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Biography: Paul has delivered across a number of Higher Education programmes within the Institute since 2001, writing and delivering modules on our degrees in photography, writing, and film and television since their inception. He has acted as course convenor for several programmes and is currently Programme Leader for our HE Photography provision. With a background in cultural studies and a particular interest in visual culture and its relationship with narrative, Paul's teaching is largely focused on photography / film history, criticism and theory; issues of representation within the media; and aspects of narrative as they relate to literature, film and television.

He is a published freelance writer, contributing articles about film and television history to various publications – both in print and online. Areas of particular interest for him are classic cinema (especially *film noir*), popular European cinema of the 1960s and 1970s, Japanese cinema, and British film and television between the 1950s and 1980s. He has also conducted research for DVD/Blu-ray releasing companies. Paul's Master's thesis examined the representation of gender and violence in Sam Peckinpah's 1972 film *Straw Dogs*, and his PhD is focused on the American films of the Dutch film director Paul Verhoeven and the manner in which these films function as a metaphor for Reaganomics.

Paul is also a published documentary photographer. In this capacity, his work largely focuses on themes of social class and our relationship with the urban environment. However, he is also interested in superstition, folklore and belief, and the intersections between these and the realm of visual representation; his work in this area attempts to reflect on how traces of belief, and the tension between the tangible and the ethereal, can be represented visually without reference to the paradigms of the fantastical.

Paul thinks sleep is overrated.

'Who is This Who is Coming?': The Subtle, Creeping Horror of the English Rural Landscape

In M R James' 1905 story 'Oh Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad', the academic and amateur archaeologist Parkins discovers, during a golfing holiday near the village of Burnstow on the East Coast of England, an ancient Templar cemetery. In that lonely location, he finds a metal whistle on which is inscribed the phrase 'Quis est iste qui venit': a Latin phrase which translates as 'Who is this who is coming?' Parkins cleans the whistle and blows it but soon finds himself plagued by recurring nightmares of being pursued along a 'long stretch of shore' by a threatening yet indefinable figure. These nightmares gradually invade Parkins' waking life, eroding the academic's firm disbelief in the supernatural. The 'visitations' have been interpreted by students of James' writing as a 'return of the repressed', a manifestation of the aspects of Parkins' self which this stuffy academic denies; this interpretation is at the core of Jonathan Miller's adaptation of the story for the BBC's arts strand *Omnibus* in 1968, starring Michael Hordern as Parkins.

The story is one of a number by James that depict the rural space as dominated by the uncanny; James' stories are a key part of a specific, and lasting, subtype of British fiction. The English rural landscape has possessed a number of varying connotations, from the Victorians' and Edwardians' depiction of the countryside as a backwards place riddled with superstition, often contrasted with the modern, forward thinking-metropolis; to modern perceptions of the countryside as a place of privilege and retreat. The Enclosure Acts of 1773 and after represented an attempt to impose structure on the rural landscape. Ever since, fiction focusing on the rural space has been dominated by a tension between the 'tamed' and the 'wild', the 'modern' and the 'pre-modern', the 'civilised' and the 'pagan' – codified within a conflict between the urban and the rural. As Paul Newland has suggested, 'British rural landscapes have long operated as imaginative spaces in which horrific, ghostly or uncanny narratives unfold' (Newland, 2016: 162). This was particularly a feature of Gothic novels such as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1763) and Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* (1847). Peter Hutchings has labelled the use of such landscapes in fiction as examples of 'dark heritage': uncanny spaces 'seemingly untouched by urban modernity, rationality or the type of progress informed by the Enlightenment' and 'in which mysterious objects, cultures or indeed practices from a distant (often pagan) rural British past might be uncovered' (Hutchings, quoted in *ibid.*). In cinema specifically, Hutchings argues, these examples of 'dark heritage' are often contrasted with the 'heritage' filmmaking popularised by Merchant-Ivory in the 1980s, in which the rural landscape is presented romantically, as a space in which one can escape from the chaos and confusion of modern life (Hutchings, cited in *ibid.*). However, beneath all of these connotations is a suggestion that under whatever façade the countryside presents, there is an undercurrent of threat and mystery: it is a space where, we are told, secret rituals are practised – whether that be the 'satanic panic' of the 1970s and 1980s, or the media coverage of the events at the Jameah Islameah school in East Sussex (the most high profile 'Trojan Horse'), these rituals are often the focus of media hysteria and fuel our collective nightmares.

I intend to examine the depiction of the rural space within 'dark heritage' narratives, contrasting two eras: the literature of the late Victorian/Edwardian era and the cinema and television of the 1970s in which these themes saw a resurgence in their popularity. To begin with, I will look at Victorian and Edwardian representations of the countryside and contrast

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's stories with those of M R James; both writers use similar narrative paradigms (protagonists who travel from the city to the countryside) but to different ends, with James' fiction validating rural folklore and Conan Doyle's stories debunking it. I will suggest that the work of these two writers characterise what Tom Brass terms an 'aristocratic version' of rural superstition and folklore, which serves to reinforce pre-modern hierarchies, and a 'plebeian version' that serves to challenge them. I will extend this discussion into the 1970s, by examining the popularity of what are sometimes labelled 'folk horror' films which explore the folkloric associations of the countryside, reflecting on how these texts used such themes to explore inter-generational conflict.

Victorian/Edwardian Representations

In William Blake's 1808 poem 'Jerusalem', Blake depicts the rural landscape as an idyll upon which the 'dark Satanic Mills' of early industrialisation intruded. By the end of the Nineteenth Century, however, perceptions of the countryside had changed. With the urban spread of industrialisation came a representation of the city as a place of hubbub, progress, rationalism and science, which was contrasted in Victorian and Edwardian fiction with the countryside – often represented as a backwards environment characterised by isolation and riddled with irrational superstition. In a number of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, most famously *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902), Holmes is commissioned with journeying to the countryside to use his powers of rational deduction as a means of identifying rational explanations for what the locals believe to be supernatural events.

In 'The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist' from the collection *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (1905), Holmes is approached by a client, Violet Smith, who has taken a job in the countryside teaching music to the children of a widower, Carruthers. Smith tells Holmes that each weekend, she cycles from Carruthers' isolated country house, Chiltern Grange, to Farnham Station, where she catches her train to town. However, as she passes Charlington Heath she finds herself followed by a mysterious figure, also on a bicycle. Holmes investigates the case and discovers the presence of an ex-clergyman named Williamson known locally for his 'peculiarly unecclesiastical' behaviour. The story hints at occult goings-on via the inclusion within the roster of characters of the ex-clergyman. However, the climax of the story sees Holmes intruding on the real plan: a forced marriage between Violet Smith and a man named Woodley, which is intended to allow the plotters to get their hands on a significant inheritance that has fallen into the lap of Miss Smith following the death of her wealthy uncle.

For Barry McCrea, these Conan Doyle stories offer a 'fundamental binary' between 'London and the countryside'; the countryside is 'settled by venerable family lines in their ancestral homes' and is contrasted with London, which McCrea says is depicted as 'a murky, volatile world of anonymous crowds, uncertain or hidden identities, and ad hoc, unclassifiable households not describable in terms of genealogy or marriage' (McCrea, 2011: 69). In these stories, Holmes 'spends much of his time shuttling back and forth between the country and the city' (*ibid.*).

Similarly, M R James' stories usually feature protagonists, often academics or amateur archaeologists, who journey to the countryside hoping to find rest and/or enlightenment

but discover only a terror which manifests itself when these protagonists disturb something ancient. In 'A Warning to the Curious' (1925), an amateur archaeologist, Paxton, discovers near to the Suffolk holiday resort of Seaburgh an ancient Saxon crown; the discovery of this crown causes Paxton to be pursued by its supernatural guardian. The crown, folklore suggests, protects the nation from overseas invasion and its removal from the place in which it is buried heralds national disaster. For Tom Brass, James' stories are largely 'about the return of an ancient power historically rooted in the soil of the nation, one that is impervious to scientific explanation, should not be challenged, and is best left undisturbed' (Brass, 2014: 177).

In their book about the East Anglian countryside, Susanna Wade Martins and Tom Williamson argue that 'M R James' Suffolk is haunted by the ghosts of the past, and often the primeval past [...] Norfolk and Suffolk presented many opportunities for these kinds of musings, littered as they were with vast isolated churches which told, not altogether misleadingly, of a decline from medieval greatness [...] and] the elemental force of the sea, the stories of erosion and coastal retreat' (Martins & Williamson, 2008: 187).

In the stories of Victorian and Edwardian writers, the countryside is a liminal space that offers a transition from one world to another – from the modern world of reason, rationalism and science to a pre-modern world of superstition, folklore and irrationality. Tom Brass has suggested that James' stories offer a validation of rural folklore and superstition in the face of the metropolitan rationality embodied by contemporaneous characters such as Sherlock Holmes: 'James himself was suspicious of social change', Brass asserts, 'particularly that resulting from scientific research, and his stories unsurprisingly endorsed the efficacy of rural tradition dismissed by disbelieving scientists or philosophers, cosmopolitan outsiders who, when confronted with evidence of the supernatural, were subsequently compelled to recant, albeit reluctantly' (Brass, 2014: 179). James' fiction highlights James' disapproval of 'Victorian scientists or philosophers who scorned myth, tradition and oral sources' (*ibid.*).

Conan Doyle and James, then, were opposites in the sense that Conan Doyle's stories feature a character who embodies rationalism and science, travelling from an urban environment to a rural setting in order to debunk rural myths and superstitions, whereas James' stories feature similarly modern, rational characters who, whilst visiting the countryside, unwittingly encounter genuine supernatural phenomena that causes the protagonists of James' stories to admit, however reluctantly, that there exist phenomena beyond the reach of their understanding. Conan Doyle's stories are from a genre associated with its rationalism (the detective story), whereas James' stories are from an 'irrational' genre (the ghost story). However, the work of these two significant authors is similar inasmuch as both authors depict the English countryside as an eerie, superstitious place, a landscape which is liminal and defined by borders – both physical and metaphysical (between the known and the unknown).

The countryside, David Bell has suggested, represents 'a settled landscape mapping out a social order across a picturesque terrain—especially its construction as "village England"' (Bell, 1997: 92). This construction of the countryside is challenged by rural horror narratives. Tom Brass argues that stories, like those of James, which validated the folklore and

superstitions of rural communities were essentially conservative, serving to reinforce traditional hierarchies at a time when industrialisation and urbanisation were threatening to destabilise them. In much Gothic fiction of the period, 'elements upheld or vindicated by the supernatural are rural tradition and hierarchy, the folkloric, and the power of "the irrational," all of which are depicted as being under threat from progress, materialism, science, rationality, and intellectual investigation' (Brass, *op cit.*: 174). From ancient folklore and its symbolic spaces (ruined castles associated with ancient families, 'metaphors for a dying nation') 'emerges a spectral apparition that [...] challenges the rationality of science and scientists' and is 'impervious to human agency (particularly that of scientists)' (*ibid.*). For Brass, there is an 'aristocratic version' of the 'agrarian myth' that is perhaps best embodied by James' stories and serves to reinforce pre-industrial hierarchies, and there is a 'plebeian version' that serves to challenge these hierarchies (*ibid.*).

1970s 'Dark Heritage'/'Folk Horror' Cinema and Television

During the late 1960s and 1970s, British cinema saw a similar engagement with the rural space and its association with folklore and superstition, which Rob Young, in his study of British music, has suggested highlights a 'lingering pagan presence in the British landscape, and by extension, the soul of the nation' (Young, 2010: np). Developing concomitant with the rise of 'backwoods horror' in American cinema (for example, films like John Boorman's *Deliverance*, 1972, and Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, 1974), these British films were often shot in real locations rather than in a studio environment. Like the rural ghost stories of M R James, the American films often featured protagonists from urban environments who find themselves in danger when visiting the rural space. Likewise, British films such as Robin Hardy's *The Wicker Man* (1973) focus on outsiders who encounter strange incidents in isolated rural locations. (In the case of *The Wicker Man*, Edward Woodward's mainland policeman discovers pagan rights taking place on the isolated island of Summerisle.) Recently, the label 'folk horror' has been used in reference to these films, though Peter Hutchings' term 'dark heritage' is equally appropriate, highlighting the ways in which these films contrast with the values of heritage cinema of the period.

Paul Newland has suggested that one reason for the lasting cult appeal of these films is that they 'often pit the rural "anti-modern", "natural" and/or pagan landscape against the technocracy of modernity' (Newland, *op cit.*: 163). The films romanticise 'a dark British (but especially English) vision of a pagan, pre-modern or proto-modern rural past', also focusing 'on what might still be alive "in the present" in such spaces' (*ibid.*). The popularity of rural horror narratives, Newland argues, 'can often be read as a response to rapid modernisation and socio-cultural change' (*ibid.*).

In Piers Haggard's *Blood on Satan's Claw* (1971), which takes place in the Eighteenth Century, a young ploughman, Ralph (Barry Andrews), unearths a strange skull and other bones whilst ploughing a field. The discovery of these remains precipitates a series of strange events, the young people of the village becoming increasingly cruel and participating in bizarre rituals in the surrounding woods. Through their rites, they conjure up a bizarre, unearthly creature; the only member of the community that is capable of stopping these events is the local judge (Patrick Wymark).

Piers Haggard, the director of *Blood on Satan's Claw*, has said that he 'wasn't interested' in the traditional screen monsters of the contemporaneous Hammer horror films: for example, Dracula and Frankenstein's monster (Haggard, in the BBC's *A History of Horror with Mark Gatiss*: 'Home Counties Horror', 2010). 'I was interested in the dark things that people feel and the dark things that happen', Haggard has claimed, and the rural setting (Bix Bottom in Oxfordshire and the ruined church of St James nearby) provided the perfect location for an exploration of these themes: 'The other thing that appealed to me was the [...] rural setting. The nooks and crannies of woodland; the edges of fields, the ploughing; the labour; the sense of the soil was something that I tried to bring into the picture' (Haggard, in *ibid.*).

The compositions within the film's photography are painterly: the film's opening sequence begins with an image of a young man ploughing which recalls images of ploughmen from art – such as Robert Jobling's 'The Ploughman of Ayr'. The sequence foregrounds our connection with the earth via the labour of the young man, his working of the field symbolic of the way nature is dominated, enclosed and 'owned' by human society and its use of technology. This is reinforced by a shot of the farmhouse which foregrounds the walls and fences that surround the building, signifying enclosure and ownership of land (and situating the story as taking place after the Enclosure Act of 1773). However, beneath the soil is something malevolent and pre-modern, an ancient force which erupts from the earth and causes harm to the community – like the whistle from James' 'Oh, Whistle and I'll Come to You, My Lad' or the Saxon crown in 'A Warning to the Curious'. Evil coming from within the ploughed field suggests that the attempts human society might make to tame the wild, to enclose land and represent ownership of it via fences and walls, are doomed to fail. The enclosed, ploughed field is placed in juxtaposition with the woodland in which the youth of the village, corrupted by their encounter with evil, practice dark rituals; the cultivated landscape is placed in direct visual juxtaposition with the uncultivable, the enclosed contrasted with the wild. The film therefore constructs a liminal space between the past and present, and between the untamed wild/tamed and civilised.

Blood on Satan's Claw validates the 'aristocratic' version of rural folklore: as in James' stories, a genuine supernatural force is drawn out of the earth which weaves a spell of corruption over the young people of the area. Its destructive potential can only be challenged by a figure of (patriarchal) authority, credited only as The Judge, a man of learning and steadfast will who after allowing the creature to be drawn out by the activities of the young people, slays the beast during a ritual enacted at the film's climax. At a time of rapid social change, the young people in the film offering a clear metonym for late 1960s counterculture, the film suggests that only by looking towards traditional hierarchies can disaster be averted. For Leon Hunt, the Judge is a 'backlash figure', and quoting Wynne-Simmons Hunt notes that the demons 'was somehow more "alive" than the Patrick Wymark character, whose viewpoint is essentially a dead one' (Wynne-Simmons, quoted in Hunt, 2002: 94). In interview, the film's writer, Robert Wynne-Simmons, expressed the methodology of the Judge: 'The central theme of the whole film was the stamping out of the old religions', Wynne-Simmons has claimed, 'Not by Christianity, but by an atheistic belief that all sorts of things must be blocked out of the mind. So the Judge represents a dogged enlightenment, if you like, who is saying 'Don't let these things lurk in dark corners. Bring it out into the open and then get rid of it. When it becomes a fully fledged cult, it will show itself' (Wynne-Simmons, quoted in Taylor, 1996: 88).

Alan Clarke, a television director known for his examinations of class conflict in television plays such as *Scum* (1977), explored similar themes in *Penda's Fen*, made for the BBC's long-running *Play for Today* strand in 1974.

Set in the Malvern Hills area of the Worcestershire countryside, *Penda's Fen* focuses on adolescent Stephen Franklin (Spencer Banks). It begins with Franklin listening to Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*. At a church hall, Stephen listens to a writer giving a lecture, which echoes Blake's 'Jerusalem', about how the rural landscape is being polluted by technology, warning about the building beneath the ancient fens of a top secret government facility. An accident takes place that leads to the sealing off of the village, Pinvin. Stephen discovers that Pinvin was named after the last of the pagan gods, King Penda. Gradually, Stephen discovers his own identity is contra to the norms set within the privileged social class in which he is rooted and to whose expectations he is expected to conform: he was adopted, his parents not English, and he is homosexual too. Stephen has internalised societal expectations and comes to see himself as 'impure', experiencing supernatural phenomena including meeting the ghost of Sir Edward Elgar in an abandoned house on the fens, and encountering King Penda himself.

Dave Rolinson, who has written extensively about Alan Clarke's work, has described *Penda's Fen* as 'an extraordinary, visionary piece, complex in theme and structure, rich in composition and visual style, a conflation of realist style and fantasy iconography superior to *The Wicker Man* and comparable with Powell and Pressburger' (Rolinson, 2010: 174). *Penda's Fen* juxtaposes conformity with individuality, Stephen's experiences in isolated rural locations with Elgar and King Penda narrativising the tension within himself between his own identity and the societal expectations he has internalised and against which he judges himself. The rural landscape is where Stephen goes to experience these 'visions', the rural space offering a connection with the past and the potential to journey back into it. Echoing William Blake's warning of the 'dark Satanic mills' that pollute the rural idyll, in *Penda's Fen* the rural space is threatened with corruption by machinery and technology; however, in the teleplay, the rural space exist ancient forces that pose a challenge to society's hierarchies. The past and the present thus come into a conflict that is also represented as a tension between the individual and society, Stephen's tentative questioning of the status quo (which leads him away from the grammar school at which he is enrolled and into the domain of the pagan King Penda) offering the character a similar trajectory to the group of young people in *Blood on Satan's Claw* who begin to practise pagan rites in the woodlands surrounding the village. The 'dark heritage' films of the 1970s make the themes of this subgenre contemporary via suggesting a relationship between pagan rituals and modern countercultural practices. In Haggard's film, the young devil worshippers deliberately resemble counterculture youths, Wynne-Simmons' script deliberately referencing the contemporaneous behaviour of youth cults, driven by conformity, and in his writing of the film Wynne-Simmons was directly inspired by the events during the Rolling Stones' concert at Altamont in 1969, the murderous behaviour of Charles Manson's followers, and the murders committed by Mary Bell in 1968 (Hunt, *op cit.*: 94). In *Penda's Fen*, Stephen's questioning of the status quo is more sympathetic, highlighting the marginalisation of various voices by society.

Conclusion

The 1970s examples of 'dark heritage' narratives tend to foreground a theme of inter-generational conflict, exploring the impact of youth cultures and drawing a connection between rebellious youth and rural folklore. In both *Penda's Fen* and *Blood on Satan's Claw*, young people are seduced by the ghosts of the past, what Rob Young calls 'the lingering pagan presence in the British landscape' (Young, *op cit.*). *Penda's Fen* is a particularly interesting example, inasmuch as Clarke's teleplay both validates the supernatural occurrences taking place in the rural space and subjectivises them (suggesting that Stephen's experiences of these phenomena may be entirely subjective) whilst representing the normative hierarchies within society as repressive; on the other hand *Blood on Satan's Claw* sees repression and traditional hierarchies as a necessary defence against the evil and corrupt – represented in the film by the supernatural occurrences and their corruption of the 'impressionable' youth of the village. Where in *Blood on Satan's Claw* the unearthing of the supernatural presence during the work of young ploughman Ralph unleashes something which needs to be controlled and repressed, Stephen's encounter with King Penda in *Penda's Fen* is liberatory, the past representing potential for growth in the future. The themes in these two texts would resurface throughout the next decade, in everything from children's fiction (HTV's children's drama serial *Children of the Stones*, 1977) to afternoon television (*West Country Tales*; BBC, 1982, which invited viewers to write in with their own stories of encounters with the supernatural in rural locations). In particular, these themes would go on to form a core part of Nigel Kneale's 1979 serial *Quatermass*, in which Professor Bernard Quatermass (John Mills) battles to stop the destruction of the nation's young people, who are drawn by a mysterious force *en masse* to ancient stone circles where they are incinerated by a force from space.

Perhaps the reason for the haunting significance of the rural landscape is that it is filled with liminal spaces – edges of woodlands, heathland, and so on. From the stories of Conan Doyle and M R James to films such as *Blood on Satan's Claw*, and more recent examples including Ben Wheatley's *Kill List* (2011), the rural landscape is a place of transition where one may cross over an invisible border – the boundary between one world and another – without even knowing it. This is despite the attempts we have made as a society since the late Eighteenth Century to enclose and cultivate the landscape in a manner that attempts to impose the structured hierarchies of our society upon the environment in which we live. These 'dark heritage' narratives seem to be popular during periods of rapid social change, and essentially have two variants: an 'aristocratic', backwards-looking strand, such as the stories of M R James and *Blood on Satan's Claw*, which validates the presence of the supernatural – the 'buried past' – in order to endorse existing traditional social hierarchies (for example, by requiring a character such as Patrick Wymark's Judge to defend society from a deeply rooted 'evil' that seduces young people and distorts their behaviour); and a 'plebeian', forwards-thinking variant which introduces supernatural themes before denying them, stripping the past of its symbolic power, in the manner of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories. However, both variants construct a dualism between the modern and the pre-modern, contrasting the enclosed and cultivated with the wild and untamed, and the rational with the supernatural. If the persistence of 'dark heritage' stories into the Twenty-First Century, in the form of the BBC's more recent adaptations of M R James' stories (*A View from a Hill*, 2005; *Whistle and I'll Come to You*, 2010) and various films (*Kill*

List, Elliot Goldner's *The Borderlands*, 2013; Corin Hardy's *The Hallow*, 2015), is symbolic of something, it is that these dualisms are still relevant and employed within popular fiction as a way of negotiating the turbulent times in which we live.

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