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Et in Arcadia Ego: British folk horror film and television

RODGERS, Diane <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3117-4308>

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Et in Arcadia Ego: British folk horror film and television [draft 2]

Diane A. Rodgers

Folklore on Screen: folk horror

'Folk horror' is a relatively newly-defined genre of film and television, most often used to describe narratives featuring folkloric elements such as paganism, witchcraft, stone circles and ghosts. The genre can be found in media across the globe such as Norwegian dark fantasy film *Trollhunter* (2010), ghostly British television series *The Living and the Dead* (2016), New England folklore-based film *The Witch* (2015), and can be extended to include offerings from Japan's Studio Ghibli such as *Spirited Away* (2001), which uses the folkloresque to create its own, at times unsettling , mythology.[1]

Film and television programmes like these are gaining increasing attention from both cult and academic audiences and film and programme creators alike, and has gained 'folk horror' clear status as a sub-genre. Such attention is bringing to the forefront a rising interest in folklore on screen, and a widening curiosity in folklore study and popular culture. However, acknowledging *folklore* as central to folk horror, how it is perpetuated through mass media and how it is particularly culturally affective is something that folklorists and screen studies scholars are only recently beginning to explore. The most interesting studies in these areas tend to examine not just *what* folklore is represented on screen but *how* folklore is communicated by various forms of media, how is it framed and within what contexts. Folklore on screen is, of course, not simply folk horror and its various monsters, devils, demons and pagan rituals, but spreads much further afield across UFOlogy, urban and rural hauntology, wyrdness and wider folkloric traditions. Folklore is represented throughout popular culture media in photography, videogames, across the internet and in a variety of film and television genres beyond horror and science fiction to include thriller, drama, romance and even comedy. It is an exciting time to embrace the varied disciplines that folklore studies incorporates and unites in a mutual fascination with folklore and contemporary legend.

The phrase 'folk horror' itself was coined in 2003 by director Piers Haggard to describe his film *Blood on Satan's Claw* (1971), now canonised as one of the 'unholy triumvirate' of folk-horror films alongside *Witchfinder General* (1968) and *The Wicker Man* (1973). Robert Wynne Simmons, writer of *Blood on Satan's Claw* describes this perpetual fascination with folklore: "The folk tale will never die, and horror is an element of the folk tale" (Robert Wynne Simmons, telephone interview with the author, 22 May, 2017) and Jeremy Dyson, who frequently uses folkloric narratives in his work from *The League of Gentleman* (1999-2017) to *Ghost Stories* (2017), echoes that folk tales "have universal appeal, there's a big crossover with religion and people *can't not watch*" (Jeremy Dyson, telephone interview with author, 15 March, 2018).

Despite this universal appeal, admirers of the genre are consistently drawn back to British folk horror film and television of the 1970s when television narratives involving folklore accounted for many hundreds of hours of programming, including documentaries such as the BBC's *The Power of the Witch* (1970), children's programmes such as *Ace of Wands* (1970-1972) and darker intellectual drama aimed at adults such as *Quatermass* (1979). Folkloric British film and television from this period, and in subsequent decades, often particularly employs themes associated with landscape and ideas of 'unearthing' in its varied onscreen narratives, which help to characterise British folk horror with its own peculiarly national sense of eeriness.

In folklore studies, the serious consideration of popular culture and contemporary legend is becoming more commonly accepted, in which one of the most significant developments has been in the application of the concept of ostension. Ostension, appropriated from linguistics by folklorists Dégh and Vázsonyi (1983), refers (in brief) to the acting out of folkloric narrative and action based on folklore. Ostensive action could be something as simple as parents stopping children trick or treating in case they are given poisoned sweets, or changing a route because a black cat crossed the path. In such cases the action is based on some level of belief, therefore ostensive action is to behave in a certain way or alter ones actions as a consequence of belief in folk myth or legend.

There are several permutations of ostension, but the one most useful for study of film and television is Mikel Koven's notion of (2008) 'mass-mediated ostension'. Koven refers to the onscreen presentation of a legend which raises "the *possibility* that the phenomenon was real, even if entertained momentarily"; the onscreen *presentation* of the phenomenon makes it ostensive (Koven 2007, 194). Koven proposes 'mass-mediated ostension' as a framework within which to study and understand *how* film and television uses folklore and *how* is legend is reproduced onscreen. If we look at the context in which folkloric narratives are presented, using what techniques to make legends plausible for an audience, and how an affective eeriness is manifested onscreen, we can often see what Koven has also termed the 'folklore fallacy' (2007). Folk horror film and television audiences are often left with the impression that folkloric elements employed onscreen are drawn from factual historical record, whereas, as Koven's detailed discussion of *The Wicker Man* shows, various folkloric elements illustrated as "'bits' of action and *mise en scène* are intended to evoke a feeling of authenticity within the diegesis" (italics in original, Koven 2007, 277), but, in fact, "it is the indiscriminate inclusion of any and all forms of 'folklore' into the...diegetic mix, which creates this fallacy" (2007, 279). Director Robin Hardy and writer Anthony Shaffer took their own literal belief in Sir James Frazer's text *The Golden Bough* and, because they use it uncritically, the representation of folklore in The Wicker Man "becomes highly problematic, in that they unintentionally reproduce many of the flaws of Frazer's original" (Koven 2007, 271).

Paul Cowdell explains this 'fallacy' elsewhere in this volume, as well as noting pioneering discussion by Michael Dylan Foster and Jeffrey Tolbert who propose 'the folkloresque' as a way of looking at how folklore functions in the world of popular culture, specifically to "reenvision categories such as *folklore* and *popular culture*, to explore how they mutually influence each other, and to productively problematize distinctions between them." (2016, 4). Folkloresque is a useful term in this burgeoning branch of folklore studies, as it describes creative, often commercial texts (such as film and television, games and graphic novels) "that give the impression to the consumer...that they derive directly from existing folkloric traditions" (2016, 5), whether this is literally the case or not. Foster and Tolbert, with reference to Koven's work, note that a sense of authenticity is central to the folkloresque, described as that which may not be 'real' folklore[2] but retains a plausibility for an audience in its presentation in which the literal truth or veracity of the media or fabricated legend is less relevant than its representation.

Therefore, it is useful to draw from a screen studies perspective to examine how artistic creations and adaptations employ folklore, in what contexts narratives are presented and what techniques are used to reproduce and represent folklore on screen. The examination of British folk horror's landscape as masking sinister secrets just below the surface, may help to explain the enduring influence of such media (in which themes of unearthing consistently arise) and perhaps to what extent contemporary British television and filmmakers are influenced by earlier texts, who continue to reproduce and reinterpret folkloric narratives.

What lies beneath: the eerie English landscape

Adam Scovell 's book *Folk Horror,* the first text entirely devoted to the subject, which includes a thorough and exhaustive index of film and television titles, argues that the genre "is never all that fussed with a genuine, accurate recreation of folklore" and that "anything could effectively be put into the mix of practices and customs, and still come out looking relatively authentic" (Scovell 2017, 29). The latter is precisely why attention this detail matters; what and why beliefs persist, develop, are acted upon or reproduced in culture is, of course, absolutely integral to modern folklore study. It is of vital importance to clarify and contextualise history and folklore as presented by popular film and television texts *because* of their ability to affect and perpetuate contemporary folkloric belief.

Although folk horror and 'wyrd' media are still relatively new categories for academic exploration, the British landscape is consistently noted as a key factor in creating eerie atmospheres onscreen. Mark Gatiss notes, in his 2010 series for BBC4, *A History of Horror*, that a key element of folk horror is "a common obsession with the British landscape, its folklore and superstitions" (Jardine and Das 2010). Scovell, too, cites landscape as an integral part in the characterisation of British folk

horror (2017, especially chapters three and four). The title of this essay 'Et in Arcadia Ego' draws upon a long history of the British relationship with the countryside: 'Arcadia' is suggestive of a place of simple, quiet pleasures, conjuring up scenes of rural tranquillity or a "happy land in which pastoral virtues triumphed" (SFE: The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction 1997) and a Britain of lost empire and 'glories' past. The Latin phrase 'Et in Arcadia Ego' itself came into use in 17th-century Italy, often in paintings incorporating skulls or tombs set within sylvan glades, and loosely translates as "Even in Arcadia I, Death, can be found" (SFE: The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction 1997).

Evelyn Waugh's use of the phrase 'Et in Arcadia Ego' as the title for the first section of the book *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), a pointedly English tale about emotional and sexual restraint and class-consciousness, sets a tone of nostalgic melancholy and an "impulse to cast one's longing gaze backwards to a place of safety and tranquillity" (SFE: The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction 1997). This evocative sense of an ever-present lingering death and sadness in even the most picturesque countryside milieu is present throughout many folkloric narratives in British media. The phrase is redolent of folk horror unearthings, raising questions of what lies just beneath the surface of the countryside or what mysteries may yet be revealed in ploughing its fields and furrows. It is important to note, however, that some titles associated with the genre, however, are not always necessarily *horrific*, but often encompasses a certain nostalgic or atmospheric eeriness.

Robert Macfarlane's article 'The eeriness of the English countryside' deliciously refers to this imagery; "the skull beneath the skin of the countryside," (Macfarlane 2015) and a sense of lurking darkness in the shadows of British culture where something repressed and sinister waits to surface at any moment. Macfarlane makes particular reference to M.R. James' ghost stories, which have been adapted for film and television on numerous occasions, most famously in the 1970s BBC *Ghost Story for Christmas* series, revived in the 2000s. James is generally considered to be the master of the English ghost story and was a learned folklorist himself (Simpson 1997). Lawrence Gordon Clark, director of the 1970s *Ghost Story* series, notes that James' "renowned English settings had none of the sentimental heritage qualities given to so many 'classic' TV adaptations of Jane Austen... His towns are habitually lonely, run down places and his countrysides are bleak and resolutely unpicturesque" (Lawrence Gordon Clark, email to author, 22 August, 2017). Macfarlane states that he finds "the eerie far more alarming than the horrific: James is one of only two writers...who has caused me to wake myself with my own screaming", suggesting James' affectiveness is in his acute understanding of landscape:

> especially the English landscape - as constituted by uncanny forces, part-buried sufferings and contested ownerships. Landscape...is never a smooth surface... there to offer picturesque consolations. Rather it is a realm that snags, bites and troubles (Macfarlane 2015).

It is not only the British Countryside which defines the image of folk horror, but also the British weather which has its own distinctiveness: consider the bleak grey skies and hills of *The Wicker Man*, or the autumnal trees and fields of *Witchfinder General.* Lawrence Gordon Clark discussed filming in varied and unpredictable conditions which often helped characterise the tone of *Ghost Story* episodes, remarking upon the evocative images at times created by the weather:

> there was a thick mist so we got the more dramatic effect of the sound of the horses trotting then the side lamps burning through and finally the coach emerging... Autumn is a great time for filming in the English countryside. You get early sunsets, lovely mists and abundant cobwebs in the dew (Lawrence Gordon Clark, email to author, 22 August, 2017).

This successful combination of bleak landscape and weather onscreen is also apparent in more recent examples of folk horror revival media. Ben Wheatley's film *A Field in England* (2013), for example, is shot entirely in black and white, blending the land, sky, trees and hedgerows together in degrees of greyscale. The plot loosely follows an alchemist's assistant who joins a band of deserters

from the ongoing civil war who become embroiled in a supposed treasure hunt for riches buried in a field, with hallucinogenic forays with psychedelic mushrooms along the way.

In *A Field in England*, the eponymous field itself is the focus: the landscape is the setting, the trap, and provides the folkloric entanglement in which the characters become imprisoned, quite literally at one point, utilising an old Celtic folk notion that it takes four men and a rope to pull someone out of a fairy ring (Rhys 1901, 239-40)[3]. Of course, there is an element of 'folklore fallacy' here in that Celtic lore is applied to a film stated as specifically set in England, but writer Amy Jump and director Ben Wheatley's artistic interpretation communicates their own impression of British folklore. Ben Wheatley, speaking about the native British experience of being utterly and inescapably surrounded by history and folklore, remarks that "There was something in the landscape that plainly terrified me... the idea that history is around you in the UK... you can walk ten miles from wherever you are and find an ancient monument, I mean, where I live, we walk the dog round a Saxon hill fort" (Ben Wheatley, telephone interview with the author, 25 May, 2018).

Another trope of the English eerie is often a physical digging and unearthing which, in folk horror, often leads to a revelation or release of something best left hidden or forgotten. In *Blood on Satan's Claw*, there is just such a literal unearthing: when farmer Ralph Gower uncovers a strangely deformed skull with one uncannily preserved eye and inhuman fur (later supposed to be the devil), sinister supernatural events begin to occur in the village. Robert Wynne Simmons describes this type of unearthing as representing a peculiarly English repressed pagan past, and a suppression of certain types of folklore and folkloric belief: "the idea of something erupting...that eeriness that you get in some of the English things" (Robert Wynne Simmons, telephone interview with the author, 22 May, 2017).

Many folkloric elements which may seem embedded in British history and culture and are sometimes mistaken for historical truth. In M.R. James' tales, there is much literal digging for treasure, such as in *A Warning to the Curious* (adapted for television in 1972). Both the original story and television adaptation discuss the legend of the three crowns of East Anglia. Not only is this legend entirely fabricated by M. R. James, it is embellished upon by director Lawrence Gordon Clark with the addition of an invented out-of-print scholarly folkloric text mentioned in the episode's dialogue. In both cases, but particularly James' original tale, the story is given such "plausible details, many...now assume that this antiquarian 'legend' which James wove into his fictional tale is authentic folklore" (Simpson 2011, 286). In addition to the fabrication of specific legendary details, James also drew heavily upon Scandinavian folklore, not just British folk legend and customs. It is interesting, then, that the combination of influences results in not only eerily authentic and "superbly effective" (Simpson 1997, 16) stories but ones which are often regarded as typically British. Adam Scovell's remark that "anything could effectively be put into the mix [of folk horror]...and still come out looking relatively authentic" (Scovell 2017, 29) underlines the importance of examining the presentation of such material and its ability to be accepted as potentially true. What may be 'folklore fallacy' can thus easily be misunderstood by audiences (in effective onscreen presentation) as 'folklore fact' and become part of a process of mass-mediated ostension which, again, raises "the *possibility* that the phenomenon was real" (Koven 2007, 194).

Acknowledging *folklore* as central to folk horror, how it is perpetuated through mass media and its ability to be culturally affective, is a key element of the eeriness of such media representations. When British landscape is used onscreen in this context, it is often for more than simple aesthetic appeal, intertwined with the weight of the folklore, the stories and the history that it bears. The choice to use a particular coastline, valley or even stone circle may well bring its own myths and legends to the screen for the audience, before any additional narrative has taken place. Writers and directors are consciously aware of using this type of folkloric landscape in their work, as Robert Wynne Simmons explains: "that feeling of a sense of place [as] being very important to folk horror...of wherever it happens to be actually gives you part of the story" (Robert Wynne Simmons, telephone interview with the author, 22 May, 2017).

Funny Peculiar: Wyrd British Comedy

Folkloric themes thus persist across many types and genres of media, and, as they are sometimes rather more 'eerie' than necessarily 'horrific' (or may not have the overt rural settings that are so often associated with folk horror); the term 'wyrd' can be used in place of 'folk horror'. I have defined my own use of the term more fully elsewhere (Rodgers 2019) but, in brief, 'wyrd' media can encompass that which shares a haunting, considered, atmospheric tone, and includes hauntological, gothic and "urban wyrd" (Scovell 2019, 10-12) texts across formats including documentaries, television plays, series' and Public Information Films.

The folk horror revival is persistent in British film and remains pervasive in the television of today.[4] Even British television comedy shares a sense of the wyrd English eerie, and is often haunted by darker folkloric themes. An obvious example is *The League of Gentlemen,* drawing upon a history of British folk horror and small town communities with characters like Tubbs and Edward, a grotesque married couple (also brother and sister) who manage a small village shop. Their shop is depicted as a crumbling building amid grimly desolate moorland on the outskirts of fictional English town Royston Vasey[5] where only locals are welcome. Upon attempting to cover up the couples' darkly comedic serial killing of one non-local 'outsider', Tubbs blurts out somewhat over-enthusiatically "We didn't burn him!" This comment obliquely references *The Wicker Man*, again, although based on folklore fallacy (as detailed in Koven 2007), the film has nonetheless successfully assisted the notion of isolated communities conducting questionable pagan rituals and even burnings to seep into popular culture. Influencing "at least two generations of some modern Pagans, who in attending the annual *Wickerman Festival* in Scotland and Burning Man Festival in Nevada, attempt to recreate the Celtic culture of Summerisle" (Koven 2007, 279), with mass-mediated ostension, fiction and folklore fallacy has in turn shaped folkloric activity.

Examples of similar folkloric influence can found in even gentler television comedy series' in which programme makers seem equally unable to resist references to *The Wicker Man* in depictions of village life, again suggestive of widespread societal suspicions about the activities of insular communities. *This Country* (2017-2018) is a mockumentary sitcom about the day to day life of two young people, cousins Kerry and Kurtan Mucklowe, and their experience of village life in the Cotswolds. In 'The Vicar's Son' episode, the vicar's estranged teenage son Jacob arrives in the village, away from 'big city' life in Bristol and, as an outsider observing the village, comments (without irony) to the camera "It's a bit wicker man, innit?" The comedy, as often in British tradition, is also tinged with sadness: in a quiet aside, Kurtan asks Jacob "What's it like in the real world?," recalling tragi-comic exchanges in *The League of Gentlemen* as Tubbs, more sympathetic than a simple grotesque, is controlled by her domineering husband and cries out: "You lied to me, Edward! There *is* a Swansea!...And other places, too! You kept them from me!" These characters are prisoners of their own localism; the outside world is something quite fearfully foreign and a poignant reminder of the some of the broader attitudes reflected in the British politics of the 2010s where populism spreads fear of immigrants and outsiders: creating a fearful 'other'.

The comedy programme most literally combining hauntological themes and folk horror tropes of landscape and unearthing is *Detectorists* (2014-2017). Described by writer-director (and star) Mackenzie Crook as a sitcom that Thomas Hardy might have written (Lewis 2015), the understated series follows the (mis)fortunes and metal-detecting ambitions of Andy and Lance, members of the Danebury Metal Detecting Club. Digging for gold and hidden treasure within the expanse of a rural Essex landscape is not so far from the work of M.R. James. As Lawrence Gordon Clark states (without intentional reference to *Detectorists*), some of James' strongest elements blend "landscape, history and myth and a lonely driven man seeking something that we know should be best left well alone... How would he have approached the metal detecting zealots of contemporary treasure-hunting?" (Lawrence Gordon Clark, email to author, 22 August, 2017). The end of the first episode in series three of *Detectorists*, set in contemporary 2017, has more than a hint of Jamesian influence: Andy unearths an ancient falconer's whistle and, upon trying it out, in a moment that could be pure folk horror, Andy and Lance pause and shudder as, on the soundtrack, the whistle echoes around the rural landscape as the sound of the wind rises ominously (recalling the folkloric tale type motif of ghosts being raised by a whistle[6]). To further highlight connective folkloric threads, as Andy and Lance shrug off their apparent unsettling feelings and head for the pub, they slowly fade

from the picture as we are shown the landscape simultaneously fading to sepia and trees begin to retreat in scale, in a kind of reverse time-lapse, back through the ages. We see a girl dressed in ancient ghostly white garb, using her falconry whistle, and a group of Saxons holding some kind of ritual ceremony in which they are burying gold, tantalisingly close to the spot where Andy and Lance were metal detecting. Significant on the soundtrack here is the use of the song 'Magpie' by The Unthanks, a contemporary English folk band who draw heavily from traditional music. The music within the song is minimal, a medieval drone underscored by ominous sounds of the wind, so that the folkloric lyrics are prominent:

> Devil, devil I defy thee
> Devil devil I defy thee
> Oh the magpie brings us tidings
> Of news both fair and fowl
> She's more cunning than the raven
> More wise than any owl
> For she brings us news of the harvest
> Of the barley we done called
> And she knows when we'll go to our graves (The Unthanks 2015).

Whilst the lyrics are suggestive of pagan belief and witchcraft, we see the landscape regress further back through time as seasons shift from summer to a cold, snowy winter and back to the rebirth of spring. The hauntological nostalgia for times past (a concept best outlined by Mark Fisher, 2014) is heady in this scene, unusual for a gentle British sitcom, as the connective threads through time and folklore integral to our changing relationship with the land play out in a manner befitting any of the most acclaimed episodes of *Ghost Story for Christmas*. The history, haunting and lost treasure are depicted for us on screen as tangibly beneath the surface, waiting there tantalisingly for Lance and Andy if only they find the right spot from which to unearth it.

Conclusions: the influence of folk horror and British 1970s television

1970s television continues to be a touchstone for many still drawing upon it for inspiration, especially those who were children during the era. Jeremy Dyson, when asked if the wyrd television programmes with folkloric themes he saw in the 1970s were in any way influential upon his present career, he stated unequivocally "Yes. *Absolutely*. One hundred percent. It showed me the way... No question, no question" (Jeremy Dyson, telephone interview with author, 15 March, 2018). The 1970s was a period in which folklore was treated with some gravity in mainstream media: "a deliciously credulous era, when reported hauntings would be treated as semi-serious news..." (Fischer 2017, 33), a "cultural moment when witchcraft and the occult were no longer ludicrous...." (Pratt 2013, 2) and reportage of activities such as the Enfield Poltergeist were common. Television programmes in the 1970s were either broadcast live or were transmitted and then gone, with no possibility to rewind, rewatch or 'catch up' later. Bob Fischer describes the generation who grew up during the 1970s as "amongst the last to remember their childhoods in this fractured, dreamlike fashion...the last 'analogue' generation" (Fischer 2017, 36) which perhaps help suggest the impact of partial memories and strong impressions made by eerie programming of the day.

If folklore is, at least, in part “man's attempt to bring enjoyment to his leisure through the art of storytelling,” (Thompson 1977) and as long as directors like Piers Haggard and Lawrence Gordon Clark indeed consider themselves storytellers first and foremost ("film is like telling a story... the most important thing is the story", Piers Haggard, interview in person with the author, 5 June, 2017) then it is crucial to consider how film and television continue to communicate folklore. In turn, it is important to understand the impact and effect of past media, past storytellers on the present; upon the storytellers and folklore of today. Where storytellers are effective in their onscreen presentation of folklore and contemporary legend, it is apparent that even that which may be

folklore fallacy can seep through into popular consciousness and, in a process of mass-mediated ostension, be considered by audiences as at least *potentially* true.

A contemporary example in which the above discussion culminates is *Arcadia*, a film made in 2018 by Scottish director Paul Wright. The film is made up of over one hundred clips of archive footage set to eerie original music composed by Portishead's Adrian Utley and Goldfrapp's Will Gregory. Described as "A fever dream of the British countryside" (Bradshaw 2018) and a "A folk horror fairy tale about the British people's relationship to the land" (Gallacher 2018), *Arcadia* neatly draws together many wyrd threads of British myth and history, public information films of the 1970s and hauntological notions of broken time. One indicative excerpt (BFI 2018) begins with an archive interview from the 1970s with a group of scruffy, mischievous looking children, sitting by what seems to be a stagnant pond. A plummy reporter asks "Does your mum know what you get up to when you come down here?" The answer, unsurprisingly, given what we have learned from 1970s public information films about playing in unsafe areas, is "no," but with the northern children's dry-witted addition that "she will do wi' you lot showin' this on't telly." With footage of the children playing rough-and-tumble amongst coarse woodland and swinging on ropes in derelict buildings, one can only imagine that *The Spirit of Dark and Lonely Water* (a sinister hooded figure voiced by Donald Pleasence in a 1973 public information film warning children against playing in dangerous areas) is simply biding his time. The excerpt continues with a montage of clips from a variety of decades, featuring representations of rural seventeenth century peasantry (a period favoured by folk horror due to the proliferation of witch trials) foraging for food and wood for fuel, and documentary film of mid-nineteenth century working class children being variously put through their marching paces in a schoolyard and bathed outdoors in tin baths. These images are juxtaposed with the queens guards marching against a backdrop of stately homes and footage of landed gentry surveying their grounds, whilst a 1940s voice over narrator queries:

> Ministers who preach up the law of the scriptures, they claim to heaven after they are dead and yet they require their heaven in this world too. Yet they tell the poor people that they must be content with their poverty and they shall have their heaven hereafter. Why may we not have our heaven here?

It is worth noting that *Arcadia* problematically merges the notion of Britain with England yet, given that the director is Scottish, it is perhaps safe to assume there is conscious artistic licence taken here presenting a dramatic tension in which he "moves on to find the exoticism beneath the surface, presenting tableaux of paganism, nonconformism and naturism, which are elided with the subversive protest ethos of punk, 17th-century levellerism, and music festivals nearer our own time" (Bradshaw 2018). The film perhaps reveals Wright's own Arcadia and the conflicts within, representing critical and radical alternatives to an authoritarian state; the film's conflation, perhaps, close in spirit to Ben Wheatley's appropriation of Celtic lore into *A Field in England*'s magical milieu.

Arcadia's archive footage and narrated commentary is evocative not only of folk horror and hauntology, but also of the legacy of a British documentary heritage and national World War Two cinema, highlighting a number of subtle fears and class divides. The audience is pointed plainly to the 'us' and 'them' culture of the British working classes versus the rich and powerful elite and the film obliquely suggests, as the old adage goes, 'the more things change, the more they stay the same'. *Arcadia* is a documentary made from snippets of the British past, bringing a dark postmodern twist and folk horror undercurrent directly into these politically unsettled times, the past literally haunting the present and future, blurring fact, fiction, folklore and fallacy.

In British media across the decades from folk horror to comedy, we can see the direct influence of culture and belief from past eras, culminating in a vision of British national identity: a land and a people haunted by its folklore, landscape and media past, which is always lurking only just beneath the surface. A number of references to folklore and folkloric texts in media, though perhaps long discredited (such as Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, notions of *Wicker Man*-esque burnings and ritual village activities) clearly retain a hold on the populist imagination, continuing to be reproduced in an ongoing process of mass-mediated ostension, fragmenting and blurring folklore

and nation along the way. In this wyrd Britain, where the poor are left wondering 'Why may we not have our heaven here?', it seems nonetheless that, eternally in its landscape and representative media, that indeed "Even in Arcadia I, Death, can be found".

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[1] *Spirited Away* is explored in detail as an example of media which *seems* to be based upon folklore, which Michael Dean Foster describes as 'folkloresque', in Foster and Tolbert 2016, 41-63.

[2] Tolbert (2013) describes 'real' folkloric legends as narratives which arise from and are accepted within a community as part of that community's culture, regardless of whether said narratives are literally true or not.

[3] Taken from a tale of Ifan Gruffyd, a farmer in Llangollen region of Wales, who has to tie a rope around himself and enlist four stalwart men to pull him from the circle as he goes in to save his daughter.

[4] Post-2000 'folk-horror revival' work which uses 'wyrd' themes include; Ben Wheatley 's film *Kill List* (2011), Ashley Pharaoh's television series *The Living and the Dead* (2016), episodes of Reece Shearsmith and Steve Pemberton's *Inside No. 9* (2014-present) and Mark Gatiss' continued revival of the BBC *Ghost Story for Christmas* series ('The Dead Room' 2018).

[5] The real-life dramatic scenery is provided by the town of Hadfield, on the edge of the Peak District, well known for its stunning scenery including bleak moors, dramatic hills, valleys and changeable weather conditions.

[6] More famously used in M. R. James 'Oh, Whistle and I'll Come to You, My Lad', also adapted for the BBC as part of the *Omnibus* series in 1968 as 'Whistle and I'll Come to You'.

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