

**Howard David Ingham, *We Don't Go Back: A Watcher's Guide to Folk Horror***  
(Swansea: Room 207 Press, 2018)

Howard David Ingham's collection of essays on folk horror has already been enthusiastically received, shortlisted for a 2018 Stoker Award, and certain to find further plaudits from the critical community. The project began on Kickstarter, where the author sought funding for a series of ominously titled 'watcher's guides' to horror film and television. *We Don't Go Back* is the first – to be followed by books on cults, identity horror, and the urban weird. The subtitle implies something akin to a viewer's handbook, a collection of technical details and behind-the-scenes trivia – what backers have received is a sizeable work of popular criticism: some eighty-six essays (organised thematically) by Ingham and a small handful of contributors.

The collection is thematically subjective rather than comprehensive – indeed, Ingham's Introduction includes an apology for whatever folk-horror favourites have been overlooked – but this approach only serves to frame an intensely personal response to the genre itself. Through sixteen chapters, each exploring a loose grouping of folk-horror films or episodes (encompassing television plays, fairytales, comedy, the Lovecraftian, and others), Ingham provides an insightful commentary on both the texts themselves and their place within the (sub)genre. The author's prose is conversational and often quirky, but frequently communicates the sinister atmosphere of the subject matter. The work very quickly shows itself to be a book that it is fun to spend time with. An obvious enthusiast for the material, Ingham is generous but robust in their criticism: the author is not afraid to call out problematic (or simply incompetent) filmmaking where they see it. The work's greatest strength, however, is its self-awareness. The author takes care to foreground how their own experiences have informed their criticism, acknowledging how family, class, and religious faith have shaped their reading. Ingham has written elsewhere of how writing horror criticism supported their mental health through tough times; *We Don't Go Back* appears to bare the author's soul to a degree that sometimes leaves the reader feeling as if they have intruded on some private meditation. The collective result of these reflections is that rare thing: criticism with emotional power alongside its analysis.

Not every essay in the collection works as well as it could. The contributions from other writers are, in themselves, sound, but the occasionally abrupt leaps in tone work against the collection's sometimes very private voice. This is not to throw shade on the essays from other writers: Monique Lacoste's piece on *The Company of Wolves* (dir. by Neil Jordan,

1984) is solid; Daniel Pietersen (on *The Turin Horse*, dir. by Béla Tarr and Ágnes Hranitzky, 2011) erudite; Jon Dear is always lively; Simeon Smith's essay on *Pan's Labyrinth* (dir. by Guillermo del Toro, 2006) is succinct and evocative. Yet the work would have been stronger with either a greater contribution from other writers, or none at all – the former would be a different book, but the latter would have more effectively distilled our time with the (primary) author.

At the risk of holding the collection to the wrong standards – *We Don't Go Back* is much more a survey than a monograph – it is disappointing that Ingham does not draw together a concluding argument about folk horror as a genre. The author's modesty may be the enemy here. The book often defers to Adam Scovell as the genre's authority, but the breadth and depth of Ingham's work here have earned the author the right to be taken seriously as a critic of film and television horror. The lack of a rigorous summative argument based on the research is keenly felt, as it seems certain that such an essay would be an affecting and insightful addition to the field. The collection ends instead with an evocative piece on the persistence of folk horror in both film and television, and in popular culture more generally. The final essay exemplifies the work's strengths, drawing on both private memory and an awareness of developments in film culture. This closing piece perhaps demonstrates what the collection is trying to be, but the reader may be left wanting more. Nevertheless, *We Don't Go Back* is a success on its own terms. Passionate without succumbing to fannishness, idiosyncratic but always engaging, Ingham and their contributors have produced an accessible and intelligent collection. The book trips lightly over the established classics of folk horror, while exploring and challenging how the genre should be defined. There is significant attention to European film, from *Valerie a týden divů* (dir. by Jaromíl Jireš, 1970) to *La Cinquième Saison* (dir. by Peter Brosens and Jessica Woodworth, 2012), and hard-to-find British television (particularly from the BBC's *Play for Today* strand), with major juxtapositions of American and Australian horror that serve to highlight as many continuities as contrasts. The essays are, largely, self-contained in a way that allows the reader to dip in and out of the text without losing any threads (though the book is rewarding to read as a continuous work) but, as noted above, this is both a strength and a weakness. In either case, it is the result of a singular vision and one that deserves commendation.

Books like *We Don't Go Back* would not exist without crowdfunding. The distinctive personal edge of Ingham's writing would most likely have been dulled by traditional

publishing. The critical essay, outside of a few august publications, is often held to be a dying form. The success of Ingham's project so far suggests that there is still a considerable appetite for this kind of writing. It deserves to succeed further.

*Richard Gough Thomas*