stows of times up ont moors A Malkin been the man that's made of shirts stufft with straw to scare the crows I seenum moving about thrae or for at a time at nite Circlin they were just like the stagmen done circlin And dansin and laffen too Onse I saw a malkin with his feat and hans on fyre On fyre they were And he was runnen Runnen across the moor as was as if to reech a tarn or sluice ditch to save himself from the friteful burnin And I say with my hand on the book I did heer that Malkin man scream becors even though he were maydde of straw and cloth there was life in him too and oh the sound he made it was like no man or annymul yoove ever heard Friteful it was.

(Myers, *The Gallows Pole* 77)



‘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.

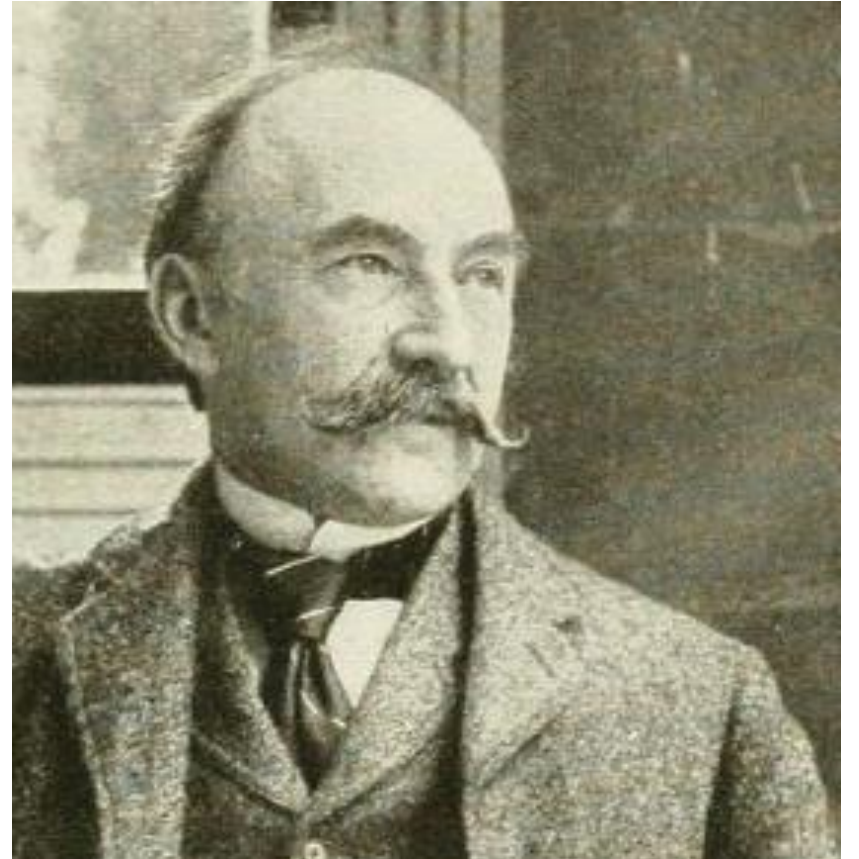
<https://hookland.wordpress.com/about/>

"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

- 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.

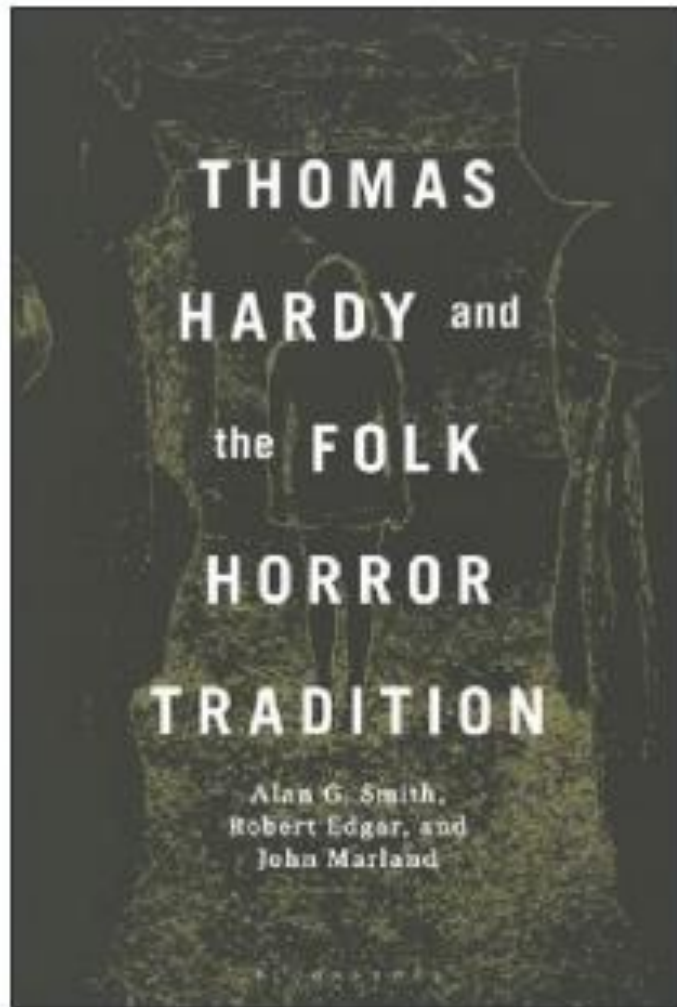




Folk Horror as a socio-political form:

- **A rise in popular narratives about the past.**
- **An uneasy nostalgia.**
- **The future as no longer progressive.**
- **Social division.**
- **Political uncertainty.**
- **Those who hold power no longer in a position of authority.**
- **Fragmented identity/identity fragmented for us.**
- **A sense of threat from 'outside'.**
- **An absence of the human.**

- **A metaphysical crisis about self.**



Thomas Hardy and the Folk Horror Tradition

Alan G. Smith, Robert Edgar & John Marland

Examines the recent resurgence of folk horror and argues that Thomas Hardy is one of its progenitors by analysing his prose (in particular his rarely examined short fiction) and its adaptations as foundational in the development of folk horror in literature, film and television.

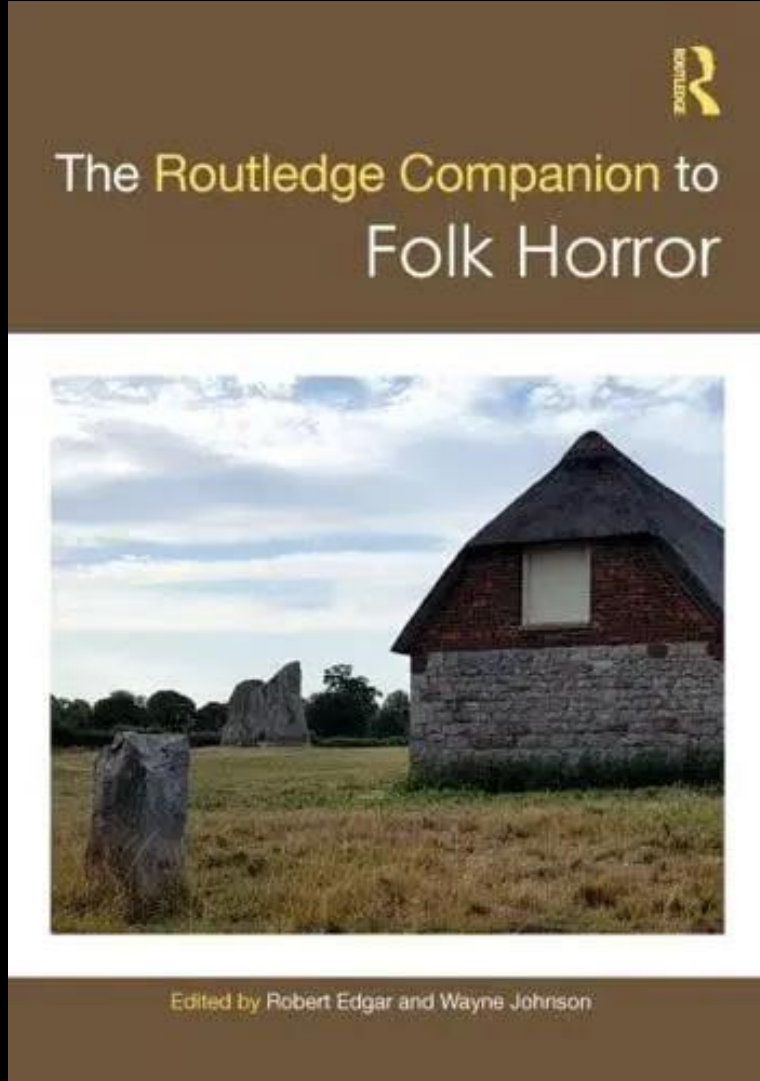
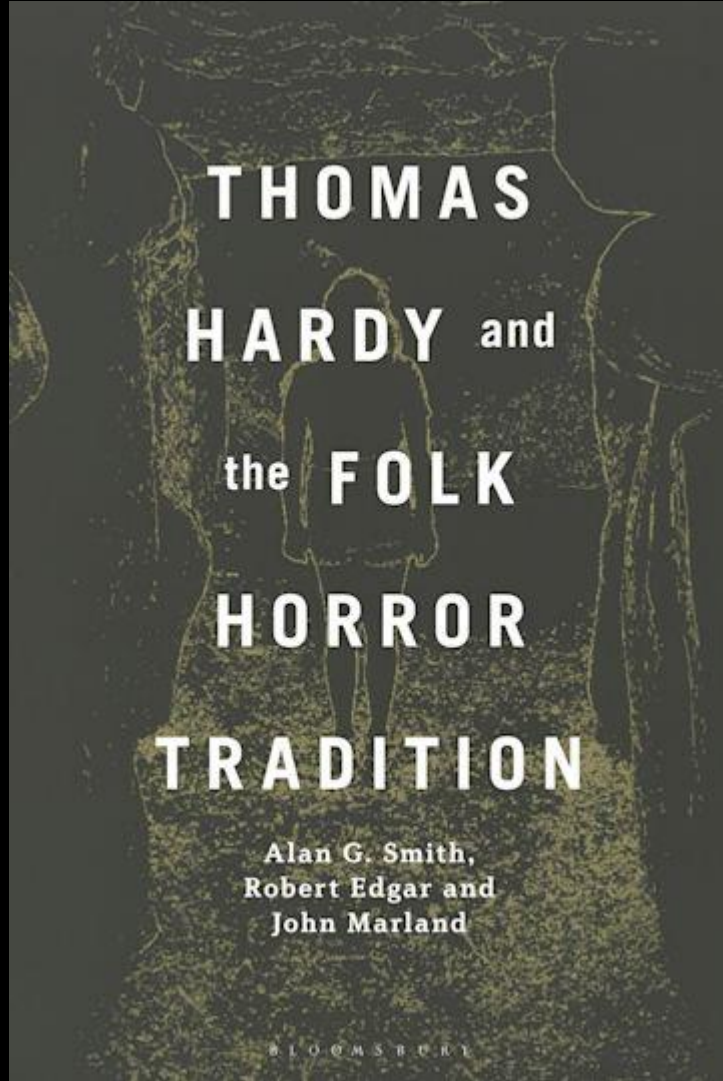
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