

Four Cottage Scenes: Reading across Globalized Idylls

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Abstract

This chapter examines how tensions between conceptions of the rural as local idyll on the one hand, and as a working production space on the other, play out in four fictional cottage scenes; two from the early nineteenth century and two from the twenty-first. The first, London's Regent's Park, exemplifies picturesque occlusions of the working reality of the countryside within an upscaling, globalizing and industrializing food system. Conversely, the other three – the novel *Frankenstein* and the movies *Blade Runner 2049* and *Bait* – draw critical attention to the idyll's enduring entanglement with global productivist farming in spite of the small farm imaginaries it espouses.

1 Introduction

In 2017, Minette Batters, then vice president of the UK's National Farmers' Union, asked: "Do we want the countryside just to be a national park and import our food from elsewhere or do we want it to be full of thriving communities that can be a productive part of the economy?" (Adams n. pag.). This was a question born out of frustration at the decline in rural infrastructure, the shortage of affordable rural housing, and the major economic challenges faced by UK farms, particularly small ones. Post Brexit, post-pandemic, and with the Ukraine war ongoing, it still resonates: the UK consumes less and less produce from its own farms and fisheries, while imports are rising. At the same time, leisure demands on the countryside are increasing, along with rural property prices.

Batters's question would also have been relevant two hundred years ago, when farming was intensifying and scaling up (especially on colonial plantations), and when, by means of enclosure, traditional common lands farmed by peasants were being turned into grand picturesque landscapes for the landed gentry. In what follows, I discuss how enduring tensions between idyllic conceptions of the rural and the rural as food production space plays out in four

fictional rural cottage scenes, two from the early nineteenth century and two from the twenty-first.

The first cottage scene is Park Village, a mostly unbuilt proposal for a group of ornate faux rustic cottages designed in 1823 by architect John Nash. It was intended as an extension to his design for Regent's Park (begun in 1811 and, at the time, located in the countryside just beyond the northwest edge of London). This "village," seen by some as a prototype for modern suburbia, would have presented an entirely idyllic impression of the countryside to its intended patrons, and offered them respite from the city's congestion, filth, and disease (Fishman 70–71).

The second cottage scene, originating from a very different political perspective, is the De Lacey family's cottage in Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*, published in 1818. Shelley grew up close to the site of Regent's Park in the years just before its creation, when the area comprised fields, farms, woods, and market gardens. In her lifetime, Shelley, who said she "lived principally in the country as a girl," will have seen this working rural or peri-urban neighborhood consumed by the expanding city and by the park's picturesque landscapes and gardens (173). According to Stephen Asma, "monsters ... disrupt neat categories of taxonomy" (125). Here, I suggest that Frankenstein's monster destabilizes the kind of urban-rural dichotomy that Regent's Park's aesthetic promoted. It has also been argued that Shelley's monster reflects contemporary anxieties about race and emancipated slaves (Malchow; Mulvey-Roberts). If the monster is indeed a product of the plantations in the Americas and West Indies as well as of Victor Frankenstein's laboratory in Ingolstadt, does he, in the scenes where he hides in (and subsequently destroys) the De Lacey's farm cottage, raise a specter of globalized industrial scale farming and its possible effects on local and traditional farming societies?

The third cottage scene, from the twenty-first century, is protein farmer Sapper Morton's gloomy and functional abode in Denis Villeneuve's big-budget dystopian sci-fi movie *Blade Runner 2049*, released in 2017. If Regent's Park imagined a countryside devoid of industry, *Blade Runner 2049* does the opposite by portraying Earth's future as a synthetic industrial plantation world inhabited by replicants in the years following an ecological catastrophe. The countryside here is an ultra-productive zone where hardly anything remains of natural flora or fauna. Because of this, when fragments of the previously existing rural ecology and society are shown, they seem intensely idyllic in comparison. With images of a real-life industrialized agricultural region of Spain being used to create some of 2049's dystopian rural panoramas, a glimpse, perhaps, is provided, of the kind of "elsewhere" that Batters's question refers to, supplying supermarkets with cheap fruit and vegetables while many local farms struggle to survive.

The fourth and final cottage scene I look at comes from *Bait*, a low-budget black-and-white film made in Cornwall with old 16mm film cameras by local filmmaker Mark Jenkin with local actors, released in 2019. *Bait*'s plot centers on a Cornish fishing village and the tensions that arise when a family of Londoners buy a fisherman's cottage for use as a holiday home. The film's plot is mainly conveyed through the eyes of a struggling fisherman who resents the village's transformation from a site of production to one of consumption. The idea of the rural idyll is manifest in some of the film's scenes, for example when the London holiday makers use old fishing nets to decorate their living room. Thus, unlike Regent's Park, which erased a patchwork of productive rural spaces to create picturesque views for Londoners, *Bait* critically juxtaposes tourists' idyllic imaginaries with the productive ones of local working people. The film raises questions about where food comes from, for example when shots of a fridge being filled with supermarket shopping are juxtaposed with footage of local fishermen struggling to land and sell their catches. While the obvious response to Batters' question would be that leisure, production, and environmental protection must support each other, this is easier said than done within current market conditions wherein, as *Bait* suggests, a quayside cottage has much more commercial allure as a second home than as a local worker's abode.

I am interested in teasing out the different critical relationships these four cottage scenes have with the rural idylls they portray and with working people's experience of globalization in the countrysides of their respective eras. By focusing on these scenes, I am also drawing parallels between our current heightened appreciation of the countryside and some early nineteenth-century urbanites' idealization of it. If, as Batters' question infers, the UK's "post-productive" rurality overlooks its dependencies on people and environments elsewhere to provide the nation's food, then, to my mind, this faintly and problematically echoes the era of the picturesque when tranquil impressions of a bountiful and tranquil English countryside were created which obscured its disturbing economic dependency on colonial plantations.

2 Regent's Park: An Idyllic Disassembly

Architect John Nash and landscape gardener Humphrey Repton began work on Regent's Park in 1811, but it did not open to the public until the 1830s. Initially it was supposed to be a grand gated housing project, but parliament insisted it should be made a public amenity.¹ The Park was the endpoint of a new north

¹ See *Hansard* 20 April 1841 vol 57 cc958-62; Regent's Park, House of Commons Debate; and The Royal Parks, *The Regent's Park and Primrose Hill Conservation Management Plan* (2015: 32).

has been described as a prototype for modern suburbia (Fishman 70–71). In the end, Nash replaced this design with one for two streets (Park Village East and Park Village West) of larger Italianate and gothic villas (Tyack 68–74). Apparently, “the humble yet the better sort of the class of people” whom he had envisaged living in his cottages were less attracted to them than he had hoped, so for commercial reasons he developed the area for a wealthier clientele requiring more space for their servants (Tyack 68). The villas that were actually constructed arguably diluted the urban to rural logic of the park’s design because they were more easily interpreted as outposts of urban and cosmopolitan sensibilities within rural contexts than the originally planned faux-vernacular cottages.

The landscaping inside the park also makes a distinction between city and country. Through the park runs the main route from what was then the edge of London to the south to the countryside to the north. The southern part of this axis is called “the Avenue,” and is flanked by formal, manicured parterres, flower beds, and fountains laid out in classical style and planted with fruit trees, shrubs, and flowers such as cherries and acers and tulips imported originally from an array of overseas territories. The northern part of this route is “the Broadwalk,” which is more “rural” and planted in a more informal and naturalistic manner: the plants and trees here are mostly native woodland species such as oaks and limes. Thus, an urban-rural and global-local taxonomy is established both in the architecture and in the landscape design wherein the global is associated with the city and the local with the country. The Park’s buildings fulfil the role of separating the working city from the gardens,³ making the park an urban-scale scenographic bubble set up to frame an idealized and nostalgia-tinged view of the countryside.

Among the ironies of Regent’s Park’s design is that its idealized countryside necessitated the clearance of a working rural landscape of real farms, cottages, fields, and woods. Another irony is that many of those escaping to this invented countryside owed their wealth to the economics of the city they were escaping from, having, for example, invested in colonial plantation-owning companies.⁴ In this regard, it is worth mentioning that the fashion for cottages and picturesque landscapes emerged in England at about the same time as new scales of industrialized monocrop cultivation and processing for international trade were being introduced in colonial plantations in the Americas and Caribbean (Shaw Taylor). At this time, a very large farm in England would have

3 Repton did the same in “The View from the Port near Bristol” (Hoare).

4 See Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery, UCL: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/maps/britain/#zoom=11&lng=-0.203247&lat>.

been around 120 hectares and might have had a workforce of about 10 people (Mingay), while the largest Jamaican plantation was the Good Hope Estate, which grew to over 3,600 hectares in size and had a workforce of around 500 slaves (Bassett). Good Hope's owner, John Tharp, who kept a total of 3,000 slaves, lived just a few blocks away from Regent's Park in a house on Portland Place and maps produced by UCL's Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery show that this part of London had the highest concentration of residents with interests in slave ownership in the UK.⁵ It should be noted, however, that Regent's Park was mainly financed by developer James Burton, who made his money not through slave-owning companies, but through major construction projects in London.

About the picturesque landscaping style of which Repton was a later exponent, Macarthur says: "Arguably, our continued appreciation of the 'English' gardens of Kent and Brown relies on the heightened effect that neo-classical country mansions have in irregular and naturalistic settings. Which, among other things, served to '... play up the paired and parallel orders of nature and culture'" (6). In Regent's Park, nature is paired with the rural, and culture with the city, within an aesthetic schema that not only distinguishes the country from the city, but also from the international trade and colonialism fueling its growth. In reality, though, as London grew, the English countryside was undergoing significant changes as well, partly because of the rural-to-urban migration that came with new industries and partly through enclosures of common land (displacing peasant communities) and the creation of stately homes and estates. A significant amount of the money for these rural developments came from investments in plantations and slavery (Fowler). By conceptually segregating the countryside from its entanglements with global trade, colonialism, and slavery, the landscape and cottages in Regent's Park performed a kind of idyllic disassembly, when in reality "the city and the country were both part of the same overarching system," as Raymond Williams put it.⁶

3 Frankenstein as Anti-idyll

The urban-rural and man-nature dichotomies manifest in the picturesque style that Regent's Park exemplifies contrasted deeply with the worldviews of some notable writers of the time. According to Timothy Morton, "Romantic era authors such as Wordsworth and Shelley strove to confuse and undermine the

⁵ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/maps/britain/#zoom=11&lng=-0.203247&lat>.

⁶ Williams quoted in Mike Dibb's *The Country and the City* (BBC Films, 1979).



FIGURE 9.2 Cottage scene in Universal Pictures' 1931 *Frankenstein*, directed by James Whale. Screenshot

difference between Nature and the human, the object and the subject, history and natural history, not necessarily by blowing it up completely, but by exploring its ironies and paradoxes" (146). Monsters in gothic-era horror stories had similar taxonomy disrupting tendencies. According to Marie Mulvey-Roberts, "Monstrosity is invariably a perception relating to bodily confusion and the blurring of boundaries out of which liminality manifests as an object of fear. The monster refuses to be contained within the familiar taxonomies through which we organise the world" (3). She also argues that "Monsters are a rupture in the fabric of society, which can itself become *monstrous* ..." (Mulvey-Roberts 233, emphasis in original). In conjunction with Morton's critique of the concept of nature, this leads one to ask whether the normalization of man-nature dichotomies is more monstrous than their disruption.

Until she was 10 years old, Mary Shelley (or Mary Godwin as she was then) lived with her father in an unusual circular modern group of houses called "the Polygon," about three hundred meters east of the site that was to become Regent's Park. The Polygon was a progressive, new development among open fields, woods, farms, and market gardens in an area popular with artists and refugees from the French Revolution.⁷ While the view from her nursery win-

⁷ <https://www.theundergroundmap.com/article.html?id=51223>.

dow would have been an open vista stretching into the countryside and while she thought hers was a “country childhood” (Shelley 173), Shelley’s home was actually at the vanguard of urbanization in her neighborhood, which would have had a liminal peri-urban character. As well as the rural spaces and activities in the vicinity of the Polygon, contemporary maps show that the workings of a city’s edge were there too, including clay pits, brickworks, lumber yards, dung, dust and ash heaps.⁸ This was a hybrid and productive environment that was feeding the city with food and materials, and recycling much of its waste. During her lifetime, however, the working spaces that surrounded Shelley’s childhood home were erased. In their place, new city blocks and streets, as well as the park’s idyllic landscapes and gardens, were constructed. Five years after Nash and Repton designed Regent’s Park, Shelley wrote *Frankenstein*.

Contrary to the segregating aesthetics of Regent’s Park, *Frankenstein* continually pulls different realms together. The monster is the most obvious example of this because he is created from an ambiguous array of pieces of humans and animals, seemingly from different parts of the world. Bewell argues that his hybrid composition echoes the ways that new breeds of farm animals were being designed and bred for efficient meat production. His focus on animal breeding in this context is given extra weight when he emphasizes Shelley’s vegetarianism and her engagement with food politics. He also points out that the “physiological writers of Germany” mentioned by Shelley in the first sentence of the novel’s preface, likely included those such as Blumenbach, who were interested in “race theory” and physiological differences between ethnicities (Bewell 2020: 717). Theirs was a branch of science that was served by an international trade in human remains for research purposes.

Mulvey-Roberts, following Malchow, identifies affinities between the monster and emancipated slaves in Shelley’s descriptions of the monster’s appearance and fugitive state. It is well known that Shelley abstained from sugar consumption because of her objections to the slave trade and that she was among those concerned about freed slaves’ welfare. In this interpretation, *Frankenstein* plays out some of the scenarios being discussed at the time about what might happen if slaves were freed, whether they might run amok seeking revenge for the inhumane treatment they had suffered, for example, or whether it might not be possible to integrate them into society through education. When the monster says he would flee to Latin America with his bride (if created), he seems to be recalling the thousands of settlements, such as the quilombos or maroons built by escaped slaves in the remote jungles and

8 <https://www.theundergroundmap.com/article.html?id=51223>.

forests of Brazil, the Caribbean, and elsewhere. If the monster does represent disenfranchised former slaves, then it follows that the colonial plantation system, where most slaves were forced to work, is metaphorically embedded in his character too.

Shelley describes the monster in settings of various scales: oceans, mountains, woods, the city, a town, a village, a farm, and a cottage. The narrative frequently seems to intersect these scales, such as when one imagines Mrs Saville reading Walton's letters about chasing the monster across arctic wastelands from the comfort of a living room armchair. Stereotypical assumptions about places are liable to disruption; the scenes in the rustic hovel where the monster reads philosophy, for example, destabilize the notion of learning as a metropolitan preserve. If the monster is a signifier for emancipated slaves, industrial farming, colonialism, racial stereotyping, and more, then the rustic scenes in *Frankenstein* that involve the monster become complex assemblages.

When the monster is hiding in the De Lacey's shed, Shelley describes in some detail the farm's layout and the daily routines of a subsistence farming family whose "nourishment consisted entirely of the vegetables of their garden, and the milk of one cow, which gave very little during the winter, when it's [sic] masters could scarcely procure food to support it" (2018b: 79). The monster is completely charmed by the family he voyeuristically spies on, by their love for each other and their simple livelihoods, and yearns to be accepted by them. His yearning intensifies the idyllic overtones of these scenes, and because they are described by an outsider looking through a crack in a wall, they seem akin to a framed picturesque view of country life.

It is, however, soon revealed that the De Laceys are not an alpine family rooted in the locality with generations of farming experience, but instead are also outsiders, having fled from the revolution in Paris. When the monster introduces himself to the blind grandfather in their cottage, the latent specters of numerous global political and philosophical issues are present, many of which relate to farming and food. The creature not only evokes colonial plantations and artificial livestock breeding, but also practices a hand-to-mouth vegetarian diet of gleaned berries and acorns. Agriculture's science-driven and globalizing tendencies thus appear within the mixed-up DNA of a primal forager within a subsistence farm. For a short time, until the monster is chased away, the cottage thus contains a Russian doll like assemblage of food and farming types and histories.

In his essay about rural horror movies, David Bell argues that the rural idyll depends on othering undesirable forms of rural life and that anti-idylls emerge when those unwanted elements threaten or corrupt the preferred vision of country life. If we extend the rural to include plantations in colonized

territories, then the abjection of Frankenstein's monster within the pristine alpine countryside reveals anti-idyllic traits. But is it possible that the roots for these traits might also lie in Shelley's feelings about the erasure of the working spaces surrounding her childhood home to create an idyllic landscape of consumption for the well off?

4 Blade Runner 2049: Fugitive Rurality



FIGURE 9.3 K (Ryan Gosling) approaches Sapper Morton's protein farm and cabin in *Blade Runner 2049* (dir. Denis Villeneuve). Alcon Entertainment. Screenshot

Blade Runner 2049 both echoes and inverts *Frankenstein* in the way it imagines the rural. In Shelley's novel, there is plenty of wilderness and traditional farming countryside for the monster to run amok and hide in, whereas in *Blade Runner 2049* Earth has become a plantation planet run by replicants supplying human populations on other planets ("off world"). Almost all life on Earth is artificially designed and programmed by the Wallace Corporation. If Frankenstein's monster carried within it a warning about the consequences of industrial farming as it was emerging at that time, then in 2049 it is too late to do anything about it.

While Ridley Scott's original *Blade Runner* movie began with spectacular aerial cityscape views, *Blade Runner 2049* begins with sweeping aerial views of a grey, polluted, and highly technologized rural landscape, which the subtitles say is California. The first shot is of an endless array of solar farms; the second of an infinite sea of greenhouses. These views look as though they might be CGI, but they are based on real footage filmed from an aircraft over the Gemasolar solar plant located near Seville and the expanse of plastic greenhouses

covering much of the Southern Spanish province of Almeria. Known locally as *El Mar del Plástico* (the plastic sea), the latter area produces huge quantities of fruit and vegetables for export to supermarkets around Europe.⁹ At 31,000 hectares, it is one of the largest concentrations of plastic greenhouses on the planet. The workers in Almeria's greenhouses are mostly migrants from Africa, who typically live in makeshift shanty houses, often without sanitation, running water or electricity. Their pay is often much less than the legal minimum wage and proper contracts are scarce. One *Guardian* report quotes a worker saying: "Every worker here has a family, a wife and children, but the only thing that matters is that we work to get the vegetables to Germany or the UK. It's like they have forgotten we are also human beings" (De Pablo n. pag.). Another worker notes that "Consumers are not aware that we are slaves inside the greenhouse" (Rippingale n. pag.). Concern was also raised about the general lack of protection provided to workers in Almeria's greenhouses during a Covid outbreak (*Sustain*).

In *Blade Runner 2049*, the opening scene's aerial views are ascribed to a "spinner," a flying car-like vehicle, piloted by a replicant LAPD officer or "blade runner" called K (Ryan Gosling). His job is to track down and eliminate renegade replicants from a previous era. According to the plot, a near-total ecological collapse took place sometime around 2020 following the bankruptcy of the Tyrell Corporation. Subsequently, the industrialist Neander Wallace rose to power because his new synthetic farming technologies averted famine. When K's craft lands, it is among greenhouses where no natural life is evident except a dead tree. He has come to visit Sapper Morton, a fugitive replicant suspected of living beyond his allotted time of death. Morton cultivates grubs for protein in the greenhouses. His home is a plain grey box with a yellow pod attached. Inside, the rooms are sparse and gloomy. We know there is running water and electricity because we see Morton cooking on a stove in the kitchen. There are also windows, but they look frosted and frame no idyllic views.

Despite the bleak imagination of the rural here, however, there are a couple of scenes later in the film where something like a rural idyll is operative. The first takes place in the farmyard when, following his killing of Morton, K notices a pair of small yellow wildflowers that have been placed at the foot of the dead tree. K picks them up, studies them, and smells them. The suggestion is that this is a rare experience for him. Describing characteristics of the rural idyll in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Brian Short writes:

9 See <https://www.movie-locations.com/movies/b/Blade-Runner-2049.php>.

A typical feature here was the prominence and close relationship of emotion, intuition, aesthetics and morality; another feature was the well-known aversion to modernity and industrialized society. In the representation of nature, these features are reflected in a strong emotional and moral sympathy towards 'natural' beauty, and in the admiration of real rural life and wilderness. (138)

All of these characteristics seem to be at play as K smells the flowers and contemplates their significance. Is this a hint that there may be some sentience somewhere within him?

The second idyllic scene comes when K starts to doubt his own provenance and seeks advice from a scientist about a "memory" of a toy horse that is troubling him. As a replicant with a limited lifespan, he knows his "memories" should have been artificially implanted, but he wonders if somehow this could be an actual memory. The scientist, a human called Dr Ana Stelline (Carla Juri), has a deficient immune system and spends her working life in a large white air-filtered dome. She is employed by the Wallace Corporation to create memories to implant into replicants' brains and projects moving images of things she is imagining onto the dome's surface by way of a device that reads her mind. The dome is introduced with a shot of a beautiful view looking up to a blue sky through a canopy of leaves gently moving in a breeze and bathed in dappled sunlight. This view contrasts starkly with the dead landscapes that have dominated the film so far, but the lush scene then abruptly pixelates and fizzles out as Dr Stelline is revealed, kneeling in the middle of the dome adjusting the controls of the device in her hands. Until the images disappear, her space cocoons a precious, idealized imagination of the countryside, in a way that echoes the picturesque imagination that was central to the design of Regent's Park and challenged by *Frankenstein*.

In different ways, the wildflower and dome scenes evoke memories of a more natural world that existed before globalization, industrialization, and corporatization took over. If Sapper Morton's cabin is a working farmhouse where utility and production take priority over aesthetics, then Dr Stelline's space is the opposite: an architecture subservient to projected dreams and memories, and a space in which illusory idylls continue to be manufactured. It could be said that K's role when he visits these settings is akin to that of Frankenstein's monster, in that it is his uncertainty about his own provenance that unsettles the taxonomic boundaries that *Blade Runner 2049* critically sets up between spaces of production and consumption, and functional reality and idyll.

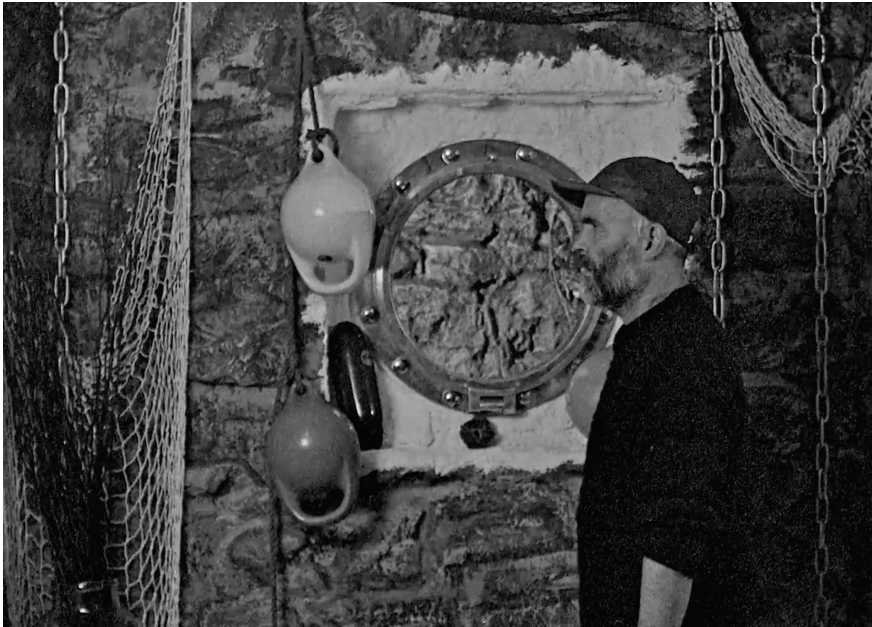
5 *Bait's* Polysemic Cottage

FIGURE 9.4 Stephen Ward (Giles King) in the cottage in *Bait* (2019). Early Day Films. Screenshot

Mark Jenkin's 2019 film *Bait* centers on a cottage in a Cornish fishing village. Tensions have arisen after the Leigh family from London bought it for use as a holiday home from two fishermen brothers (Martin and Steven Ward) who have to move to an inconvenient edge of town estate as a consequence. The plot reflects current realities in Cornwall where demand for holiday homes has driven up house prices and displaced local working people from their neighborhoods, particularly in coastal areas (Whitehouse; Weeks; Stevenson). *Bait's* release coincided with the outbreak of Covid in the UK, which increased rural property sales and prices as lockdowns opened up homeworking possibilities for mostly white-collar workers (Inman). Loose parallels can be drawn here with early nineteenth-century urban to rural migration by wealthy urbanites, catalyzed in part by anxieties about the spread of disease.

The Wards have not only lost their family cottage, but have been split by tourism in other ways too: Stephen earns more by using the family fishing boat to take holidaymakers out on pleasure trips than Martin could by using it to fish. Without a boat of his own, Martin has to cast nets on the beach to catch

fish when the tides come in. When the Leighs ask him to stop parking his battered pickup in his old quayside space because they have reserved it for their Airbnb guests (who complain about the noise of fishing boats leaving early in the morning), Martin is incensed.

An early scene has Martin standing in the hallway of the Leighs' freshly decorated kitchen. Their new décor includes nets, chains, boat fenders, a porthole, and other fishing industry memorabilia. These items have conflicted meanings: for Martin it is odd to see things he uses for work aestheticized in this way, but for the Leighs these items, bought on eBay, signify the rural idyll they are creating for themselves. They do not seem to connect their fishing boat decor to the local industry that they are complicit in displacing. *Bait* juxtaposes the contrasting perspectives on the village and its function with great effect: in one sequence, the camera cuts between a shot of Martin setting up his nets on the beach and one showing the Leigh family's mother Sandra taking food items out of supermarket bags and placing them in the fridge. This not only raises the question of where our food should come from – from places like Almería's greenhouses or from local farms – but also of where the plastic bags might end up end up when they have been discarded.

Early on in *Bait*, a sense of foreboding is created when a jump cut suddenly reveals Tim, the father of the Leigh family, lying dazed on the ground. A few shots before, Martin, who we later learn is angry about the parking and noise complaints, is shown striding down a street staring grim-faced toward the camera. Did his frustration boil over into violence? The cause of Tim's distress, which was not Martin, is revealed later in the film. Jenkin's style creates expectations of rural horror tropes in which outsiders meet grisly ends at the hands of unhinged locals (Bell). *Bait's* dark soundtrack adds to the sense of foreboding; it comprises slow, deep rumbling sounds that make even ordinary scenes seem unsettling. When these sounds combine, for example, with a close-up of an old fisherman (the Wards' father?) closing his eyes, it feels like the film could take a supernatural turn. Although *Bait* plays with viewers' expectations of horror erupting until the end, it never actually happens. Moreover, while *Bait* resembles an anti-idyll in its mood, it does not abject Martin but leads the viewer to understand and sympathize with his position. The cottage scene described above, and the film as a whole, creates an ambiguity about who is being cast as an outsider and othered by whom.

In *Bait*, as with Nash's Regents Park, a productive rurality is supplanted by idyllic spaces of consumption for people seeking respite from the city. But is tourism actually responsible for the decline of fishing? Until 1983, Britain was a net exporter of fish, but it now imports around twice as much fish as it exports (Uberoi et al.), partly because British tastes are for fish that are in short

supply in UK waters (Greenwood). Furthermore, the UK fishing industry now employs around half the number of fishers it did in 1970 (Uberoi et al.). EU fishing policies have long been blamed for the decline of UK fishing, including by pro-Brexit politicians and fishers, but a recent Centre for Food Policy report suggests that “the real causes were changes in the international rules governing access to fisheries, overfishing which required drastic remedial measures and the UK’s own policies” (Greenwood 6–10).

One review of *Bait* on a Cornish arts website says:

In recent decades second home-owners have taken the heart from the traditional communities of St Ives and Padstow, and similar processes of change are undoubtedly affecting most of the other fishing villages in Cornwall. But perhaps, apart from its obvious artistic virtues, another reason why *Bait* is prompting such interest outside the Duchy is the fact that it also speaks to even bigger problems, particularly the fracture in British politics and society, and the fact that the liberal metropolitan elite don’t seem able to understand the issues that exist in other hard-pressed communities outside the metropolis.¹⁰

Bait was released in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum and one could argue that it inadvertently reinforces the stereotypes which plagued that divisive event. Brexit was seen by many as a vote against the “metropolitan elite” by marginalized communities. The film is definitely on the side of the marginalized and when Martin refers to Tim as a “prancing Lycra c***!” in one of their arguments, he will have echoed the frustrations of many local people. Having said that, the film also shows the Leigh and Ward families to be full of individuals with their own perspectives on the situation that they find themselves in, with some of these moving beyond traditional urban-rural and local-global dichotomies. This is particularly the case for Martin’s nephew Neil and the Leighs’ daughter Katie: Neil makes a point of working with Martin and learning the fishing trade rather than work with his father (Stephen) in the leisure industry for more money. And Katie likes Neil much more than some of the more arrogant “DFL’s” (“down from Londoners”) that she knows and starts a relationship with him. These younger characters offer a glimmer of hope for better interactions between metropolitan pleasure seekers and rural working communities. However, this hope is dashed when a fight between Neil and Katie’s brother, who is appalled by their romance, results in Neil falling

¹⁰ <http://www.artcornwall.org/index.htm>.

from the quayside and ending up unconscious or possibly dead on a boat deck far below. The film's ending shows the brothers Stephen and Martin taking the boat out fishing together in solidarity.

6 Conclusion

The cottages in Nash's Park Village scheme were meant to be the centerpieces of an idyllic scene removed from the reality of rural peasant life and from the globalization, colonialism, and agricultural industrialization fueling London's growth then. In contrast, Shelley's *Frankenstein* critically exposed the cottage to global politics, colonialism, and slavery by inhabiting it with a Parisian refugee family and the monster with his inferred plantation provenance. In this context, the scene where the monster spies on the De Laceys through a crack in a wall suggests that, for those like him, the idyll can be viewed, imagined, and yearned for from afar, but not experienced. *Blade Runner 2049* also makes a point of separating experience and idyll: Morton's grey functional cottage appears to be in a completely different realm than the projections created by Dr Stelline in her bubble. But have the latter's seemingly innocent projected imaginaries and artificial memories emerged as a result of the material realities of the former? In *Bait*'s present-day setting, the Leighs' nautical kitchen décor and the supermarket shopping in their fridge also indicate a disconnect between idyll and the lived experience of rural workers who provide our food. However, unlike those whose homes and workplaces disappeared under Regent's Park, Martin's fishing livelihood is not quite erased, and his battered car still spoils the Leighs' view.

I began this chapter by quoting Minette Batters's question about where British food comes from and used it as a starting point for looking at tensions between idyllic representations of the countryside and the lives of rural workers within globalized agricultural economies. Batters's emphasis on "thriving communities" indicates that she is advocating for more productive rural futures that all kinds of human and non-human agents can contribute to and prosper in. Clearly, she is supporting neither the kind of super-productivism of early nineteenth-century colonial plantations or de facto plantations like El Mar del Plastico, nor a totally nature-conserved and leisure-dominated UK rurality. *Frankenstein*, *Blade Runner 2049*, and *Bait* draw critical attention, in their different ways, to the rural idyll's entanglement with intensive globalized food production systems and with the environmental damage and human hardship that they are too often associated with. Their criticality contrasts sharply with the kind of taxonomic, picturesque, and obscurantist sensibilities

that resonate not only in the Regent's Park of early nineteenth-century London, but in too many contemporary post-Brexit and Post-Covid imaginaries too.

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