

Folk Horror in the Ozarks: The Genre Hybridity of

Debra Granik's *Winter's Bone*

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As described by Adam Scovell, films that can be considered part of the folk horror genre exhibit common elements that fall along what he describes as the 'folk horror chain' which includes particular deployments of landscape, isolation, skewed belief systems/morality, and the inclusion of a happening/summoning. Scovell gleaned this 'chain' by taking a look at the commonalities among the three films that are often considered the founding triumvirate of the genre, *Witchfinder General* (Michael Reeves, 1968), *The Blood on Satan's Claw* (Piers Haggard, 1971), and *The Wicker Man* (Robin Hardy, 1973), thus establishing a category that has continued to gain popularity and interest among film theorists and aficionados (2017: 17-18). Yet, even Scovell himself recognizes the need for flexibility in the parameters of the folk horror genre and emphasizes the fruitful discoveries that might be made by exploring the subtle connections with films that might, at first, be considered outliers: 'Folk Horror is best seen, not simply as a set of criteria to be read with hindsight into all sorts of media, but as a way of opening up discussions on subtly interconnected work and how we now interact with such work' (2017: 5-6). Influential film theorist Rick Altman also argues for the flexibility of genre in his seminal book on the subject: 'Genres are not inert categories shared by all (though at some moments they certainly seem to be), but discursive claims made by real speakers for particular purposes in specific situations' (1999: 101). Following Scovell's and Altman's prompts, I will trouble the boundaries of folk horror by taking a look at Debra Granik's 2010 film *Winter's Bone*, positioning it as a hybrid that sits on the cusp of the genre. The film is indeed an excellent example of hybridity,

falling partially within several genres including folk horror and backwoods horror. Through this exploration I hope to show how films that might not fall squarely within the predetermined limits of folk horror can provide added insight and a richness to the genre that would be lacking without their inclusion.

Due to the parameters set by Scovell and embraced by many theorists of the genre, *Winter's Bone* is not traditionally found on the established list of folk horror films. It does not include supernatural elements or deal overtly with pagan traditions, and it is not set in the European countryside as are many of the touchstone folk horror films. *Winter's Bone* is distinctively American, with its Ozark Mountain setting and its gritty, meth-fueled reality. Thus, on first consideration, there may not seem to be a strong connection between this film and those that contain ancient rituals, witchcraft, or mystical happenings, as many folk horror offerings do. While the film is no doubt on the borders of folk horror, the narrative of *Winter's Bone* (much like the celebrated founding film triumvirate) deals with an interloper who intrudes upon a clan that is guarding deep, potentially deadly secrets within its innermost circle. Also, like many other folk horror films, *Winter's Bone* foregrounds the importance of landscape and relies upon isolation as a crucial aspect of the narrative. The rural, hardscrabble setting of the film serves as an additional 'character', fostering the seclusion and desperation of the clan members who inhabit it. The land is not only a determining factor influencing the peoples' lives; it also literally helps them to keep their dark secrets hidden. Due to its dependence upon landscape, its portrayal of a dangerous, insular group of people, and its narrative centering on an interloper who is trying to unearth the key to a mystery, *Winter's Bone* can be considered an example of American folk horror. It sits on the edge of the genre, certainly, but is perhaps all the more interesting for that—limning the generic terrain.

Winter's Bone is based on a young adult novel of the same name by Daniel Woodrell. It was adapted for the screen by Debra Granik and Anne Rosellini. The film chronicles seventeen-year-old Ree Dolly's (Jennifer Lawrence) search for her missing father, Jessup, a ne'er-do-well methamphetamine dealer whose disappearance may ultimately result in the destruction of Ree's family. The Dolly family lives in a small cabin in the Ozarks in an isolated community where almost everyone is related by blood or marriage. Ree has become the prime caregiver for her twelve-year-old brother, Sonny (Isaiah Stone) and her six-year-old sister, Ashlee (Ashlee Thompson) due to the mental breakdown and near-catatonia of their mother, Connie (Valerie Richards), who has plunged into deep depression, presumably as a result of her husband's neglect, philandering, and his deep involvement with the dangerous meth-fueled economy of this backwoods community. As a result of Connie's total withdrawal and abdication of her parental responsibilities and Jessup's absence, Ree has become the surrogate head of the family, acting as both mother and father to her siblings, a position she inhabits with a great deal of maturity and care. Ree knows what it is like to be neglected, so she does what she can to prevent Sonny and Ashlee from having to grow up in the same situation. Throughout the film we see Ree not only teaching her brother and sister traditional school subjects such as math and spelling but also passing along basic survival skills such as how to shoot, how to cook, and – in one particularly infamous scene – how to skin a squirrel.

Early in the film we discover that Jessup has once again been picked up by the local police for cooking meth, and he has put up the family house and timberlands as collateral for his bond. Unfortunately, since his release from prison, Jessup has gone missing, and if he does not show up for his court date, the family will lose everything. During an unexpected visit by the bail bondsman responsible for Jessup, Ree is warned of the dire situation and told that she must

deliver her father to court or be prepared to lose the house and land. Unfortunately, Jessup's court date comes and goes with no sign of him, so the only way Ree can maintain ownership of the family property is to deliver hard evidence to the authorities that Jessup is dead. She needs to find his body. Ree implores her drug-addled uncle 'Teardrop' (John Hawkes) to ask the leaders of her extended family where her father might be, but he refuses, so Ree takes it upon herself to find Jessup. Ree's ensuing search for her father forces her to confront a community that holds buried secrets, both literally and figuratively. She soon discovers that neither the hardscrabble landscape nor those who walk upon it are willing to readily offer up information, so Ree must fight through layers of lies, deflection and silence in order to find the answers she so desperately needs.

Landscape and Local Character

Landscape is of central importance in folk horror. Scovell names it the 'first link' in his 'folk horror chain', noting how landscape is instrumental in creating the isolation required to spur a folk horror narrative: 'The landscape must in some way isolate a key body of characters, whether it be just a handful of individuals or a small-scale community' (2017: 17). In all three of the foundational films of folk horror, the landscape is so important that it becomes a character in its own right. The pastoral, almost-too-perfect island setting of *The Wicker Man*, for example, helps to create a sensation in the viewer that something is not quite right and that perhaps the inhabitants of Summerisle are not as benign as they first appear. In addition to providing the isolation necessary for the folk horror narrative, Summerisle also exerts a mystical effect upon its inhabitants, thus propelling them to carry out—and actually celebrate—the horrific murder of Sergeant Howie at the end of the film. The strong influence of landscape is present in *Winter's*

Bone as well. As in most folk horror offerings, the sense of place is one of the most potent and influential elements of the film. Director Debra Granik was keenly aware of the importance of location to this story, so she chose to use actual Ozark sites rather than finding stand-in locations or shooting on a back lot: ‘If we were going to attempt this’, said Granik, ‘we knew it had to be there, it had to have local people populating the film visually. There is no chance that this film would come to life in any way that would be close to the book—or close to any anthropological sense of precision—unless we did it there’ (Gross 2010). Thus, the entire movie was filmed on location in the Ozark Mountains, and the settings were created by repurposing existing homes and buildings in the area. The only constructed set used in the film, in fact, was that of an abandoned, burned out meth house, and this was done purely for safety reasons. While the production team did find an actual abandoned meth house in the filming area that could have been used, they opted to convert another local burned out house for that scene, fearing the contamination that might have still been present at the actual meth house site (Adams 2010). The importance of location is even emphasized in the first words heard in the film: ‘Way down in Missouri where I heard this melody’. This is a line from the 1914 folk song, *Missouri Waltz*, which is sung a cappella as a non-diegetic voiceover that accompanies the opening credits.

The landscape of *Winter’s Bone* serves as a perfect visual metaphor for the emotional lives of the characters who people this story. This is a cold, hard place, and the harsh environment prompts a roughness and an unyielding fight for survival in its inhabitants. By employing shots that linger on images of windy vistas, rocky ground, and bare, foreboding trees, Granik visually conveys this struggle and also captures the emotional core of the film. The countryside is presented in washed out, unsaturated blues and grays. There is no lush greenery here, only the harshness that stands as a reminder of the violence and danger that lurks within the

community. Self-preservation is a key operating principle, and the constant effort needed to survive within this environment has served to turn these folks into some very rough characters indeed.

‘Landscape as character’ and the influence of place on the psychology of the people are two elements that set *Winter’s Bone* partially within the folk horror genre. The purposeful presence of the environment is emphasized throughout the film with wide frame shots that show Ree Dolly as a small, solitary figure walking across an unwelcoming terrain. This foregrounding of environment was supported by the entire production team. In several interviews, Michael McDonough, the cinematographer of *Winter’s Bone*, has discussed the importance of place to the film, ‘The landscape was always going to be a major character in this film and we spent many months in the landscape before we ever brought an actor there’ (Saito 2011). By spending time in the area in which the story is set, the production team was not only able to get a feel for the land, they were also able to gain firsthand knowledge of the daily lives of the Ozark residents and of how people in the area spoke and interacted. The extended pre-production visits and location scouting also allowed Granik to recruit actors and production consultants from the area who could bolster her trust among the residents and help her learn the local mythos. This was especially important to Granik since the story she was going to tell was one of a rough, isolated community embroiled in the methamphetamine trade. She was keenly aware of the sensitive nature of the subject matter and did not want the locals to think that she intended to portray them as ruthless idiots or as stereotypical inbred degenerates, character types that are commonly found in ‘backwoods horror’ films such as *Deliverance* (John Boorman, 1972) and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974) and that constitute, as Bernice Murphy has pointed out, a standard trope in the post-1970 horror film (2013: 135). It was important to Granik that the locals

understand that she did not intend to replicate that same stereotypical pattern, but wanted to show the resilience and self-reliance of the Ozark people in addition to the roughness and violence that can sometimes rear its head in the illegal drug trade:

We had dues to pay. [. . .] If we were going to show difficult parts of Ozarks culture—and meth is a big thing—we felt we should show the positive side of the culture. An Ozarks woman who was kind of a local spokesperson would say to me that there's a difference between poverty and impoverishment. Poverty is a financial status.

Impoverishment is multivalent—it means lots of things are lacking that bring life to a level that isn't sustainable. The Ozarks are not lacking in history and heritage that people feel very proud about—and a strong self-reliance. (Bell 2010: 29)

Granik's investment in getting to know the community paid off. She ended up being able to cast two local children as Ree's young siblings, and area actors also portrayed several of the Dolly family's cousins and neighbors. Even one of the main characters in the film, 'Thump' Milton, the frightening patriarch of Ree's extended family, is portrayed by a local icon: biker and Vietnam veteran, Ron 'Stray Dog' Hall. The deployment of location and the incorporation of local color and characters has prompted several reviewers to comment upon the 'authentic' feel of *Winter's Bone*. Apparently, Granik was also successful in her wish to show respect for the local community. Reflecting on the completed film, many of the locals say that they feel it does a good job of balancing the harsh reality with the true struggles and resilience of the characters. Granik does not portray her characters as one-dimensional monsters but strives to show the humanity underneath the roughness. As one reviewer rightly notes: 'Within the gothic setting of the rural Ozarks, Granik's film exceeds the aforementioned labels [gritty, raw, real, authentic];

it's a dark and gripping tale that portrays a maligned culture with honest tenderness' (E. L. 2010: 70).

Bolstering the film's authentic feel is its use of traditional folk tunes and local musicians to provide both diegetic and non-diegetic elements of the soundtrack. One of the key performers is singer Marideth Sisco who sings the song heard during the opening credits. Sisco introduced the filmmakers to the traditional music of the area and ended up gaining a role in the film as a result. As she recalls:

The *Winter's Bone* production team was in the West Plains area visiting Daniel Woodrell and scouting for locations, when someone expressed a wish to hear 'Ozarks music'.

Daniel, who knew a group of us played weekly at a friend's house, brought them to hear us. They stayed a while, listened to the music, videotaped us, and left. Two years later I got a phone call from [producer] Anne Rosellini telling me they'd written a scene into the movie for me'. (Watson 2015)

Apart from the Ozarks music heard in the film, the soundtrack consists primarily of rural diegetic noises such as footsteps, animal grunts, barking, wind chimes, gunshots, and car engines, accompanied by the occasional sustained sound of a bowed stringed instrument to add an ominous tone and create tension. Using authentic sounds and music to solidly link a film to a particular locale, while also underscoring the unease contained in the story, is a common technique used by folk horror filmmakers. The soundscape can help place the audience within the environment by mimicking a 360-degree aural experience. Coupled with an effective mise-en-scène, the sound effects can engulf viewers, making them feel like they are immersed in the film. An effective soundscape helps to animate the all-important landscape, and the two must work together seamlessly if a film is to successfully engender the tension and foreboding of

effective folk horror. As Paul Newland notes in regards to *Blood on Satan's Claw*, 'The rural landscape and the sound work together to produce a space of thematic and temporal tension' (2016: 167). This description also accurately captures the combined workings of the images and sound in *Winter's Bone*. Like many of the best folk horror offerings, *Winter's Bone* vibrates with a feeling of potential violence and danger. It is as if there is always an unseen threat just outside the frame, a silent predator ready to swoop in and inflict a fatal wound at any moment.

The Clan

The isolated clan is the most important element of many folk horror offerings. The best examples of the genre often contain narratives that center on secrets kept by an insular group of people who have strong ties to one another through some combination of shared beliefs, religious dogma, and/or familial connections. Insiders are expected to adhere to a code of silence or risk being ostracized, perhaps even killed; and while groupthink no doubt fosters the community members' skewed vision of reality, it is the isolation that tends to push some of their actions into the realm of horror. As Scovell notes, for example, both *Blood on Satan's Claw* and *The Wicker Man* follow a community whose members 'gradually twist into something malevolent due to their isolation' (2013). It is the seclusion that helps to foster and cement the societal codes and belief systems that engender horrific consequences. This is also true of the intractable community at the center of *Winter's Bone*. As the story unfolds, we discover that Jessup Dolly has been murdered by someone in Thump Milton's inner circle: he gave information to the police about other local meth dealers, information that would directly implicate Milton and his gang. Apparently, Jessup was unable to face the ten years in prison that his most recent legal infraction would bring. Unfortunately, the local sheriff leaks word of Jessup's cooperation. In

short order, an unknown person pays Jessup's bail. He is let out of jail and summarily disappears. The quick silencing of Jessup and the subsequent cover-up of the murder is what brings Ree and her family to the verge of crisis.

Although the kinship group at the center of *Winter's Bone* is not an official cult, it does exhibit cult-like properties in that the members have shared beliefs, and they are expected first and foremost to serve the interests of the clan. They do this by keeping their patriarch, Thump Milton, informed of everything that happens in the area, thus giving him a kind of omniscience and allowing him to avoid unwanted difficulties. At times, it seems like there is an almost-paranormal 'surveillance system' operating in the town, speeding information to Milton like lightning. By the time Ree walks up the hill to see him, for example, Milton already knows that she has just been talking to his granddaughter, Megan (Casey MacLaren). There is a quasi-mystical connection at play among this extended family implied in Ree's line, 'I'm a Dolly – bred and buttered. And that's how I know Dad's dead'. Her status as a family member should help Ree to obtain needed information from the group, but unfortunately, she is ostracized due to Jessup's betrayal. Until she can prove herself loyal to the clan, she cannot be privy to their secrets.

Insider/Outsider

Winter's Bone offers interesting insights into the folk horror category through its deployment of 'the interloper', a character central to the genre. This person is usually someone who is a complete outsider, entirely ignorant of the customs and traditions of the community in which they find themselves, a situation which immediately puts them in peril. The interloper usually does not understand the clan's/community's ways and often looks down upon the group's

members as naïve or backward. And, much like the central figures of classic Greek tragedy, hubris causes the interloper to misinterpret events and disregard warnings, ultimately leading to his or her own downfall. The prime example of this folk horror staple is, of course, Sergeant Howie (Edward Woodward) of *The Wicker Man*. Howie is an interloper who maintains an air of superiority and an unwavering belief in himself. He is self-righteous in his faith and unable to consider the world from any other perspective, which blinds him to the danger that the Summerisle community poses. The narrative of the hubristic interloper is another way in which folk horror is aligned with the genre variously called ‘backwoods horror’, ‘rural horror’, or ‘hillbilly horror,’ a sub-genre that Murphy calls the ‘most formulaic’ of the American horror film (2013: 133). Here, intruders into isolated rural areas find themselves in danger when they are confronted by hostile locals who seek to maim, torture and/or kill them. As Mark H. Harris more colorfully describes the backwoods narrative formula: ‘City slickers traveling through rural territory run headlong into deranged, frequently inbred and unhygienic, country folk seeking to show them what's what in as grisly a manner as possible’ (2018). This is a genre that is built upon the ‘[h]orrification of rural people’, and some prime examples are *Deliverance*, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, and Wes Craven’s 1977 film *The Hills Have Eyes* (DeKeseredy et al. 2014: 180).

Since *Winter’s Bone* contains some backwoods characters that are definitely dangerous, and specifically a mortal threat to Ree and her family, some might, at first, consider the film to be more closely aligned with backwoods horror than with folk horror. I find this to be a generic misplacement of the film, however. While the distinction between these two genres is certainly permeable, it can be more clearly established by taking into account the mindset of the human menace. Backwoods horror narratives often foreground the deranged, id-centered nature of the

homicidal ‘monster’, as exemplified by the gleeful scenes of abuse and violence found in such films as *The Hills Have Eyes* and *Deliverance*. In folk horror, on the other hand, the actions of the violent characters are usually grounded in a carefully thought-through (albeit often skewed) worldview that comes complete with an established, communally-accepted dogma. Backwoods horror killers no doubt have a reason for their actions, but their crimes are more often the result of a chance encounter with the interloper rather than something calculated to help the community thrive. Their violence is opportunistic, not pre-planned or systematic. When looked at in this way, it is clear that *Winter’s Bone* falls more neatly into the category of folk horror than that of backwoods horror since the violence that Ree encounters is as a result of established precepts held by the local community. Thump Milton and his family do not immediately try to harm Ree upon her first intrusion into their territory; instead, various Milton family members warn her to stop inquiring about Jessup’s disappearance because it will force them to take violent action against her. The Milton clan is not composed of bloodthirsty maniacs who take pleasure in harming people. They are just carrying out tasks that need to be done in order to protect their own self-interests. In this community, making and selling meth is one of the only ways to make a living, and they are not about to let Ree’s dogged pursuit of the truth interfere with that.

One of the notable things about *Winter’s Bone* is that while Ree is an interloper, she is simultaneously both insider and outsider in relation to the clan, a space not usually occupied by the interlopers in folk horror. Unlike most of these characters, Ree does not come from somewhere else. She has been born and raised in the area; she knows and accepts the community’s ways and is connected to many of the locals not only by physical proximity but by blood, a fact she uses to her advantage. In a scene with Milton’s wife, Merab (Dale Dickey), for example, Ree hopes that reminding her of their familial connection will persuade her to offer

information about Jessup's whereabouts: 'Some of our blood, at least, is the same. Ain't that supposed to mean somethin'?' Isn't that what's always said?' Unfortunately, Ree's ploy does not work – at least, not at first. In fact, her position as a partial 'insider' initially serves to hinder her quest due to the fact that Ree is aligned with Jessup and his betrayal. Ree suffers guilt by association. She also engenders distrust because she does not participate in the drug trade and does not use drugs herself. This makes her unique among her extended family members and is another reason why she is viewed with suspicion.

It is this insider/outsider duality that makes Ree's position vis-à-vis the Milton clan particularly complex and fascinating. She is threatening to them because she knows their ways. She knows the dangers of breaking the cultural codes and is thus able to make informed decisions about how to proceed with her search. And even though she knows firsthand the dire consequences that can result from tangling with Thump Milton's crew, Ree is resolute and is willing to take the risk. As a result of doggedly pursuing information about her father's whereabouts, of course, Ree does suffer the consequences when she is grabbed by Merab and her sisters and taken into the barn where they subject her to a brutal beating. The beating is a clear message to Ree that she must abandon her inquiry or risk further harm, but Ree is not cowed. She is both stubborn and resourceful, and, most importantly, she ultimately proves her loyalty to the clan by keeping quiet about the beating and about the other illegal activities of the Milton gang. Thus, the beating is a pivotal moment, allowing Ree to prove that she is not like her father. Forging a connection to the folk horror chain, this beating might be considered an example of Scovell's fourth link—the 'happening/summoning' (2017: 17), which Andy Paciorek notes can involve a supernatural element or can be an 'entirely earthly event [. . .] such as an act of violence' (2018: 15). Because Ree survives the incident and does not betray the family to

outsiders, she effectively moves to a more trusted position in relation to the Milton clan.

Although she has always considered herself a part of their extended family, by enduring the ‘ritual beating’ Ree shifts from a liminal insider/outsider to that of a true insider, thus opening up the possibility for a change in the outcome of her quest. Ree’s willingness to play by the Milton clan’s rules undergirds her survival and ultimately leads to success in her effort to save her family.

Gender Roles

In the kinship society at the center of *Winter’s Bone* there are strongly ingrained and regulated gender expectations which are kept in place through the primacy of physical force. This is how Thump Milton maintains domination over his gang and how he enforces the code of silence in relation to his illegal dealings. Milton is a large, aggressive man and he will not hesitate to harm anyone bold enough to cross him. All members of his group are expected to fulfill their proper role and to abide by the unwritten, yet ubiquitous, societal codes; this is particularly true in relation to gender codes. Women are expected to raise the children, maintain the home, obey what the men say, and stay quiet. And this they do—for the most part. In *Winter’s Bone* the women not only abide by the gendered codes, they actively enforce them within the community. Throughout the film, in fact, we more often see the women policing each other in regard to expected behavior than we see the men policing them. For example, in the scene in which Ree first approaches Milton’s house to ask for information about her father, Merab immediately warns Ree that she is in the ‘wrong place, I expect’. Here, as Glen Donnar notes, Merab ‘signals both Ree’s violation of unwritten community codes against trespass and Ree as symbolically out-of-place within accepted gender roles’ (2016: 169). Merab goes on to re-emphasize gendered

expectations when she asks, ‘Don’t you got no men to do this?’ Within this community, it is only the men who take the active part in dealings and negotiations. Another important scene that demonstrates the women’s lack of agency occurs when Teardrop shows up to claim Ree immediately after she has been beaten. Even though Merab and her sisters were the ones who actually administered the beating, it is Thump Milton who takes control, checking to make sure that Ree has been sufficiently thrashed and making the decision to release Ree into Teardrop’s custody:

Thump: You gonna stand for her, are ya’?

Teardrop: She done wrong, you can put it on me.

Thump: She’s now yours to answer for.

Here we see what amounts to a ‘gift’ exchange between the two men, much like the exchanges used to establish reciprocal obligation and kinship as described in Gayle Rubin’s ‘The Traffic in Women’:

If women are the gifts, then it is men who are the exchange partners. And it is the partners, not the presents, upon whom reciprocal exchange confers its quasi-mystical power of social linkage. The relations of such a system are such that women are in no position to realize the benefits of their own circulation. (1975: 174)

Thump ‘gives’ Ree to Teardrop in exchange for an assurance that no further information will circulate about Jessup’s disappearance. Teardrop acknowledges the pact with the affirmation, ‘This is a girl who ain’t gonna tell nobody nothing’. So even here Ree cannot speak for herself; Teardrop must speak for her. Milton will not put any stock in Ree’s word because she is female.

Although the women seem to have little agency within *Winter’s Bone*, the film’s narrative ultimately proves that this is not always the case. Ree’s unlikely salvation comes in the

form of help from Merab and her sisters who agree to take her to Jessup's body in order to retrieve his hands, evidence that will prove he is indeed dead and thus not legally liable to surrender the family's property for his bond. Although we never find out if Merab and her sisters have consulted with Milton about their decision to help Ree, it is almost certain that it is one that they have come to on their own; that is why the trip must happen quickly and in the dead of night. Merab and her sisters seem to be driven to help by two impulses: First, they are upset with being disparaged by the townspeople and, second, they can now allow themselves to express sympathy toward Ree since she has proven herself to be an 'insider'. She has passed their test by enduring the beating and yet refusing to speak ill of them, thus proving that she is worthy of help. Ultimately, it is the women who assist Ree in saving her home and family, indicating that perhaps there is a sub-group working within Milton's clan that might just be more powerful than the man himself. As Jesús Ángel González notes, 'Obviously, if there is hope in this abandoned frontier community it is in women's hands and in female solidarity' (2015: 71).

In an article on genre, Ralph Cohen argues for the malleability of generic categories due to the diachronic change that takes place as categories are added and deleted:

Concepts in theory and practice arise, change, and decline for historical reasons. And since each genre is composed of texts that accrue, the grouping is a process, not a determinate category. Genres are open categories. Each member alters the genre by adding, contradicting, or changing constituents, especially those of members most closely related to it. (1986: 204)

It is this openness that allows for *Winter's Bone* to be considered on the cusp of folk horror, even though it differs in some key respects from the films considered to be foundational to the genre.

While including a myriad of folk horror elements such as a rural setting, the foregrounding of landscape, a primarily-diegetic soundscape that works to enhance the mise-en-scène, and the centrality of cult-like behaviors, *Winter's Bone* also exhibits a complexity that elevates it to one of the best of the genre through its reimagining of the character of the interloper. The simultaneous insider/outsider status of Ree Dolly makes *Winter's Bone* a film that should be particularly appreciated for its combination of traditional folk horror elements and its reimagining of this standard trope. As Altman notes, genres need to evolve if they are to remain viable: 'The genre constitution process is not limited to a cycle's or genre's first appearance' (1999: 77). As folk horror continues to spark examination and gain popularity, theorists and enthusiasts would do well to consider films on the margins—films that help to open up analyses and provide new insights into the construction of the genre. *Winter's Bone* is one such film. Its hybridity offers unique insights into the way in which elements of folk horror have been deployed in films that have yet to be examined through its particular lens.

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