

BA Thesis English Language and Culture, Utrecht University

June 2019

Hedwig van Staalduine

6495761

David Pascoe



Abstract

In a time of environmental dispute, this essay strives to combine ecology with literature and music. Richard Adams wrote his novel *Watership Down* in 1972, in growing societal ecological awareness. A film adaptation of this novel was released in 1978, a series adaptation containing 4 episodes in 2018. Both adaptations are paired with a certain theme song, a song written especially for the adaptation. Adams' novel exhibits the consequences of human actions for the environment through portraying the lives of rabbits in England's countryside. His vivid descriptions shed light on the effects of myxomatosis and counter-urbanization. Whereas raising ecological awareness may have been Adams' main goal, the adaptations' effectiveness in doing so is up for debate.

Content

	Page
Introduction	3
Analysis	
Passion and Pride in 'Fire on Fire'	4
Grounding in musicology and ecology	10
Sailing through Adams' <i>Watership Down</i>	12
Dreams of Death in 'Bright Eyes'	17
Conclusion	22
Bibliography	22

Introduction

The legendary voice of David Attenborough was first introduced to a broad audience through *Life on Earth*, a BBC television show portraying the earth's beauty in 1979. Netflix recently released a new show called *One Planet*, also accompanied by Attenborough's voice. However, in between the adorable monkeys and endearing dolphins, Attenborough slips in a few less than subtle warnings: the earth is in trouble, the environmental issues are not to be ignored any longer. In an ecologically turbulent period, it is time to consider the consequences of human ancestry. Merely months before the release of *One Planet*, Netflix produced a new adaptation in the form of a series of Richard Adams' novel *Watership Down*. Considering Adams worked as an assistant secretary in the precursor to the Department of the Environment (Pallardy), it is interesting to question and explore the amount of ecological awareness present in this 2018 adaptation, yet also in the 1978 film adaptation, specifically in the theme songs they produced. Have the hit songs paired with *Watership Down*'s film adaptation of 1978 and the series adaptation of 2018 furthered Adams' original ecological intentions and if so, how?

An important matter to take notice of, is that the author of this research is influenced by Western music. As Kathryn Marie Kalinak states: "Although music is universal (...) music is by no means a universal language shared among all people across time" (10). The views shared in this exploration will inevitably be coloured by a Western musical gaze.

Passion and Pride in 'Fire on Fire'

Bigwig realized that he had stumbled, quite unexpectedly,
upon what he needed most of all: a strong, sensible friend,
who would think on her own account and help to bear his burden.

--*Watership Down* (Adams 334)--

'Fire on Fire' was composed by Steve Mac and Sam Smith, especially for the 2018 Netflix adaptation of *Watership Down*. After the song was released on December 21st, 2018, it reached the Top Forty, a constantly changing radio list ranking singles based on popularity according to airplay, streaming and social trends, in Hungary, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Switzerland and Ireland. In the UK, 'Fire on Fire' reached #74 in the Top 100 charts in early January 2019, subsequently rose to #63, then fell to #66 and to #88 by the end of January, and the song had left the charts in February (Official-UK-Charts-Company). Smith recorded the song with the BBC Concert Orchestra at London's Abbey Road Studios (Wikipedia). Although 'Fire on Fire' may not be in any charts now, Smith is present in there with new songs, being a popular artist (uk-charts.top-source.info).

In the United States, 'Fire on Fire' did not make it into the Top 100, which is surprising as Netflix is an American corporation. According to Jeff Smith, movie and music industries have shared the positive effects of synergy since the existence of film. The term synergy is a recent invention, refined by R. Buckminster Fuller in 1975, and then added onto a system which has been known since the 1910's. Pairing a song to a certain film, positively influences the commercial value of both. Synergy is basically cross-commerce: hearing a song being played on the radio advertises the corresponding film, and hearing a song in a film increases the market value of the song (J. Smith). The failure of 'Fire on Fire' to reach the US Top 100, is therefore a synergy malfunction for Netflix. Their approach did work well in Great Britain however, perhaps because Sam Smith is a British artist.

'Fire on Fire', as performed by Smith:

My mother said I'm too romantic

She said: 'You're dancing in the movies'

I almost started to believe her

Then I saw you and I knew

Starting this song off with the phrase 'my mother' and some pronouns immediately highlights the question of vocalization. There is an 'I' and a 'you', yet more information would be helpful to define whether these persons are symbolic or alluding to actual *Watership Down* rabbits. The 'I' in this paragraph has a mother who criticized a romantic tendency, perhaps a naivety to idealize movie romances. Stretching this naivety into ecological grounds, this could relate to the human tendency to close their eyes to what is not preferred to be seen, like the ecological consequences of human actions. The previous sentence started with the word stretching on purpose, this theory is quite a stretch. It is safe to assume the creatures mentioned in the song can be no more than symbolic in representing Adams' rabbits, as the actions Smith mentions are exclusively human ones. The 'I' almost gave up on their romantic search until meeting the 'you', who apparently strengthened the initial romantic beliefs.

Maybe it's 'cause I got a little bit older

Maybe it's all that I've been through

I'd like to think it's how you lean on my shoulder

And how I see myself with you

The audience cannot be entirely sure what this 'it' refers to, Smith does not give this away. This 'it' is likely connected to romance, as the previous paragraph concerned romance's victory. If the 'it' indeed refers to romance, the 'I's experiences in aging, connecting and reflecting together have presented this main creature with the possibility to love.

I don't say a word

But still, you take my breath and steal the things I know

There you go, saving me from out of the crowd

The main creature describes its seamless relationship with the 'you' mentioned earlier, spoken conversation is not necessary; their minds are one. Naturally, rabbits cannot talk the way humans talk. They have their own way of communicating but not through the spoken word. Therefore, this passage applies to the rabbits rather well: communicating speechlessly, saving one another from the danger a crowd forms. The threat is merely implied here, as saving someone is only necessary in case of imminent danger.

Fire on fire, we're normally killers
With this much desire, together, we're winners
They say that we're out of control and some say we're sinners
But don't let them ruin our beautiful rhythms
'Cause when you unfold me and tell me you love me
And look in my eyes
You are perfection, my only direction
It's fire on fire, mm
It's fire on fire

Firstly, the element fire is mentioned here, alike 'Bright Eyes' in the chorus. This might be part of an homage from Smith to his predecessor Batt, incorporating this significant element. The fire is paired with the phrase 'We're normally killers'. This sentence seems strange in combination with rabbits, even if the main creatures were only meant to be symbolic. Rabbits are hunted, they are never the hunters (Dickenson). These natural characteristics aside, Adams created a different rabbit universe, one with the military warren Efrafra, consisting of trained officers obeying a strong leader. In their direct surroundings, Efrafrans instill fear in the hearts of many rabbits, meaning they could be the killers Smith mentions. However, writing a theme song about the story's antagonists instead of its protagonists does not seem to be the most logical choice. Perhaps a more oblique meaning is intended here: the main creatures may normally not be accustomed to such a harmonic life. Yet this

desire, this inspiring love they have found, created an opportunity. This sentence might refer to the trust present between Fiver and Hazel, Adams' main characters, as Fiver is slightly odd yet nonetheless supported by Hazel, which leads them to their *Watership Down* haven in the end. 'Fire on Fire' obviously concerns some kind of bond between creatures, whether this bond is romantic or strongly amicable is not entirely clear. Perhaps making a choice between the two is not relevant and not necessary. The sentence 'They say that we're out of control and some say we're sinners' demands some background on the composer. Smith is known for the subject matter of his lyrics, attempting to redefine the notions of romantic love within popular music. One of his most acclaimed songs 'Him', pleads for acceptance of his love for a man (Pallady). Therefore, this sentence might refer to Smith's opinion on the parts of the Bible condemning homosexuality. Receding to the rabbits, the insubordination Fiver and Hazel administer by leaving their first warren could also be referred to as a sin. Going out on a limb again, rabbits as sinners might also refer to their intense influence on the earth's ecosystem. Humans deployed the method of myxomatosis, the spreading of a deadly virus amongst rabbits, out of necessity between 1953 and 1955, to save crops, and farm and conservation habitats (Flowerdew, Trout en Ross). The human efforts to regulate their numbers could not destroy them or 'their beautiful rhythms' though, as the strong loving bond conquers all in the end. The phrase 'fire on fire' seems to imply that this is a case of two elements that officially should not work together but they do, due to the power of all-consuming love.

When we fight, we fight like lions
 But then we love and feel the truth
 We lose our minds in a city of roses
 We won't abide by any rules

Smith compares his main creatures to lions here, strong fighters if the need presents itself. A group of lions is described as a pride, meaning the reference to lions might again be a link to Smith's conviction of conveying the pride in same-sex love. The phrase 'city of roses' stands out. The

American city of Portland is known as the city of roses. However, neither *Watership Down* nor Sam Smith has a special affinity with Portland (Bird). Again, an oblique meaning might be intended. A rose is often considered to be a symbol of love, stemming from legends concerning Aphrodite (Kazanlak). The rose is also the national flower of England (Barrow). In a city of love, possibly alluding to an English environment, the main creatures do not fit in, losing their minds, not abiding by any rules. This could allude to Smith's homosexual orientation or to the insubordinate rabbits. Using this 'city of roses' as a metaphor introduces the opposition between the urban city and the natural rose. This metaphor can be connected to a human wish resounding in the 1960s and 70s for relocation to the countryside, occupying the rabbits' natural habitat (Fielding 61).

There is hardly any information to be found concerning Mac's and Smith's reaction to 'Fire on Fire'. In a statement Smith said: "I am so excited and honored to be a part of this new adaptation of *Watership Down*. This story is so powerful and timeless, and it has been thrilling to work with director Noam Murro and his team and the incredible Steve Mac on this song for it. I hope everyone loves it as much as I do" (Wikipedia). Smith is currently a popular artist, his fan-base consists of teenagers and adults. Asking him to compose a song for the 2018 adaptation was probably partly a commercially beneficial decision, obeying the musical synergy system.

Both *Watership Down* theme songs are musically analysed using the following musical terms: tonality, melody, harmony, rhythm and timbre. Tonality is "a structure for organizing musical sounds into music (...) a musical system revolving around a single tone or note, which functions as a centre of gravity" (Kalinak 10). There are several ways to divide tonality into groups, but the two most important and most used groups are the minor and major scale. People can recognize a minor scale by the association of melancholy that is often paired with minor tonality. A major tonality, on the opposing hand, is usually connected to happiness. These two tonalities are of great importance for musical film scores. Moving on to melody: "a series of notes played in a memorable and recognizable order (...) a hook on which to hang listeners' attention" (Kalinak 11). Subsequently, harmony "has to do with the coordination of notes playing simultaneously (...) certain combinations of notes, or

chords, over others, creating stress points built upon dissonance and resolutions that dissipate dissonance.” (Kalinak 12). Harmony is perceived as orderly and stable when it stays close to its tonal centre. The further away a harmony moves from its tonal centre, the more an audience connects the music to disorder and instability. Second to last is rhythm, which “refers to the organization of music through time; its basic unit is the beat, a discernible pulse that marks out the passage of time” (Kalinak 13). Rhythm can further the experience of pace in a film and is closely associated with tempo, the pace of a musical piece. Finally, “Timbre refers to the quality of sound that distinguishes one instrument or voice from another” (Kalinak 13).

‘Fire on Fire’ has a minor tonality, unlike ‘Bright Eyes’, sparking a sadder sentiment. Melodically speaking, one of the first intervals, a combination of two consecutive notes, used in ‘Fire on Fire’ is the exact same interval that starts off ‘Bright Eyes’. Smith mentioned he was honored to become part of this production as it the original adaptation influenced him very much. He probably heard Batt’s ‘Bright Eyes’ and may have, either consciously or unconsciously, implemented the same melodic opening, perhaps as an homage. All the melodic notes are safely within the song’s key. Whereas Batt’s song has a light air to it, Smith’s piece develops a melancholy timbre, working with piano, dramatic strings and an occasional heavy beat on the backbeat.

The 2018 series contains four episodes of about 50 minutes each whereas the film only lasts 93 minutes in total. This already enables the series to present a more detailed version of the story. The series leans towards a romanticized view of *Watership Down*, pairing up all the rabbits into brave couples overcoming terrible dangers together. ‘Fire on Fire’ may have rightfully pulled some attention to romance if this song must function as an accompanying theme song. However, the newest adaptation portrays certain elements of Adams’ ecological critique, like the blood-shed field, that Smith’s song completely ignores.

‘Fire on Fire’ seemingly shows very little regard for the environment, nor for the original storyline of *Watership Down*’s rabbits. As shown in the lyrical close-reading, trying to find ecological links within Sam Smith’s ‘Fire on Fire’ is possible but only through very imaginative reading. Assuming

a theme song should have some kind of connection with the film or show it accompanies, this lack is surprising.

Grounding in Musicology and Ecology

The Rabbits were perplexed.

They could not make out why the wood was so light and still

and why they could see so far between the trees.

--*Watership Down* (Adams 141)--

Assumptions have little value in this case, so what should be the role of a theme song?

Besides fulfilling a commercial role through synergy, a theme song can contribute to visual images in many more ways. The previously mentioned Kalinak provides a beautiful short summary of the possibilities of film music:

Film music, whether it is a pop song, an improvised accompaniment, or an originally composed cue, can do a variety of things. It can establish setting, specifying a particular time and place; it can fashion a mood and create atmosphere; it can call attention to elements onscreen or offscreen, thus clarifying matters of plot and narrative progression; it can reinforce or foreshadow narrative developments and contribute to the way we respond to them; it can elucidate characters' motivations and help us to know what they are thinking; it can contribute to the creation of emotions, sometimes only dimly realized in the images, both for character to emote and for audiences to feel. Film music can unify a series of images that might seem disconnected on their own and impart a rhythm to their unfolding.

Agreeing with Kalinak's theory on the relevance of music for visual images, Mark Brownrigg investigates film music and its genres and he concludes: "Different types of music are in turn associated with different types of film, and these musical paradigms became formally associated with their particular genres with the coming of sound to the Hollywood film" (61). He adds that films are

seldom purely part of one particular genre, therefore the music coincides. However, film music always has specific associations matching their genres, confirming there must be a generic set of conventions governing the use of Hollywood film music.

Like the movie and music industries use each other to advance both their interests, ecology and musicology may also prove to gain from a mutual synergy system. The ecological presence in the *Watership Down* theme songs is questioned, therefore ecology may or may not be transferred through music. Simon C. Estok explores the field of ecology, and therefore ecocriticism, through theorizing ecophobia in his article, published in 2008. According to Estok, the space of ecocriticism has opened itself up considerably, although this openness is accompanied by increasing ambivalence. The previously rather peaceful ecocritical community has developed a conflict: resolute, theorizing avoiders are on one side, the realistic spotters of eco-resistance are on the other. Both sides agree on a societal general contempt for the natural world, presenting itself as a clear discourse. Estok attempts to warn the ecocritical field to be wary of the delusion that theory cannot lead to changes in public policy. He recognizes making changes is not easy, however, as the preservation of the natural world must inevitably lead to suffering for humanity: humans will have to sacrifice some of their space in favor of the natural world. This problem is also known as the anthropocentrism vs. ecocentrism debate: the era of man vs. the era of nature. The problematic discourse concerning nature sparks a lack of “adequate vocabulary for prejudice and bias against the natural world in general” (207). The agency over the natural world may be in need of theorizing, according to Estok. Humans have seized the God-given, as seen in Western culture, right to control nature, implying ecophobia, as exploitation implies misuse. He explains writing ecophobia as: “Imagining badness in nature and marketing that imagination” (209). Adams may prove to be an example of this definition.

Sailing through Adams' *Watership Down*

There was not a rabbit in the Owsla but had confidence in Woundwort. As they heard him preparing to go first into the depths of the enemy warren as calmly as though he were looking for dandelions, his officers' spirits rose.

-- *Watership Down* (Adams 440) --

Writing a novel from a rabbit's point of view automatically presents an author with certain problems: humans have a different way of communicating than rabbits do. Nonetheless, an opportunity to engage in the story is necessary. Therefore, Adams could hardly avoid a certain amount of anthropomorphism in *Watership Down*, perhaps inspired by Beatrix Potter's more domestic rabbit stories (Rivera). Exploring the characterization of his protagonists, he introduces many adjectives connected to human emotions. Hazel has a "shrewd, buoyant air about him" (16), Fiver experiences fear, "trembling and crying" (19), and is often distressed. These recognizable emotions help an audience connect with animals they may not have paid large attention to in the past. Rabbits were viewed as a pest during the 1950s and 1960s (Flowerdew, Trout en Ross 1109). Claiming these characteristics as inevitably human, might also be an egocentric move on the human part. Whereas anthropomorphism is a handy tool to spark identification possibilities for the human audience, at the same time considering the emotional character traits Adams gives his rabbits to be anthropomorphism instead of realistic possibilities, betrays a homocentric worldview.

From time to time, Adams 'educates' his audience with explanations of a rabbit's natural habits, sprung from his imagination. He introduces many rabbits in several warrens, and each warren has its own set of habits, some more recognizable for human readers than others. According to Rebecca Raglon and Marian Scholtmeijer, Efrafra is the most unrabbit-like warren. Efrafra is run as a military dictatorship, a strict, class-divided, overcrowded, and highly organized society. The authors

therefore state Adams must have felt that “highly regulated systems clearly contradict animal nature” (128), which is hard to prove. Even if a scientific research would agree with them, Adams might not, and sadly, asking him has become impossible.

The protagonist rabbits find themselves in conflict with the Efrafrans, yet, dangerous as they may seem, humankind is without a doubt enemy number one. Adams describes human efforts to exterminate and/or utilize rabbits from the point of view of the victims, criticizing these systems and their lack of ecological regard. The previously mentioned Hazel and Fiver try to warn their warren companions in the beginning of the novel of an imminent danger. To his audience Adams reveals the inscription of a huge billboard by the side of the road: “This ideally situated estate, comprising six acres of excellent building land, is to be developed with high class modern residences by Sutch and Martin, limited, of Newbury, Berks” (20). To Hazel and Fiver, these words being unattainable, these are just: “Heavy posts, reeking of creosote and paint, towered up as high as the holly trees in the hedge, and the board they carried threw a long shadow across the top of the field” (18-19). They cannot explain what the imminent danger is, so only a small group of rabbits follow them in their exodus. The remaining rabbits are left to witness the ‘ideally situated estate’ being developed. Humans destroy warrens by plugging up the escape holes and pumping down poison gas, resonating the deadly poisonous gasses utilized in WWI. The carnage is described to the protagonists by a rabbit who escaped:

Very soon the runs were crammed with rabbits clawing and clambering over each other. They went up the runs they were accustomed to use and found them blocked. Some managed to turn around but they couldn’t get back because of the rabbits coming up. And then the runs began to be blocked lower down with dead rabbits and the live rabbits tore them to pieces. (160-161)

Considering next to this description, the question ‘Why?’ is answered with: “It was just because we were in their way. They killed us to suit themselves” (163), a connection with the holocaust horrors is

sequacious. As Raglon and Scholtmeijer put it, the human systems appear relentlessly destructive. “Their lack of emotion is crueler than even personal aggression would be” (128-129). Next to these connections, Estok’s theory on the human difficulty in sacrificing space in favor of the natural world enters the discussion again. The Nazi ideas on necessary German ‘Lebensraum’ hits close to home here, switching the Aryan race for the human race in general. Inspired by Goethe, Adolf Hitler described in his book *Mein Kampf* the right to extended living space he attributed to the Aryan race (Schmitz-Berning 376). Other non-Aryan people had to make room for the superior race. Linking this back to *Watership Down*, humans dominating the earth, favoring themselves above other natural creatures is a comparable phenomenon. As mentioned earlier, during the 1960s and 1970s UK citizens portrayed a wish to relocate to the countryside (Fielding 61). This human desire inevitably meant that the original inhabitants of the countryside, the rabbits, had to make room.

This counter-urbanization is not the only reason humans tried to regulate rabbit numbers. A large rabbit population can cause damage to crops, and farm and conservation habitats, which is why people deployed the previously mentioned method of myxomatosis between 1953 and 1955, causing 99% mortality (Flowerdew, Trout en Ross 1109). As the rabbit numbers fell, important ecological changes took place: “vegetation altered due to reduced grazing pressure, predators were affected by the reduction of a major prey species and these changes also affected many other animals” (1109). The rabbit population rallied, however, genetic resistance appeared by 1970. Myxomatosis is nonetheless persistent, rearing its head usually in autumn and spring. To Adams’ rabbits myxomatosis is known as the White Blindness. Hazel, Fiver and their surviving companions encounter a peculiar warren during their search for a haven. This warren is rather undercrowded and it accommodates slightly strange rabbits. Fiver soon understands how this rabbit hole functions. The nearby farmer fed the rabbits to raise them into big and healthy animals, to subsequently trap one every now and then. This warren’s White Blindness survivors comply in a devoted way.

Remaining in the contextual timeline, *Watership Down* is situated in the climactic phase of the Cold War. Flowerdew, Trout and Ross also describe a realistic societal fear of a nuclear

apocalypse, controlling the 1970s. There are traces of this apocalyptic fear detectable within the novel. The rabbits, however, do not fear nuclear weapons, they fear humans and their methods of causing an ecological apocalypse for the rabbits. The Blind Whiteness, myxamotosis, already slaughtered many rabbits, and was an ecological apocalypse by itself. Counter-urbanization can finish the process. Adams chose specific words, negatively connotated, to signify human interference with the rabbits' habitat:

A little way in front of them, the ground had been freshly **disturbed**. Two piles of earth lay on the grass. **Heavy posts, reeking of creosote and paint**, towered up as high as the holly trees in the hedge, and the board they carried threw a long **shadow** across the top of the field. Near one of the posts, a hammer and a few nails had been **left behind**. The two rabbits went up to the board at a hopping run and crouched in a patch of nettles on the far side, **wrinkling their noses at the smell of a dead cigarette-end somewhere in the grass**. Suddenly Fiver shivered and cowered down. 'Oh, Hazel! This is where it comes from! I know now – something very **bad**! Some **terrible thing** – coming closer and closer.' (...) 'I don't know what it is,' answered Fiver **wretchedly**. 'There isn't any danger here, at this moment. But it's coming – it's coming. Oh, Hazel, look! The field! It's covered with **blood**!' [...] 'Hazel – the danger, the bad thing. It hasn't gone away. It's here – **all round us**'. (18-21 my emphasis)

Humans leave behind their polluting materials, disturbing the rabbits' natural surroundings. Their influence casts a shadow over the fields instead of allowing the fields to flourish in the sun.

Subsequently, the human actions are described with very negatively connotated phrases, bad and terrible. Fiver describes an imminent danger, coming closer and closer. He cannot know what it is or when it will come, like human citizens could not know where and when nuclear danger could arise. Fiver sees a blood-shed field, instead of the sunset shedding soft orange light over the grass. Fields covered with blood link back to war casualties losing their blood to the earth's soil.

Finally, there is a connection to be made between a rabbit's warren and human bunkers. In case of a nuclear attack, a bunker is the place to be. Rabbits build their warrens underground, hidden safely from predators, or, as Adams writes, Elil¹. However, their warrens cannot protect them from human violence, from the Blind Whiteness and poison gas. In the Guardian of April 4th, Robert Mcfarland describes the intentions of his recently published book *Underland*. In this Anthropocene era, humans should realize what kind of ancestry they leave behind for their progeny. Mcfarland refers to the inspiring activism of Greta Thunberg and the school climate-strikers, and the Sunrise campaigners pushing for a Green New Deal in America, as excellent ways of reconsidering intergenerational ecological justice. *Watership Down's* newest adaptation could be a helpful addition to this list, provided it pulls focus to the ecological consequences of human actions. This same concern, or moreover lack of concern, for ancestry is portrayed in the novel from the animal point of view through The Story of the Blessing of El-ahrairah. El-ahrairah's many wives and many young needed such an amount of nourishment, the grass of Frith's world started to grow thin. Despite Frith's warnings, El-ahrairah refused to control the eating and breeding habits of his rabbits, claiming his people were the strongest and most important, which perhaps alludes to the suggestion each species might have this conviction, especially humans. Frith punishes El-ahrairah by granting other animals keen hunting skills, endangering rabbit lives and rebalancing the world he created.

¹ Perhaps as an allusion to H.G. Wells' Eloi in *The Time Machine*.

Dreams of Death in 'Bright Eyes'

It seemed to Hazel that he would not be needing his body any more,
so he left it lying on the edge of a ditch, but stopped for a moment to watch
his rabbits and to try to get used to the extraordinary feeling that strength
and speed were flowing inexhaustibly out of him into their sleek young bodies
and healthy senses.

--*Watership Down* (Adams 478)--

Bright Eyes was a very successful song in the late 1970's, a synergy success in Great Britain. The song maintained its first position in the UK charts for six weeks and over a million copies of the song were sold (uk-charts.top-source.info). This popularity was not matched in the United States, it failed to reach the Billboard Hot 100 (most popular contemporary music according to teenage and adult American voters). The song was especially composed by Mike Batt and recorded by Art Garfunkel for the *Watership Down* film, also utilized afterwards in a television series, televised between 1999 and 2001, as a theme song (Wikipedia). Garfunkel was surrounded by late seventies disco in the charts, leading the UK into the eighties. The huge popularity of such a small acoustic 'floating', as Batt puts it, song is therefore surprising. Nine years prior to this radio list 'Bridge over Troubled Water' ended on #4 in the Top 100. Art Garfunkel had not been included in this list since then (uk-charts.top-source.info).

Mike Batt's song 'Bright Eyes', as performed by Art Garfunkel:

Is it a kind of a dream
Floating out on the tide
Following the river of death downstream
Oh, is it a dream?

The first phrase demanding attention is 'the river of death'. 'Floating' and 'tide' are both words easily

associated with water and therefore in this section with this river of death. The place where a river springs is usually referred to as the starting point. The river ends in the sea, therefore ceasing to be a river. As water always flows downwards, following a river downstream suggests someone heading for the ending. Adding this onto the fact that this river is not just a natural creek but a river of death, the subject of a life ending and someone wondering about this possible dream-like final step is probably intended here.

There's a fog along the horizon
 A strange glow in the sky
 And nobody seems to know where it goes
 And what does it mean?
 Oh, is it a dream?

No one can know, without a shadow of a doubt, what happens to someone after, or perhaps during death. The 'fog' and the 'strange glow' might be part of a dream-like afterlife, disappearing along with the dead. Considering the contextual nuclear apocalypse fear, the fog and strange glow might also allude to an imminent nuclear attack. Rabbits cannot watch the news, read billboards or otherwise be updated of events about to occur. They must listen and look closely, trust their instincts, and watch the world around them to keep informed. Perhaps the strange glow nobody truly understands is warning them of what may come, ecological disaster.

Bright eyes, burning like fire
 Bright eyes, how can you close and fail?
 How can the light that burned so brightly
 Suddenly burn so pale?
 Bright eyes

The 'bright eyes' can refer to rabbit's eyes, being alive and alert. They apparently 'burn with fire', which could be a way of emphasizing their focus. Then again, eyeballs can reflect what they see like

miniature mirrors. Perhaps Batt suggests here the rabbits are watching their world burn both figuratively and literally, at the hands of humans. Elaborating on the contextual nuclear theory, the fire might be a symbol of an apocalyptic atomic attack. 'Close and fail' may be referring back to dying: eyes closing to never be opened again. The formerly brightly burning light suddenly burns pale, which can be a connection to the loss of liveliness: the eyes lost their lively spark in death. A pale burning fire is rather a specific metaphor. Batt may have been inspired by Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Pale Fire*, released in 1962, who was inspired himself by William Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* (Wikipedia). Shakespeare used the expression "pale fire" to describe the moon's pale glow, only possible by snatching the sun's fire. Perhaps Batt intended his pale fire to be connected to the darkness of nighttime, the moon's natural habitat, darkness being the opposite of lively summer's day. Fiery eyes see everything, pale eyes very little: watching a nuclear explosion can blind a creature.

Is it a kind of a shadow
 Reaching into the night
 Wandering over the hills unseen
 Or is it a dream?

A wandering shadow, reaching into the night, alludes to the grim reaper looking for his next companion. The mention of night again might confirm the 'pale fire being a deathly nighttime glow' theory. The narrator is still wondering here what death might be like. This passage also radiates a feeling of insecurity, a fear of what might be creeping around unseen, perhaps intertwined with the fear of animosity between nations, fear of invisible radiation.

There's a high wind in the trees
 A cold sound in the air
 And nobody ever knows when you go
 And where do you start?

Oh, into the dark

A 'high wind in the trees' would usually cause some jostling, which may be the 'cold sound in the air' mentioned afterwards. These descriptions could refer to the sensory observations someone experiences whilst dying or during death. Again, they could also allude to the straightforward perception of a heavy falling bomb, jostling through the high treetops, whistling down. Batt mentions no one knows where someone starts to move into the dark, possibly referring to the start of death creeping in. There is no specific vocalizer visible through the lyrics, seemingly 'Bright Eyes' is sung by an omniscient narrator, who is, ironically enough, in search of answers.

In a video owned by youtuber FaceCulture, lasting less than 5 minutes, FaceCulture asks Mike Batt about the birth of 'Bright Eyes', and his original intentions:

With Bright Eyes I was commissioned by a director, the director of the *Watership Down* movie. And he said to me: 'Write a song about death'. And I thought 'well, how do you write a song about death?' It's a very dark subject. Well, I went home and I thought 'actually it's the most important question. What happens when you die?' To us it's important. (Batt 0:05-0:37)

The interviewer then asks him what he believes in:

I don't know. I think, I'd like to think we're not clever enough to know. Why should we know? Too many people claim to know. What happens when you die? I admit there's nobody, there's no manual when you get born, there's no book. Well, people say there's the Koran, the Bible... I don't know what happens, so I wrote: 'Is it a kind of a dream, floating out on the tide, following the river of death downstream. Is it a dream? It was this mystical wondering about what happens and that's how I cracked the song. When I went back to the producer, they said to me 'well, we really like the song. Who would you like to record it?' And I said 'well, I'd like Art Garfunkel.' I just felt his voice was right for it. It had this lovely purity, his voice. It was just right for

this floating kind of song (...) I think, to have the guy who sang Bridge over Troubled Water sing your song is the, was to be at the time, the biggest honor I could expect (...) I thought, actually, if you think of bright, I won't write about death, I'll write about life. So if you think of bright eyes, that's what you have, a twinkle in your eyes when you're alive, not when you're dead. Where does it go? That was my question. How can the light that burned so brightly suddenly burn so pale? (Batt 0:40-3:45)

Harmonically speaking, considering Batt centered this song around life and death, there is a surprising amount of major chords present. Usually a song with the heavy load of a sad subjects, consists of an overwhelming minor tonality, which is not the case here. On the other hand, this makes sense, as Batt chose to highlight the dream-like wonderings, the lighter imaginative side of death. The melody almost exclusively contains notes compliant with the song's key, with the one exception in the sentence right before the chorus, in the word 'Oh'. This word is sung with a minor third function, followed by a major third function. Due to the major tonality of the song, this minor trip is very noticeable, perhaps alluding to the wonderings Batt portrays about death. The rhythm is a calm steady beat, performed by a drummer playing background to a small orchestra. Combined, this presents 'Bright Eyes' with a soothing lullaby-like timbre.

The 1978 film is faithful to Adams' novel, portraying the horrors of rabbit life being disturbed by humans with brutal honesty. Bigwig's near-death experience is shown with all its bloody elements and heavy breathing, accompanied by disturbing strings in a minor tonality. The rabbit war concerning the limited natural space left after human interference, is depicted with gruesome details. 'Bright Eyes' supports its accompanying film more loyally than 'Fire on Fire' does, drawing attention to death through natural elements.

Conclusion

In conclusion, whereas 'Bright Eyes' has strayed a little from Adams' ecological path, 'Fire on Fire' has certainly strayed further. The highlighted subjects in both songs, respectively death and romance, could signify a spike in societal interests changing over time. A research conducted to explore societal interests in the concerning time and area could perhaps present clarification. The lack of ecological presence in 'Fire on Fire' is surprising as ecological awareness has become an increasingly frequent point of discussion over the last few years. Since Attenborough's latest show *One Planet* and Murro's adaptation of *Watership Down* both have been produced and released through Netflix, the large difference between their messages is unexpected. Perhaps Attenborough ought to star in the next adaptation of *Watership Down*, ensuring ecological awareness and soothing reassurance at the same time.

Bibliography

- Adams, Richard. *Watership Down*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin books Ltd,, 1972. book.
- Barrow, Mandy. *Emblems of Britain*. 2014. Web. 23 June 2019.
- Batt, Mike. *Mike Batt interview part 5* FaceCulture. 14 April 2008. Web.
- Bird, Anna. *How Portland Became Known As The City Of Roses*. 12 February 2016. Web. 23 June 2019.
- Brownrigg, Mark. "Film Music and Film Genre." Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. 2003.
- Dickenson, Victoria. *Rabbit*. London: Reaktion books, 2013. Web.
- Estok, Simon C. "Theorizing in a Space of AMbivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 2 April 2009: 203-225. Print.

Fielding, A.J. "Migration and Urbanization in Western Europe Since 1950." *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 155, No. 1 (1989): 60-69. Web.

Flowerdew, J.R., R.C. Trout and J. Ross. "Myxomatosis: Population Dynamics of Rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus* Linnaeus, 1758) and ecological effects in the United Kingdom." *Rev. sci. tech. Off. int. Epiz.* (1992): 1109-1113. Web.

Garfunkel, Art. "Bright Eyes." *Watership Down*. By Mike Batt. 1978.

Kalinak, Kathryn Marie. "How Does Film Music Work? Film Music: A Very Short Introduction."

Kalinak, Kathryn Marie. *What Does Film Music Do?* Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010. 1-21. Book.

Kazanlak, Rose Festival. *Why Are Red Roses Considered Romantic? Symbol of Love*. 23 June 2019.

Web. 23 June 2019.

Mcfarlane, Robert. "What lies beneath: Robert Mcfarlane travels 'Underland'." *The Guardian* 20 April 2019. Web.

Official-UK-Charts-Company. *Official Singles Chart Top 100*. 23 May 2019. Web. 23 May 2019.

Pallady, Richard. *Sam Smith*. 15 May 2019. Web. 23 June 2019.

Pallardy, Richard. *Richard Adams*. 5 May 2019. Web. 23 June 2019.

Raglon, Rebecca and Marian Scholtmeijer. "Animals Are Not Believers in Ecology: Mapping Critical Differences between Environmental and Animal Advocacy Literatures." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2007): 121-140. Web.

Rivera, Adrienne. *Four Writers Inspired by Beatrix Potter*. 4 August 2017. Web. 23 June 2019.

Schmitz-Berning, Cornelia. *Vokabular des National-Sozialismus*. Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1998. Print.

Smith, Jeff. "Banking on Film Music: Structural Interactions of the Film and Record Industries."

Dickinson, Kay. *Movie Music, The Film Reader*. London: Routledge, 2003. 195. Web.

Smith, Sam. "Fire on Fire." *Watership Down*. By Sam Smith and Steve Mac . 2018.

uk-charts.top-source.info. *Top 100 1979*. 23 May 2019. Web. 23 May 2019.

Watership Down. Dir. Noam Murro. 2018. Netflix.

Watership Down. Dirs. Martin Rosen and John Hubley. 1978. Internet.

Wikipedia. 28 March 2019. Web. 10 May 2019.

—. 1 April 2019. Web. 10 May 2019.

