

**Local Haunts: Non-Fiction 2012–24: By Adam Scovell.
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At over 400 pages in length, this is a fairly hefty tome, particularly as this volume presents a collection of mostly short articles originally written for sites like *Little White Lies*, *The Quietus*, and Scovell's own long running *Celluloid Wicker Man* published online, along articles for *Sight and Sound*, the BFI and presented talks. Three substantial sections on 'Literature', 'Wanders', and 'Film and Television' provide descriptions, musings and often quite personal and poetic responses to works the author finds interesting, engaging and thought-provoking.

Opening the 'Literature' discussion with the ghost stories of M. R. James, there is a haunted tone common to all Scovell's considerations such as the bleakness of J. G. Ballard and melancholy of W.G. Sebald, recurring favourites of Scovell's throughout. Each piece works as an introduction to or brief reflection on the title at hand, some chapters more akin to the blog posts they began as, others timely snapshots of the moment they were written. One piece written during the 2019 UK general election interprets Sebald's 'wider grasp of such historical momentum' as Scovell finds himself 'watching with banal horror history circling around once again' (88). Most chapters include significant contextual detail and compare the artist or text under discussion with similar or intellectually related works, Scovell musing upon the aesthetic links that he sees. In 'Film and Television', Scovell makes links between *Nuts in May* (1976) and a variety of folk horror and folkloric titles including *Whistle and I'll Come to You* (1968), *Robin Redbreast* (1970), and *Requiem for a Village* (1976), the likes of which surface regularly throughout the volume.

Though a broad variety of film and television works are included, there is particularly strong representation of French New Wave, arthouse cinema and weird film and television from the 1960s and 70s. If the reader is less familiar with the broader and more obscure works to which Scovell frequently refers, his catalogue of references may seem overwhelming. Not all readers, not even all film scholars perhaps, may be familiar with the early documentary work of Alain Resnais, for example.

By describing what he recognises in the work of other writers, such as 'the melancholy search for solace in the physical world' in reference to Adalbert Stifter (66), and Robert Walser who 'becomes a spectre of his own story ... always disappearing in between his sentences' (60), it is inviting to build a similar impression of Scovell himself. With such a quantity of brief, often sensory, responses to his surroundings and culture from over a twelve-year period, Scovell's work creates a picture of a character enviably absorbed in a whimsical world of classic literature, French cinema, and romantic meanderings off the beaten path. Therefore, beyond the texts themselves, it is also in the landscapes, workspaces and photography where Scovell finds reflections of himself, such as in discussion of Thomas Bernhard: 'perhaps I'm being too much like one of his characters' (77). His self-perception may seem somewhat lofty at times: laying claim to Alan Garner's landscapes 'fluent in the

sort of places that were mine' (p40) and comparing himself with Proust: 'much of my work seems to be a similar turn' (p47). However, there is a charming poetic loneliness and 'pessimistic solitude' to Scovell's writing that is nonetheless engaging (p104), most successfully throughout the 'Wanders' section, whether along the Suffolk coastline, in Alan Garner's Cheshire, or exploring the urban wyrd of the M53 underpass. Some particularly evocative descriptions of travels recount what seem very English, gently rebellious, acts like dangling one's legs over a cliff edge or drinking water from an outdoor natural source 'as a two fingers up' to modern sensibilities (p119).

Scovell often returns to M.R. James and, visiting the place of James' burial, makes unusual personal reference to Scovell's own 'miserable and hellish' (154) life at school, finding a bittersweet moment on this journey to be 'peaceful sitting among the dead' (159). Scovell's walks are always relevant to writers or texts that interest him, whether London landmarks relevant to Muriel Sparks, Michelangelo Antonioni, or Harold Pinter, but he also acknowledges the joy and creativity in wandering about for its own sake, making observations and taking photographs. Some travel accounts relating to the work of Jacques Tati, Agnes Varda, and Francois Truffaut are somewhat of an anticlimax to this section, all too brief with very little beyond a flavour of the relevant films.

Because of this occasional unevenness, one gets the sense that little has been edited out of this collection, an exhaustive compendium of Scovell's short publications. Though there are some standout examples that include more personal reflection, evocative description, insights and philosophy, in many cases the short chapters focus on description of a relevant author, book, film or other relevant text. There are some lovely recurrent themes of haunting and poetic solitude, and, especially if read in small chunks, *Local Haunts: Non-Fiction 2012-24* may be most effective to simply pique the interest of readers who have yet to discover some of Scovell's favourite texts rather than offering insightful critique for those who already have.

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