S haun Cooper's book has certainly earned both halves of its title, since while the sixty or so legends and anecdotes it contains are indeed drawn from Sussex, the author's broad reading enables him to bring forward valid parallels from many parts of Britain. His chief source is the early volumes of the *Sussex County Magazine,* which carried a good many articles on folkloric material from its foundation in the 1920s up until a change of editorship in the mid '50s; he supplements this with various memoirs and occasional fiction from about the same period.

His book is packed with interesting traditional material, and will undoubtedly prove informative and entertaining for many readers, but those seeking historical data will have to approach it with caution because it sets out to show that Sussex 'had a large number of witches' (2). What our county does undoubtedly have is a large number of *stories* about witches, and Shaun Cooper is all too ready to accept that wherever there is a story there was once a real person who was thought to have the alleged power; thus he declares 'the county had at least 26 shape-shifters: 20 witch-hares and a wizard-hare, 2 witch-cats, 1 witch-dog, and a witch and a wizard who could make themselves invisible' (25). But the documentary sources describing these persons credited with magical power (which can be tracked through Cooper's ample notes) are not trial records or press reports such as were used by Owen Davies in his studies of popular 19th-century beliefs, but simply the journalistic articles of the *Sussex County Magazine*; further research would be needed to confirm whether this material is factually reliable. Shaun Cooper's knowledge of history is sometimes at fault, notably when he says that 'many' people were hanged for witchcraft in England (there were in fact very few), and 'a handful at most' were burnt (there were none) (133).

Cooper is well aware of the process of oral diffusion by which a story spreads from one place to another, with appropriate variations of detail; he very aptly calls this 'grafting' (6, 131). Nevertheless he argues that the force which causes similar legends to be found in various villages within the same district is not mere neighbourly contact and imitativeness but the influence of landscape, in particular of 'liminal

regions': the junction of the north escarpment of the Downs with the level agricultural land of the Weald, and the valleys of the Adur and Arun. Whether or not one accepts this theory, his book makes interesting reading for all who are intrigued by Sussex and its witch legends.

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Jacqueline Simpson

A review of
Folk Horror: Hours Dreadful And Things Strange

Emily Jessica Turner

Adam Scovell's *Folk Horror* is an excellent primer on the cultural mode, as manifested in fiction, film, music and television. Not only does it offer an accessible introduction to those new to the discourse around folk horror, but it should also interest those who are *au fait* with the subgenre: it offers much depth of analysis into relevant examples and faithfully documents the form's development and deviations throughout the last four decades.

With references to and analogies of the defining films of the genre permeating Scovell's text, it is clear that the author lives and breathes folk horror. He uses his own personal exploration of the genre, via conferences and opportune meetings, to chart his theoretical explanation of the mode as a 'mutation of [horror's] affect' (6).

Folk horror is, in Scovell's phraseology, a 'prism of a term' (5), and his book is intended to reflect this. *Folk Horror* is not a prescriptive text, but instead is intended to serve as

'a way of opening up discussions on subtly interconnected work and how we now interact with such work' (6). The text deftly identifies the tensions at the heart of folk horror, and shows why, perhaps, verbalising the genre proves so difficult: it is a land wherein the 'past and the present mix and create horror through both anachronisms and uncomfortable tautologies between eras' (10).

Scovell illustrates that folk horror, as representative of some of the concerns of 20th-century British counter-culture, serves as a 'connected link between certain forms that emerged in the popular culture of the 1960s' (6). He follows the development of these 'certain forms' through a variety of media modes to the present-day resurgence of interest in folk horror aesthetics and narratives.

Chapter One is the introductory chapter, with the author's anecdote about his meeting with Robin Hardy, director of *The Wicker Man* (1973), and a general discussion of 'Folk Horror' as a term. Here, Scovell postulates that folk horror can be considered as a mode which channels aesthetic or thematic folklore, presents a close link between arcania and modernity, or utilises a 'popular conscious memory'. Chapter Two develops on this by exploring the thematic connections between the 'unholy trinity' of folk horror films: what Scovell calls the 'Folk Horror Chain'. What links this 'unholy trinity' — constituted of *Witchfinder General* (1968), *The Blood on Satan's Claw* (1971), and *The Wicker Man* — Scovell argues, can be identified as a model for folk horror. This model, the Folk Horror Chain, provides the theoretical basis for the remainder of his book.

Link One in the Folk Horror Chain is landscape, where 'elements within its topography have adverse effects on the social and moral identity of its inhabitants' (17). Link Two is that of isolation, resulting in halted social progress and skewed systems of belief, and Link Three is that of the 'happening' or the 'summoning'.

These three links impact the narratives and aesthetics of *Witchfinder, Blood,* and *Wicker*, all of which emerged during the British counter-cultural movement that saw popular culture respond to and resist conservative modes. Such tensions between past and present emerge repeatedly throughout this chain — specifically, signifying 'a reversion to older ideas but explored within [...] new social freedoms' (13) and turning a critical eye to the period in which these films were created.

This Folk Horror Chain, the author suggests, has a special relationship with the landscape, a connection Scovell explores in Chapter Three, which focuses on 'topographical ideas'. Landscape, which often has 'adverse effects on the social and moral identity of its inhabitants' (17), is theorised as a nuanced, 'alchemical' theme in folk horror. This chapter explores this idea through an exploration of the impact of M.R. James's writing, adapting his work for small and silver screen, modernity and progression as readable within geography, examples of unearthing temporal pasts or objects of possession ('inorganic demons') from the landscape, and how television brings folk horror 'From the Furrows to the Living Room'(53).

This idea is developed further in Chapter Four, which looks at the concept of rurality and focuses on an exploration of rural life's sense of 'otherness' as warping the reality of folk horror texts. Via a tour of the 'Strange British Coastline', Scovell explores

pulp rurality in British films from the 1960s to the end of the century. Representations of anomalous rurality – celluloid ruralism which does not necessarily fall fully under the category of 'folk horror' – and the function of rurality in examples of non-British films within the folk horror mode (particularly Scandinavian, Japanese, American and Australian examples) are also discussed.

Chapter Five moves onto themes of the occult, examining the wider themes of Jacques Derrida's theory of hauntology and the urban 'wyrd'. Scovell suggests that when framed by hauntology, folk horror's tension with the past and 'visions of [...] lost future[s]' (126) can be better understood, complicating nostalgia for both contemporary and modern day audiences. Nigel Kneale's work is utilised to introduce themes of urban topographies, public paranoia, and the contemporary hauntological viewing of 1970s Britain as a folkloric realm in itself. Particularly interesting is this chapter's discussion of the mode's relationship with Public Information Films.

Beginning with a discussion of the 2016 film *The VVltch*, Chapter Six catches up with modernity – 2010 seems to be the year in which 'all things Folk Horror really solidified' (30), Scovell suggests. The author highlights two aspects of the contemporary resurgence of folk horror: work that reflects or subverts nostalgic 'visions' of folk horror's 'primary era', or draws a thematic connection between the current political landscape and that of 1970s Britain. This chapter also explores the function of nostalgia in the esoteric output of the record label Ghost Box and the visual project Scarfolk, and the relationship between 21st-century politics and folk horror. Especially convincing is the author's linking of Brexit ideology with folk horror's twisted localism and fear of the outsider. 'We have burnt our Sgt. Howie in the wicker man', says Scovell, 'and now wait naively for our apples to grow once more' (184).

Folk Horror well reflects the emerging 'newness' of the discipline, still pliable and open to interpretation. Something which begins, at the start of Scovell's text, as something almost 'so far unnamed' (5), by the conclusion is demonstrated to be a multi-faceted, multitudinous subgenre which manifests within different forms of media.

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