

After the Rural Idyll: Representations of the British Countryside as a Non-Idyllic Environment

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Abstract

This paper explores a somewhat overlooked tradition of non-idyllic representations of the British countryside, particularly characteristic of the post-World War Two period. It considers the collective significance of these representations and what they tell us of the place of the rural within contemporary British culture. The paper takes a broad survey approach, highlighting the representation of rural landscapes, rural communities and rural life, and the rural economy and rural labour, across a range of non-idyllic representations. It argues that it is no longer plausible to sustain the argument that the overwhelming imagination of British rural space is idyllic. These non-idyllic representations afford spaces to explore the imprints of modernity and globalisation on the British countryside, whilst the special place of the rural within British national identity now seems less secure.

Introduction

The rural, fondly idealised as bucolic, natural, unchanging, innocent and safe (Bell, 2006; Sommerville et al., 2015; Haigron, 2017), has long been posited as occupying a special place within British culture (Williams, 1973; Wiener, 1981; Colls and Dodd, 1986; Lowenthal, 1991; Short, 1992). This prevailing imagination of rural space, it is argued, has long been central to British national identity, particularly that variety known as Englishness. This powerful mythology grew up from the mid nineteenth century, a time in Britain of rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, in part as a defensive reaction to the challenge this posed to the economic and cultural power of the landed aristocracy (Wiener, 1981: 14), in part a cultural osmosis between an emergent class of industrial capitalists and their landed forebears (Howkins, 1986: 64; Chambers, 1990: 19) and in part a nostalgic retreat from the rapid pace of change and the grim living conditions of a growing urban population (Laing, 1992: 138).

From this time the English way of life was captured in the imagery of a rural, typically Home Counties, landscape that was repeatedly deployed as an antidote to the perceived ills of industrialisation and modernity (Wiener, 1981: 41-42; Eagleton, 1993: 8). Despite its specific historical origins a number of writers have discerned an enduring centrality of this rural mythology within British, and especially English, popular culture (Wiener, 1981: 73; Howkins, 1986: 77;

Woods, 2010: 235), one strongly reflective of an ascendancy of middle class values within this realm (Thrift, 1989; Phillips, et al., 2001; Haigron, 2017: 71).

It would be wrong though to imagine that this veneration of the rural is unchallenged and universal. There is, for example, a deep history of representations of the rural as a place of danger, from European folk tales like 'Little Red Riding Hood' (Woods, 2011: 18) to horror films such as *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), whilst in parts of the global South the rural is often associated with poverty, oppression and environmental degradation (Murray, 2016: 227). Bell (1997: 94), with specific reference to the US, has called the place of the rural in the popular imagination 'ambivalent', noting both idyllic and anti-idyllic representations.

With reference to Britain some have recognised recent examples of more nuanced, problematic, alternative or downright negative rural imagery (Hutchings, 2004: 34; Yarwood, 2005: 23; Leyshon and Brace, 2007: 200; Woods, 2010: 215; Haigron, 2017: 7) and a growing appreciation of non-idyllic rural landscapes (Orton and Worpole, 2013) such as the 'edgelands' (Symmons Roberts and Farley, 2011) of the rural-urban fringe (Gallent and Anderson, 2007). Whilst some note that the idea of the British rural idyll is displaying some signs of strain (Bell, 2006: 150), none suggest its cultural ascendancy is seriously threatened (Wood, 2010: 235).

By contrast, this paper draws attention to what it argues is an extensive and somewhat overlooked tradition of representing the British countryside in non-idyllic ways. Whilst it is possible to find earlier examples of non-idyllic representations of British rural areas, their representation in this way seems to be particularly pronounced in the post-World War Two period and especially from the early 1960s onwards. It is this post-war period that this paper focuses on. Non-idyllic here refers to representations that admit troubling elements and whose overriding impression of rural space challenges its idyllic rendition. The paper asks, what is the collective significance of this tradition? It considers whether we can still plausibly sustain the argument that the overwhelming cultural imagination of British rural space remains that of the idyll. It unpacks the meanings and significance of this tradition by situating it within wider economic, political and cultural terrains. It asks, for example, what processes of change in the countryside does it speak to and, potentially, what changing cultural attitudes to the British countryside does it reflect? It also, tentatively, explores the relationships of these representations to lived cultures (Yarwood, 2005: 23). Finally, it considers the implications of all this for rural scholarship.

Whilst the rural idyll is an imagination associated with England, particularly southern England, this

paper does not restrict its discussion just to these spaces. It notes and makes reference to examples from across Britain including representations of Scottish (*The Wicker Man* and *His Bloody Project*, for example), Welsh (*The Owl Service* and *On the Black Hill*) and northern English (*All Quiet on the Orient Express* and *This Filthy Earth*) rural spaces, as well as many from within those southern landscapes squarely associated with the rural idyll. The representations noted and discussed here also include excursions to other English rural spaces including its eastern (*The Breakthrough*, *Whistle and I'll Come to You* and *Waterland*) and Celtic fringes (*The Birds*, *Straw Dogs* and *Bait*). The paper adopts this geographic scope for two reasons. First, simply, it is possible to find examples of non-idyllic representations of rural Britain from across all of these regions. As exploring the collective significance of such representations is the primary aim of this paper it was felt important not to restrict its regional scope. Second, the themes within these representations cut across these regions. We find the non-idyllic themes discussed in this paper in representations of all of these regions. This paper offers exploratory analysis across the range of non-idyllic representations of British rural areas from the post-war period. Subsequent analysis might profitably probe their specific regional geographies in more depth.

Non-Idyllic Representations of the British Countryside

Recent years have seen a growing literature, from geographers (Yarwood, 2005; Leyshon and Brace, 2007; Yarwood and Charlton, 2009; Woods, 2010) and also from disciplines such as English literature (Fournier, 2017; Haigron, 2017) and film studies (Hutchings, 2004; Krzywinska, 2007; Hockenhull, 2010), that has explored darker shades of British rural imagery. This literature has undoubtedly produced a more nuanced understanding of the contours of the British rural idyll. It has, for example, highlighted darker and more heterogeneous elements within even iconic texts associated with the idea of the British rural idyll, including Laurie Lee's (1959) novel *Cider with Rosie* (Leyshon and Brace, 2007: 198), television comedies such as *To the Manor Born* (1979-1981; 2007) and *The Vicar of Dibley* (1994-2007) (Dickason, 2017) and television dramas like *Heartbeat* (1992-2010) and *Peak Practice* (1993-2002) (Phillips et al, 2001). Others have explored the ways in which media presentation of problematic rural issues has actually reinforced the idyllic construction of the British countryside, for example, by presenting them as exceptional rather than routine (Woods, 2010). Further, some have highlighted representations that offer complex, multi-layered, rather than one dimensional, visions of rurality (Yarwood and Charlton, 2009: 203). However, this literature rarely challenges the consensus that, overall, the image of the British countryside is predominantly the product of processes of idyllisation. There is perhaps, at least implicitly, something of a presumption of the ongoing ascendancy of the rural idyll running through

much of this work, even as it highlights representations that do not fit this mould. Haigron's (2017) edited collection *The English Countryside: Representations, Identities, Mutations* is unusual in offering an exception.

The methods, sampling and contextualisation in much of this work, whilst generating considerable insight into individual examples, has tended to isolate them from wider bodies of representation. This limits the extent to which they are able to question the supposed ascendancy of the rural idyll in British popular culture. Typically this literature examines single representations, artists, media or genres. Its primary point of reference tends to be the work itself or its genre rather than any wider bodies of non-idyllic rural representations within which these examples might also be situated. This limits what this literature is able to say about the collective significance of the non-idyllic representations that it explores. This is the case even when this work explores unambiguously negative representations of the British countryside, such as the 1998 film *The War Zone*, the tale of an incestuous family relocating to the Devon countryside. *The War Zone* draws comparisons between the violent natural processes that have formed the landscape and the familial violence of the film: "Nature is used explicitly as an external marker of internal tumult, violent thoughts and confusion" (Leyshon and Brace, 2007: 205). However, this appears as more an exceptional, rather than a potentially more routine, representation of rural Britain. Its violent themes, though, and use of a harsh rural landscape as metaphor are echoed, for example, in the 2001 film *This Filthy Earth*. *This Filthy Earth* depicts the struggles of two sisters who inherit a run-down farm in a brutal rural environment that is peopled by monstrous, violent men. The film critic Peter Bradshaw (2001) argued: "Filthy is right. This is a film to counter-balance any lingering misapprehension that the countryside is a place of picturesque tranquillity".

The criticism above is not to challenge the validity of the findings of any individual study cited here. Rather it is a collective limitation of this body of work. By contrast this paper takes a broad survey perspective, eschewing in-depth interpretation of individual representations. It attempts to convey something of the collective significance of a large number of diverse non-idyllic representations of British rural space. Its primary site of analysis is the representation itself (Rose, 2016) rather than, say, audience interpretations. Research utilising other sites of analysis would, however, repay this further endeavour.

It is possible to discern, then, in the post-World War Two period, an extensive and diverse tradition of non-idyllic representations of the British countryside spanning multiple media (see figure 1 for some examples). These representations are worthy of scrutiny for a number of reasons. First, they

are extensive in number. Figure 1 lists over 70 examples and does not claim to offer anything other than a selection. It suggests that it is difficult to sustain the argument that non-idyllic representations of the British countryside occur only as exceptions to a prevailing idyllic. Second, in many cases, these examples are undoubtedly popular and enduring. The surreal dark comedy *The League of Gentlemen*, set in the fictional village of Royston Vasey, whose motto is “You'll never leave!”, ran across almost 20 years on BBC Television as well as in radio and stage versions, whilst the horror writer James Herbert had sold over 54 million copies of his books at the time of his death (Holland, 2013). Whilst it might not have always been their non-idyllic themes that primarily drove the popularity of these representations, their popularity ensures that these themes are widely consumed. Finally, many of these representations are critically significant. The non-idyllic is a theme explored by many of Britain's most critically acclaimed post-war writers and artists including George Orwell, Daphne DuMaurier, Dennis Potter and Graham Swift, a number of whom have been nominated for or won major cultural awards.

Despite their diversity a number of themes cut across these examples, some of which are explored below.

Rural Landscapes

Typically rural landscapes, within these representations, are evoked not through the aesthetics of the idyll, but rather as places that are grim, ugly, bleak or isolated. For example, Daphne DuMaurier's introduction to Saxmere, the east coast setting for her short story *The Breakthrough*, a chilling tale of a scientist's quest to solve the mystery of life after death, is a case in point (figure 2a). Gordon Burn, in *Happy Like Murderers*, his true crime account of the lives of Fred and Rose West, two serial killers who committed at least twelve brutal murders in Gloucestershire between the late 1960s and late 1980s, evokes the Devon village of Northam, the childhood home of Rose West (née Letts) in similar terms (figure 2b). These representations, then, advance a rural aesthetic that is often the polar opposite of the rural idyll.

Where they do evoke the idyllic these representations tend to do so for genre effect, as a contrast to the violence of the story, for example, rather than to construct an object of nostalgic longing. Indeed at times the idea of the meanings of the idyllic rural landscape, and what it might conceal, is directly satirised. The 2007 film *Hot Fuzz* offers a comedic deconstruction of the idyllic image making process. It follows the relocation of a London policeman to the picture perfect (fictional) village of Sandford in rural Gloucestershire, which becomes plagued by a series of gruesome unexplained

deaths. *Hot Fuzz* reveals the murderous activities of Sandford's Neighbourhood Watch Alliance who are so desperate to win the national best kept village contest that they violently dispatch anyone who undermines its idyllic appearance. This includes many of the village's youths, itinerant street entertainers, the talentless and adulterous leads in the local amateur dramatics production of *Romeo and Juliet*, a dyslexic local newspaper reporter and a drunken property developer. The hyper-evocation of the idyllic rural landscape within the film provides a visual and cultural counterpoint to the bloody spaghetti western style shoot out at its climax. The idea of the idyllic rural landscape as a cloak concealing evil is a theme also explored, albeit in very different ways, by Val McDermid in her 2013 crime novel *Cross and Burn* (figure 2c).

Rural Britain has undergone significant changes in the post-War period reflecting the impacts of a range of processes of rural restructuring (Marsden et al., 1990). The British countryside, over this period, has witnessed the growing impacts of modernity and globalisation (Hutchings, 2004: 39; Bell, 2006: 153; Fish, 2007: 4; Fournier, 2017; Haigron, 2017: 9). Many of the representations discussed here articulate these changes through their representations of the rural landscape in a number of ways. Symbols of modernity, for example, occur as both visually prominent and symbolically significant landscape elements within some representations. An example, is the positioning of a line of pylons across a hillside in the violent horror film *Eden Lake*: “the protagonists are outsiders, attempting to experience rural pleasures, which are introduced through vast expanses of rolling hills interrupted by electricity pylons. This intrusive punctuation of the landscape forewarns the spectator of the setbacks and troubles ahead” (Hockenull, 2010: 218). Whilst symbols of modernity within the landscape are here deployed to signal threat, this association is far from inevitable. In the 1978 animated film version of Richard Adams' novel *Watership Down* their presence is more equivalent to the landscape's 'natural' elements.

“At first, visuals of rolling fields fill the screen, almost idyllic in their watercolour designs. The shot continues but, cutting back slowly, the screen draws through the steelwork of a cable pylon, allowing the full view onto the valley before the film’s title appears on screen. That such an important moment is marked by an object once regularly excluded from depictions of the landscape is telling ...

Similar objects appear throughout *Watership Down*, portrayed as an almost organic part of the landscape ... Barbed wire fences litter and border almost every pasture, tarmac roads cut through the grass with their deadly cars, and the rusting old ironwork of a graveyard breaks the skyline. This is the reality of the landscape: corroded, messy but all as much a part of the environment as the trees and the hills” (Scovell, 2018: np).

Watership Down, like many non-idyllic representations does not present the rural as a vulnerable environment that has been invaded and corrupted by the external agents, forces and threats of globalisation and modernity. Here, non-idyllic modernity is identified as inherent, rather than external, to the countryside.

Rural Communities and Rural Life

Rural communities, within non-idyllic representations, are typically depicted as small, closed, insular and unchanging, characterised by close, hierarchical familial and social bonds. Whilst within idyllic portraits of rurality these translate into the virtues of tradition and community, here they tend to mutate into pathologies of boredom and abuse. Rural places and rural life, then, are commonly represented as dull, especially for young people and those lacking resources who are yoked to repetitive manual labour.

Magnus Mills' novel *The Restraint of Beasts* is a black comedy about two itinerant Scottish labourers, Tam and Ritchie, and their English foreman, set during a macabre fence building trip to rural Herefordshire. The boredom of rural life is captured in a scene in their local pub one evening prior to their departure (figure 3a).

Themes of boredom, lack of opportunity and immobility run through the BBC Television comedy *This Country*. Shot on location in a picturesque Cotswold village in a mockumentary style, *This Country* follows the lives of two disenfranchised young people Kerry and her cousin Lee 'Kurtan' Mucklowe. Episodes are framed by references to studies highlighting the economic and social marginalisation of rural youth, for which Kerry and Kurtan are the ultimate embodiments. Much of the programme's comedy derives from the contrast between Kerry and Kurtan's delusional imaginations of their rural locale and the mundane realities of their lives there. Episodes open with a form of hyper-idyllic framing, bucolic farming scenes, for example, suffused with soft autumn light, set to a soundtrack of bird song, whilst the majority of story lines unfold in the prosaic settings of Kerry and Kurtan's social housing. They imagine their rural setting as rich in glamour and excitement, based largely on their occasional glimpses of a minor celebrity who lives nearby, riding his bike or leaving a shop. A further recurrent theme is Kerry's paranoid belief that the Cotswolds is riven with postcode-based gang violence. In an early episode she lists the (imagined) threats from gangs based in equally idyllic village settings from across the (never glimpsed) territories beyond her village (figure 3b).

Gordon Burns' in *Happy Like Murderers* explores the abusive consequences of the dull restricted lives within these closed rural communities in the rumours of incest and sexual abuse of animals and young children he heard when researching the rural childhood of Fred West (figure 3c).

For all of the diversity of these representations, the collective image of the British countryside that emerges here is of a space of dysfunctional communities within which either nothing happens, or bad things happen in secret, hidden away in grim, remote places. Collectively they, and others like them, offer an extensive and enduring antidote to the idyllisation of the British countryside.

Rural Labour and the Rural Economy

Rural labour, within non-idyllic representations such as *Happy Like Murderers* and *The Restraint of Beasts*, is frequently shown as repetitive, squalid and soul-destroying (figure 4a, b), a central theme in other examples such as the film *This Filthy Earth* discussed above. *The Restraint of Beasts* also explores more industrialised forms of rural labour when the novel's three protagonists are hired to work for the mysterious Hall brothers, whose rural business empire, whilst opaque in its true nature and extent, includes the fencing of land and the production of sausages in a prison-like factory staffed by a robotic, uniformed workforce (figure 4c). The Hall Brothers first appear as jovial, peripheral characters within the novel but assume greater prominence as it becomes obvious that they exert huge power over the rural area within which Tam, Richie and their foreman are working. As the story progresses the Hall Brothers become increasingly unpredictable, hostile and controlling.

Industrialised agriculture and its consequences is a theme explored in Jonathan Coe's acclaimed political satire *What a Carve Up!* It tells the history of the wealthy, immoral Winshaw family who ascend to the apex of British political and economic power, whilst causing immeasurable damage to the country in pursuit of their own ends. One section concerns Dorothy Winshaw who has built a huge agri-food business through the innovation of ultra-efficient battery farm and slaughterhouse methods coupled with complete disregard for animal welfare. Here the British countryside is rendered a site of industrialised cruelty and death (figure 4d).

What a Carve Up! directly engages with the rural worlds created by the processes of globalisation and modernity emphasising their horrors. However, here as with other explorations of the worlds created by processes of rural modernity, these are not presented as invaders of a formerly pristine

countryside. Dorothy Winshaw is emphatically *of* the countryside, part of a historic family dynasty from within the rural landed elite. These texts offer commentaries on the implication of the British countryside within the processes of modernity and globalisation that do not posit the countryside as an innocent victim but rather as actively complicit in its own transformation. They echo Bell's (2006: 157) comments on the British countryside's own roles in its recent crises: "All the recent fuss in the UK over farming's (mis)management – BSE, foot and mouth, GM foods – has provided us with a distinct set of anti-idyllic images".

Noting the non-idyllic qualities of representations is nothing, in itself, new in the context of geographical scholarship of the images of rural Britain (Yarwood, 2005; Leyshon and Brace, 2007; Yarwood and Charlton, 2009; Woods, 2010). However, it has not been previously proposed that that such non-idyllic rural imagery seriously poses a challenge to the hegemony of the rural idyll within British culture. It is argued here, though, that there is a collective significance to these non-idyllic representations, apparent at the aggregate level, which the presumption of the rural idyll within salient bodies of literature misses. Further, many of these representations display emphatically non-idyllic tropes that make no reference to the rural idyll. For example, it is common, for the non-idyllic elements of representations to be presented as routine and normal, rather than exceptional. In addition, again it is common for rural areas not to be presented as formerly pristine environments that have been spoilt in some way. Often, for example in the case of *The Breakthrough*, above, our first glimpse of these environments is unambiguously non-idyllic.

The Non-Idyllic Countryside and Lived Cultures

What then are the wider significances of the non-idyllic representations explored here? Do they relate in any way to people's attitudes and behaviour towards British rural environments? In what ways, then, do they connect to lived cultures (Yarwood, 2005: 23)? These are questions that have been explored hardly at all within salient literatures and are ones that would undoubtedly repay further research.

We might though recognise a series of popular engagements with the British countryside that do not seek to exploit its idyllic, picturesque qualities. Rather there are contemporary rural engagements including rural crime and illicit economic activities in the countryside (Somerville et al., 2015), modern slavery and exploitative labour practices in rural economies, fly tipping (the illegal dumping of waste), illegal bloodsports, illegal music events and dogging (meetings of groups of strangers in secluded locations for the purposes of casual sex), that exploit the very conditions of

the rural that are explored in its non-idyllic representation. These activities are frequently the product of the coming together of both 'urban invaders' and 'rural rogues' (Somerville et al., 2015) rather than simply activities that are inflicted upon the countryside from beyond.

It is difficult to quantify these activities, and particularly in ways that would allow comparison with more idyllic oriented engagements. However, tentative evidence suggests they are far from exceptional engagements with the British countryside and have been, perhaps, growing in the UK recently (figure 6). Despite this there has been a tendency for rural scholarship to neglect such activities in favour of more idyllic engagements with the rural, despite a now extensive literature on other troubling rural issues such as poverty, exclusion and marginalisation (see, for example, Milbourne, 1997). They perhaps represent future avenues of rural research.

Conclusions

This paper has attempted to bring forward an extensive and significant tradition of non-idyllic representations of rural Britain. It has questioned the position of some previous rural scholarship by suggesting that non-idyllic representations are now not exceptional within the context of British culture. Further, these representations do not necessarily paint the countryside as a formerly pristine environment, nor as an innocent victim spoilt by outside forces. It has suggested that we should no longer unquestionably accept the presumption of the rural idyll. It has also argued that rural imagery is no longer simply an antidote to the processes of modernity but also offers a cultural space within which to explore its imprints and consequences.

Whilst a number of writers have previously traced the centrality of the rural idyll to British, especially English, national identity in periods prior to World War Two, that relationship now seems less certain. This reflects the decline of any coherent sense of national identity in the present period and the lack of any special place for the rural environment, or more accurately, idyllic renditions of it, within anything other than the decaying remnants of Englishness that persist as pockets of nostalgic nationalism (Hutchings, 2004: 29; Krzywinska, 2007; Orton and Worpole, 2013: 13). Richard Bradford, for example, in his survey of British fiction since 1970, finds any sense of national identity elusive: “novels which even in an obtuse way address some element of Englishness are significant because of their rarity” (2007: 177). He draws no special attention to the rural in his subsequent discussion of the literature of contemporary Englishness. This is not to suggest that the rural idyll is now absent from British culture. The enduring popularity of the 'Aga saga' novels of Joanna Trollope and television programmes such as *Escape to the Country* tell us

otherwise. Rather, in having lost something of its ideological foundation, the rural idyll is undoubtedly less ascendant within a cultural terrain now characterised by multiple images of rural Britain, the non-idyllic squarely amongst them. Maybe this paper suggests that, individually and collectively, we are able to accommodate multiple visions of British rural space simultaneously. Whilst, for example, Saturdays might find me cycling through picturesque Hampshire villages, they might, equally, find me enjoying a gory rural horror flick (Hall, 2019). Perhaps such accommodation has long been the case.

This paper has, though, barely begun to scratch the surface of these issues. There remains much work to be done, for example, highlighting non-idyllic representations in other media little explored here such as music, gaming, poetry, theatre, dance, sculpture and painting. The scholarship of non-idyllic rural representations across international terrains is also patchy. Studies of the issues explored in this paper in other countries or through comparative international analysis would add considerably to this literature. The recent prominence of anti-idyllic themes within British media representations may be informed by the cross-cultural influences of global media. The popularity of the 'Scandi noir' crime genre, for example, in the novels of Henning Mankell and the Danish television series *The Killing*, and their depictions of cold, bleak, anti-idyllic rural landscapes is something that British film and television has, to some degree, sought to copy in series such as *Shetland* and *Happy Valley*. These and other cross-cultural influences on British representations of rural landscapes offer a further avenue of research. This paper has also said nothing about audience interpretations of non-idyllic representations, surely a rich terrain of enquiry, and little about their relationships to lived cultures. It might also be timely to turn more attention to earlier non-idyllic representations such as Thomas Hardy's *Tess of d'Urbervilles* (1892), Sir Arthur Conan-Doyle's (1902) Sherlock Holmes story *The Hound of the Baskervilles* or the novels of Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth Bowen and Rosamund Lehman (Haigron, 2017: 14) and assess their contemporary significances and enduring legacies, and their places in the British imagination of its rural spaces.

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George, T. [Dir.] (2017 -) *This Country*, BBC Television

Kotting, A. (2001) *This Filthy Earth*, East London Film Fund / Film Council / FilmFour / Tall Stories / Yorkshire Media Production Agency

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Rosen, M. [Dir.] (1978) *Watership Down*, Nepenthe Productions

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Wainwright, S., Lyn, E., Fywell, T. and Hardman, N. [Dirs] (2014 -) *Happy Valley*, Red Production Company

Watkins, J. [Dir.] (2008) *Eden Lake*, Rollercoaster Films / Aramid Entertainment Fund

Wright, E. [Dir.] (2007) *Hot Fuzz*, StudioCanal / Working Title Films / Big Talk Productions

Resources

Information about the films and television programmes discussed here can be found at the Internet

Movie Database: <https://www.imdb.com/>

Clips and extracts from many can be found at Youtube (and similar sites):

<https://www.youtube.com/>

There is a wealth of resources, including clips, trailers and discussions, for studying British film available through the British Film Institute's website: <https://www.bfi.org.uk/>

Reader-generated reviews of many of the books mentioned here, useful if you want to look at audience interpretations, can be found at Goodreads: <https://www.goodreads.com/>

Literature

- George Orwell *Animal Farm* (1945, film 1954)
- Daphne Du Maurier *The Birds* (1952, short story)
- John Wyndham *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957; film *Village of the Damned*, 1960; 1995)
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- Alan Garner *The Owl Service* (1969, TV series 1969)
- James Herbert (1975) *The Fog*
- Bruce Chatwin - *On the Black Hill* (1982, film 1987)
- Graham Swift - *Waterland* (1983)
- Susan Hill – *The Woman in Black* (1983, TV film 1989; film 2012; stage adaptation 1987; numerous radio adaptations)
- James Herbert – *The Magic Cottage* (1986)
- Peter Robinson – detective series Inspector Alan Banks (1987 - , TV series 2010-2016)
- Tim Pears - *In the Place of Fallen Leaves* (1993)
- Jonathan Coe - *What a Carve Up!* (1994)
- Melvin Burgess *Junk* (1997)
- Gordon Burn – *Happy Like Murderers: The True Story of Fred and Rosemary West* (1998)
- Magnus Mills – *The Restraint of Beasts* (1998)
- Magnus Mills - *All Quiet on the Orient Express* (1999)
- Ann Cleeves detective series -Vera Stanhope (1999 - , TV series 2011 -); Shetland (2006 - , TV series 2013 -)
- James Herbert (2006) *The Secret of Crickely Hall* (TV series 2012)
- Sarah Waters *The Little Stranger* (2009; film 2018)
- Jeanette Winterson (2012) *The Daylight Gate*
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- Val McDermid (2014) *Cross and Burn*
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- Melissa Harrison (2015) *At Hawthorn Time*
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Film and Television

- *Quatermass II* (1954 BBC TV series; film version 1956)
- *Night of the Demon / Curse of the Demon* (1957)
- *The Damned* (1962)
- *The Witches* (1966)
- *The Reptile* (1966)
- *Witchfinder General* (1968)
- *Whistle and I'll Come to You* (1968, remade 2010, based on M R James (1904) short story 'Oh whistle and I'll come to you my lad')
- *Cry of the Banshee* (1970)
- *Blood on Satan's Claw* (1970)
- *Straw Dogs* (1971 – based on Gordon Williams (1969) novel *The Siege of Trencher's Farm*)
- *The Devil Rides Out* (1971, based on Dennis Wheatley (1934) novel)
- *To the Devil a Daughter* (1972 based on Dennis Wheatley (1953) novel)
- *The Stone Tape* (1972)
- *The Wicker Man* (1973)
- *Survivors* (1975-1977, TV series)
- *Nuts in May* (1976; Mike Leigh TV play)
- *Children of the Stones* (1977)
- *Watership Down* (1978, based on Richard Adams 1972 novel)
- *Pennies from Heaven* (1978; Dennis Potter TV series)

- *Blue Remembered Hills* (1979; Dennis Potter TV Play)
- *An American Werewolf in London* (1981)
- *The Draughtsman's Contract* (1982)
- *Rainy Day Women* (1984)
- *Withnail and I* (1987)
- *Drowning by Numbers* (1988)
- *Robinson in Space* (1997)
- *The War Zone* (1998)
- *The League of Gentlemen* TV series (1999-2017)
- *This Filthy Earth* (2001)
- *Dog Soldiers* (2002)
- *The Last Great Wilderness* (2002)
- *Morvern Callar* (2002)
- *28 Days Later* (2002)
- *Hot Fuzz* (2007)
- *28 Weeks Later* (2007)
- *Eden Lake* (2008)
- *Robinson in Ruins* (2010)
- *Kill List* (2011)
- *A Field in England* (2013)
- *Broadchurch* (2013 - 2017)
- *Glue* TV Series (2014)
- *The Goob* (2014)
- *Happy Valley* (2014 -)
- *Bronco's House* (2015)
- *The Levelling* (2016)
- *This Country* TV Series (2017 -)
- *Ghost Stories* (2018)
- *Bait* (2019)

Other

- David Tress landscape painting *Light Across (Loch Kishorn)* (2001); *Voyage to Staffa I* (2004)
- Christopher Orr landscape painting *All We Need is the Air That We Breathe* (2004)
- Suede *The Blue Hour* (music album) 2018

Figure 1: Non-idyllic representations of the British countryside since 1945.

a) “The sandy track topped a rise and there below us, stretching into infinity, lay acre upon acre of waste land, marsh and reed, bounded on the left by sand-dunes with the open sea beyond. The marshes were intersected here and there by dykes, beside which stood clumps of forlorn rushes bending to the wind and rain, the dykes in their turn forming themselves into dank pools, one or two of them miniature lakes, ringed about with reeds” (DuMaurier, 2018 [1966]: 5, from *The Breakthrough*).

b) “Then it was one short street standing in the middle of nowhere. A donkey on a hill; some chickens or some kind of farm in the front. Big skies making it an exposed and wind-whipped place. Water in three directions: broad rivers to the east and north; the sea to the west. All of this water visible and within walking distance. Northam, the village in north Devon where Rose Letts grew up, is out on a limb and so a weather-blasted place. Baked in the summer months; windswept and apt to be wet throughout the rest of the year. Built on a hill sloping upwards from the sea.

Northam Burrows, standing between the village and the sea, is half water, half land. Thousands of tough, springy islets, micro-islands, which go on for miles and are dark and treacherous looking. A dark, flat wilderness, intersected with dykes and mounds, with scattered horses feeding on it.

For all the drowning space, this is a part of the world that has a trapped and cornered feel. There is nowhere to go but back to Bideford in the direction in which you came” (Burn, 1998: 108, from *Happy Like Murderers*).

c) ““You’re wrong. This isn’t some communicable disease that’s spread out from the city. It’s always been here. Lurking under the beauty. Wherever you are, somebody’s inflicting horror on another human being. It’s just that there are some environments where it’s easier to get away with it. You can pretend all you like, but underneath your country idyll, the bad stuff is simmering and seeping in all directions.”” (McDermid, 2013: 231, from *Cross and Burn*).

Figure 2: Representations of the rural landscape.

a) “Leslie Fairbanks had a residency at the Crown Hotel Public Bar. Once a week he performed his musical programme entitled 'Reflections of Elvis' to what seemed to be the entire local population. We lived in a quiet place on the road to Perth, and the Crown Hotel was the only establishment you could get a drink apart from the Co-Op off-licence... They came to The Crown to drink, and on the nights Leslie Fairbanks played they just drank more. This was rural Scotland. There was nothing else to do.” (Mills, 1999 [1998]: 23-24, from *The Restraint of Beasts*).

b) “[Kerry]: 'There are people from my past who would love to see me slain. I got enemies everywhere. I got enemies in South Cerney. I've got enemies in North Cerney. I've got enemies in Cerney Wick. I got enemies in Bourton on the Water. There's a tea rooms there and under the counter they got a panic button, if I take one step inside they can press that and police will be there in three minutes. Ain't that right'.

[Looks to Kurtan, who shrugs his shoulders]” (from *This Country* (2017) episode 1).

c) “Freddie remained his mammy's favourite. She doted on him. They were close. How close nobody can really say. But almost certainly closer than they would have wanted anybody to know. There are rumours that he lost his virginity to his mother when he was twelve... Incest was still common in rural communities like Much Marcle in the years after the war. Mother-son incest was less common than incest between fathers and daughters. Father-son incest was rarer still. But there are still rumours in the village that Fred West was abused by his father as well as his mother when he was living at home. If it's on offer, take it. That was what his father taught... His father had first told him that is was possible to have sex with a sheep by putting its rear legs down the front of your own wellington boots. A sheep tied to a tree in a field was the Much Marcle social club. That was the joke” (Burn, 1998: 141-142, from *Happy Like Murderers*).

Figure 3: Representations of rural communities and rural life.

a) “He found life at home after he came back from Hereford exceptionally slow. He was back working with his father on the farm, rising before dawn to do the milking and roll the urns up to the main road for collection. Then silage and mud and milking again at night. What you did yesterday, you did the next day. Changeless and monotonous. Five Woodbines [a cigarette brand] and a pint of cider on a wall outside the Walwyn Arms of a Saturday dinnertime was all the social life... In September 1957 Fred West bought himself a 98 cc. Bantam motorbike, registration number RVJ199. Something to quicken the pace of country life. The dead life. The slow movement of time” (Burn, 1998: 141-142, from *Happy Like Murderers*).

b) “When I woke up the next morning I realized that, like Tam and Ritchie, I didn't like working on Saturdays much either. My head was throbbing from the drink. Worse, there was rain falling on the caravan roof. To people who work outside all day this is one of the most desolate sounds known. Rain can transform the most pleasant task into drudgery. The only reason we had managed to keep the job just about on schedule (more or less), was because the weather had stayed dry. Now we faced a muddy, soaking wet struggle from the moment we went out in the morning until the end of the day. And, of course, the squalor inside the caravan would reach new depths, with wet clothing hanging everywhere and mud on the floor. All we had to dry us off was the gas fire. I lay on my bed thinking about this and wondering how I was going to motivate Tam and Ritchie to get up” (Mills, 1999 [1998]: 84, from *The Restraint of Beasts*).

c) “The combined din of the refrigerator vans and the operations in the loading bay continued late into the night. Bells rang. Other vehicles came and went, and heavy doors were slammed shut as unknown voices gave instructions. It wasn't until after three o'clock that the last of the vans departed.

'Are you awake?' said Tam.

'No' replied Richie.

'Have you noticed we never see those guys from the factory going home?'

'That fucker probably doesn't let them.'

'No ... ha. Night then.'

'Night.'" (Mills, 1999 [1998]: 204, from *The Restraint of Beasts*).

d) “Dorothy was a great believer in research and development, and over the years the Brunwin Group built up a reputation for technological innovation, particularly in chicken farming. These were some of the problems she set out to solve:

I. AGGRESSION: Dorothy's broilers, just before going to the slaughter at seven weeks old (roughly one fiftieth of the way through their natural lifespan) were typically allotted a space of half a square foot per bird. Feather-pecking and cannibalism were common amongst birds held in such confinement.

SOLUTION: After experimenting with special red-tinted spectacles clipped on to the beak (so that, by neutralizing the colour, the bird would be prevented from pecking at the red combs of its fellows), Dorothy replaced these with blinkers which simply blocked off the vision to either side.

When this also proved too cumbersome she applied herself to finding the most effective method of de-beaking. At first it was done with a blow-torch, then with a soldering iron. Finally her designers came up with a small guillotine equipped with hot blades. It was reasonably efficient, except that if the blades were too hot they caused blisters in the mouth; also, since it was necessary to de-beak about fifteen birds a minute, perfect accuracy was not always possible and there were many cases of burned nostrils and facial mutilations. The damaged nerves of the beak stumps had a habit of growing back, turning in upon themselves and forming chronic pain-inducing neuromas. As a last resort, Dorothy arranged for soothing music to be piped into the battery cages and broiler-houses. Manuel and His Music of the Mountains was especially popular” (Coe, 1995 [1994]: 248-249 from *What a Carve Up!*)

Figure 4: Representations of rural labour and the rural economy.

English local authorities dealt with 998 000 fly tipping incidents in 2017/18, a slight decrease of one per cent from the previous year following annual increases from 2013/14 (DEFRA, 2018: 1).

The RSPCA received 7915 reports of organised dog fighting between 2015 and 2018 (RSPCA, 2019).

It is estimated that 10 000 – 13 000 people are being exploited in the food and farming industry (Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority, 2018).

Over 680 illegal music events were recorded in England and Wales between 2016 and 2019, an increase of nine per cent (Mixmag, 2018).

Figure 5: Non-idyllic engagements with the British Countryside.