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Making up the British countryside: A posthuman critique of *Country Life*'s narratives of rural resilience and conservation[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Through a close reading of a 2018 special issue of the popular British magazine *Country Life* guest edited by Prince Charles, this paper highlights the tension between its stated inclusive view of the rural and the exclusionary paternalistic-conservative politics pursued under this veneer. Combining a narratological method with a posthuman perspective grounded in the recent work of Donna Haraway and Karen Barad, which undoes binary oppositions such as nature-culture and rural-urban by radically reconfiguring notions of agency, difference, and responsibility, we ask: *who and what* makes up 'country life' in the stories presented in the special issue, *who and what* gets to tell these stories, and which *human and non-human actors* are marginalised or left out by *how* the stories are told? Our analysis, which focuses on the special issue's engagement with notions of rural resilience and conservation, advances debates in rural studies about how to challenge non-inclusive narratives of the rural by: 1) highlighting the continued urgency of critiquing such narratives, especially when they appear in popular outlets like *Country Life*; 2) drawing attention to the way these narratives may be implicitly rather than explicitly exclusionary, which indicates a need to pay close attention to exactly *how* their politics of the rural is constructed; and 3) proposing that more intensive engagement with Barad and Haraway can advance the work of rural studies scholars who have long sought to think the rural as more-than-human.

'Thus at once, for me, before the argument starts, country life has many meanings'

—Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*

'The role of the countryside, with all its diversity and idiosyncrasies, in our national life is too important to be left to chance. Everyone will have their own opinion of what is most important, but I wonder whether there is more common ground than is sometimes apparent'

—Charles, Prince of Wales, *Country Life*

1. Introduction

To commemorate his 70th birthday, Charles, Prince of Wales—heir

apparent to the British throne—was asked to guest edit the November 2018 issue of *Country Life*, a glossy weekly magazine which focuses on the British countryside and has been published since 1897. Its readership skews towards the well-off: according to the social grade (a market research system in the UK that ranks households based on the occupation of their primary income earner from A, the highest, to E, the lowest), 46% of *Country Life*'s readers are classified as AB and 70% as ABC1, compared to, respectively, 27% and 55% of the national population.¹ Its impact, however, reaches far beyond these mostly affluent readers.² As noted in *The Guardian*, *Country Life* 'has become part of the fabric of Britain', pervading high and popular culture as it 'championed the work of architect Edwin Lutyens, once employed the garden designer Gertrude Jekyll, inspired the name of a Roxy Music album and received a namecheck in the latest series of *Downton Abbey*' (Saner, 2013). The

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¹ Statistics taken from a media kit produced by *Country Life*'s publisher: www.ti-media.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Country-Life-2017-2.pdf (accessed 31/03/20) and the National Readership Survey website: www.nrs.co.uk/nrs-print/lifestyle-and-classification-data/social-grade/ (accessed 31/03/20).

² The average circulation per issue for 2018 was 41,698. <https://www.abc.org.uk/product/2464> (accessed 31/03/20).

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magazine has also been identified by rural studies scholars as playing an important role in shaping perceptions of the British countryside (Agg and Phillips, 1998; Yarwood and Charlton, 2009; Shirley, 2015; Woods, 2016) and, in the context of rural gentrification, as providing a model lifestyle for the ‘new squirearchy’ (Heley, 2010).

The most extensive academic engagement with *Country Life* to date appears in a 1998 article by Jenny Agg and Martin Phillips (Agg and Phillips, 1998). Examining images from several issues, the authors show how the magazine affirms rural gender stereotypes. Rosemary Shirley (Shirley, 2015:38–41) also focuses on *Country Life*’s visual content in an analysis of the way its 1970s annual motoring specials reconciled the idea of speed, exemplified by fast cars pictured in village settings, with a notion of the rural as a space of stillness in need of preservation. Both accounts are products of the ‘cultural turn’ in rural studies, which prompted a surge of attention ‘to the images of and meanings attached to the countryside’ and to how these images and meanings contributed to the ‘construction of rurality’, not just in symbolic, but also in social, political, and material terms (Agg and Phillips, 1998:261; Cloke, 1997).

In light of *Country Life*’s wide and enduring cultural influence, it seems timely to explore in more detail how it ‘makes up’—as a construction that is also an imagination—the British countryside. We do so by looking not just at the magazine’s images, but also its textual components. Moreover, rather than taking *Country Life* at face value as ‘a conservative UK magazine that advertises lavish rural homes and covers the lifestyles and concerns of landed rural society’ (Yarwood and Charlton, 2009:203), we identify the particular type of conservatism it propagates, and specify how this politics is presented.

The *Guardian* article referenced above notes that Mark Hedges, *Country Life*’s editor, takes pride in the magazine’s critique of windfarms and support for hunting and badger culling (Saner, 2013). This aligns it with a conservatism that privileges the protection of traditional rural landscapes and leisure pursuits over the generation of renewable energy and animal rights. At the same time, the article quotes Hedges as insisting that *Country Life* is ‘often fighting the case for upland farmers earning £10,000 a year. This is not just about an elite. You cannot care about something as big as the countryside and just cherrypick’ (Saner, 2013). While it is hardly surprising that this claim, as we will show, is belied by the magazine’s contents (and even by Hedges’ own example, as upland farmers tend to be associated with the same traditional rural lifestyle as the landed gentry), it is nonetheless significant that the editor feels compelled to deny that *Country Life* provides an elitist perspective on the countryside. Tellingly, Roy Strong (Strong, 1996:7), too, begins his book about the magazine’s first 100 years by refuting that it ‘merely illustrat[es] a comforting vision of an upper-class never-never-land’. A commitment to inclusivity is thus repeatedly performed in relation to the magazine.

Central to *Country Life*’s claim to care about all of the countryside is its acknowledgement of the existence and urgency of climate change,³ reinforced by its long-standing association with Prince Charles,⁴ who, at the 2020 World Economic Forum in Davos, called for ‘action at revolutionary levels’, including the imposition of green taxes, to stop the rapid decline in biodiversity (Stevenson, 2020). Charles’ record of combining rural advocacy with environmental activism encompasses being a fierce critic of intensive and industrial agriculture (Carrell, 2010), and a proponent of organic farming (Mayer, 2007); combatting climate change and its sceptics (Quinn, 2014); fighting ocean pollution, the illegal wildlife trade and deforestation (Green, 2018); and protecting

endangered species and promoting sustainable fishing (Walker, 2015). *Time*, in its 2007 list of ‘Heroes of the Environment’, dubbed him ‘the royal radical’ for calling attention to environmental issues long before this became part of the mainstream (Mayer, 2007). In addition to attempting to influence the environmental policy of successive Tory- and Labour-led UK governments (Walker, 2015), Charles is said to run his own residences in a sustainable manner (Green, 2018). Of the 53, 000-ha Duchy of Cornwall estate, the Duchy Home Farm is particularly notable for having already been converted into an organic farm in 1986 (Mayer, 2007). Part of the Duchy’s revenue, moreover, is used to support charities such as The Prince of Wales’s Charitable Fund and The Prince’s Countryside Fund, with the latter intended to support family farms and ensure the future of the British countryside. Charles’ image as a committed, combative environmentalist ensures that the public does not immediately or exclusively associate him with conservatism.

By undertaking a close reading of the 2018 special issue of *Country Life* guest edited by Charles, we highlight the tension between its stated inclusive ‘politics of the rural’ (Woods, 2006:580) and the exclusionary politics grounded in ‘class-based paternalism’ (Vail, 2015:106) that emerges when we take into account what is said, as it were, between the lines, and what is left unmentioned and unpictured.⁵ With Charles, in the epigraph to this paper taken from his programmatic editorial, pointing to the ‘diversity’ of the countryside and professing a determination to find ‘common ground’ with those who see it differently, how is it that the special issue ends up endorsing a narrowly conservative, elitist agenda for the rural that ignores the ‘many meanings’ of country life insisted upon by Raymond Williams (Williams, 2011: 3) in the other epigraph? To answer this question, we proceed from a posthuman perspective that thinks Williams’ ‘many meanings’ in a maximally inclusive manner. Drawing on the recent work of feminist posthuman theorists Karen Barad and Donna Haraway, which has not received much attention yet in rural studies, we examine *who and what* makes up country life in the stories presented in the special issue of *Country Life*, *who and what* gets to tell these stories, and which *human and non-human actors* these stories—as a result of *how* they are told—marginalise or leave out.

In rural studies, debates about how to challenge dominant narratives of the rural that rely on the social exclusion of, among others, the poor, women, the young, the racially or ethnically other, and the queer (Philo, 1992; Murdoch and Day, 1998; Little, 1999; Philip and Shucksmith, 2003; Milbourne, 2004; Gray et al., 2016), as well as about how to develop more inclusive perspectives (Halfacree, 2007) have been ongoing since at least the 1990s. We seek to contribute to these debates by: 1) highlighting the continued urgency of critiquing exclusionist rural narratives, especially when they appear in popular outlets like *Country Life*; 2) drawing attention to the way these narratives may be implicitly rather than explicitly exclusionary, requiring close attention to exactly *how* their politics of the rural is constructed; and 3) proposing that more intensive engagement with the work of Barad and Haraway can advance the work of rural studies scholars who have sought to think the rural as more-than-human (Whatmore 2006; Jones 2006; Hinchliffe 2007).

Central to the special issue’s averred care for all of rural life, we contend, is its invocation of two notions that have been extensively discussed in contemporary rural studies: *resilience* (see, e.g., Brown and Schafft, 2011; McManus et al., 2012; Skerratt, 2013; Scott, 2013;

³ Among other coverage, a special issue titled ‘Climate Change: What Can You Do?’ appeared on 19 April 2007 and an article by John Gummer, the chair of the UK Climate Change Committee, encouraging readers to follow the Committee’s recommendations, was published on 26 June 2019.

⁴ Prince Charles also guest edited an issue of *Country Life* in 2013, to mark his 65th birthday, and wrote an annual birthday message for the magazine in each subsequent year.

⁵ Our close reading places itself in the tradition of what, in literary studies, is variously called ‘reading against the grain’, ‘symptomatic reading’ and ‘resistant reading’ (Wiget, 1991; Best and Marcus, 2009). However, rather than thinking of what we do as a ‘reading against the text’ (McKenzie and Jarvie, 2018:300, emphasis original) that imposes an ideological framework upon it from the outside, we consider it a reading *with* the text designed to access the text’s own politics. We show how the special issue’s explicit claim to inclusiveness is superimposed not on a hidden message, but on an implicit yet perfectly legible one of exclusionary conservatism.

Roberts et al., 2017) and *conservation* (see, e.g., McEachern, 1992; Pierce, 1996; Agnoletti, 2014; Macdonald and Feber, 2015a; 2015b; Lowe, 2017). Both resilience, in its association with the empowerment of vulnerable rural communities, and conservation, in suggesting a concern for animal and plant life, are foregrounded in the special issue as part of its claim to be standing (up) for the British countryside as a whole. It is by parsing the narratives constructed around these notions through the lens of the radical reconfigurations of agency, difference and responsibility proposed by Barad and Haraway, which undo binary oppositions such as nature-culture and rural-urban, that it becomes clear how the special issue, on a largely implicit level, configures both resilience and conservation in a manner that reinforces these binaries, continues to centralise the human, and furthers a conservatism that consolidates the power of rural elites and can be linked to a xenophobic nationalism. This has the effect of naturalising structural inequalities in the British rural, especially in terms of class; of reinforcing the idea of the British countryside as a space of whiteness; and of foreclosing efforts to conceive of the countryside as a more-than-human matter. The point we are trying to make is not that the special issue's alignment with a paternalistic brand of rural conservatism is unexpected. What we believe it is worth elaborating on—in order to understand how such conservatism retains influence and pre-empts criticism—is the way the special issue, instead of explicitly endorsing paternalism, presents it obliquely under the guise of a claim to inclusiveness and an appeal to resilience and conservation, terms that, like Charles himself, are often associated with more progressive politics.

In what follows, we begin by laying out our approach and theoretical framework. Next, we present our close reading of the special issue, focusing first on the narrative of rural resilience presented in Charles' editorial and then on the way the issue, across the editorial and several features, narrates rural conservation. The conclusion summarises our findings and underlines the need to advance a posthuman understanding of both the rural and concepts like resilience and conservation not just in rural studies research but also in more popular outlets, which play an important role in shaping the (perception of) the British rural.

2. Narrative close reading beyond the human

While the studies of *Country Life* by Agg and Phillips (1998) and Shirley (2015) examined how the magazine's images make up the rural across multiple issues, we concentrate on the narrative of the rural composed by the images and texts of the 2018 special issue edited by Charles. We chose this issue because, since special issues have a significantly higher profile and higher sales figures than regular ones, it will have been put together with a view to making Charles' and the magazine's shared politics of the rural appeal to an audience exceeding *Country Life*'s regular readership. By looking in detail at this issue, moreover, we can grasp how the elements that make up its particular conservative politics of the rural are fleshed out in relation to each other across the editorial, the features and the advertisements.

Our method, which cultural analyst and literary scholar Mieke Bal has called 'close reading as a critical practice', mobilises the tools of narratology to make explicit who is telling a particular story and from what perspective, what strategies are used to tell this story, and what 'process of meaning-making ... these strategies suggest' to the reader (Bal, 1999:13, 10). With regard to the special issue of *Country Life*, it is important to emphasise that, while Charles is not the only storyteller featured, he is the main 'expository agent' (Bal 1999:10), positioned as an authority both in general (in a publication that clearly supports the monarchy) and more specifically with regard to rural and environmental issues. According to Bal,

only those who are invested with cultural authority can be expository agents. For only such subjects are able to routinely address an audience that is numerous and anonymous to the agent, an audience which tends to go along with the assumed general meaning of the

gesture of exposing: to believe, to appreciate, and to enjoy. (Bal, 1999:10)

It is the 'assumed general meaning of the gesture of exposing'—in this case, the narrative about country life proposed as appealing to the readers of the special issue—that our close reading seeks to get at. We argue that the issue's overt expository gesture (its purported inclusive, non-elitist narrative of rurality) stands in tension with a more implicit story that excludes the perspective and interests of many rural actors, while consistently privileging those of the rural elite, as exemplified by Charles.

We supplement Bal's approach with a focus on the contribution that non-human actors make to exposing the rural. Cultural theorists Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann's 'material ecocriticism' posits that 'every existing thing and occurrence' possesses a 'narrative dimension' (Iovino and Oppermann, 2012:451). This means that anything can become, in Bal's terms, the *narrator* of a text as the one presenting the story, or the *focalizer* as the 'agent of perception' or 'holder of the "point of view"' in the story presented (Bal, 2009:18).⁶ With regard to the special issue of *Country Life*, the question then becomes: which narrating and focalizing agents, human and non-human, are included or excluded, privileged or marginalised in how it presents the British rural?

Barad—whose work combines theoretical particle physics, quantum field theory, philosophy, and cultural studies—emphasises that 'different material-discursive practices produce different material configurations of the world ...; they do not merely produce different descriptions' (Barad, 2007:184). Thus, the privileging of (certain) human stories leaves unacknowledged how non-human stories contribute to configuring what the world (or a specific part of it, like the rural) is and what it is not. Barad further insists that all meaning is produced differentially, based on a quantum physical understanding of difference not as a fixed state of separation but an ongoing process of 'differencing: differences-in-the-(re)making' (Barad, 2014:175). In Barad's agential realist framework, stories are modes of differencing in which 'the enactment of boundaries ... always entails constitutive exclusions' that 'matter both to bodies that come to matter and those excluded from mattering' (Barad, 2007:135, 57). The constitutive nature of these exclusions indicates 'that what is excluded is never really other, not in an absolute sense' (Barad, 2007:158).

This is where Barad's notion of 'intra-action', as opposed to the more usual 'interaction', enters the frame and offers an opportunity to push further Sarah Whatmore's (2006) insistence on thinking the rural, through Haraway's cyborg theory, beyond a concept of hybridity as 'entail [ing] the joining of two (or more) previously separated entities' (Jones 2006:188). Put simply, where interaction and hybridity in the traditional sense imply contact *between* two discrete bodies, intra-action implies that bodies are constituted *in* their entanglement, as fundamentally relational: it refers to 'relations without preexisting relata' (Barad, 2007:139). Thus, any form of embodiment 'is to live with/in and as part of the phenomenon that includes the cut', as the differential process of boundary-making, and with/in and as part of 'what [the cut] excludes' (Barad, 2007:158). To return to the case at hand, this means that the performative process through which 'country life' is constructed—which the special issue of *Country Life* both enacts and embodies—bears with/in it, intra-acts with, that which it excludes from 'country life'. What is important to ask, then, is whether, within the issue, this intra-action is acknowledged and responded to in a responsible way.

Barad counts Haraway—whose work cuts across science studies,

⁶ We follow Bal (2009:15–16) in separating the entity of the narrator from that of the author. This makes particular sense in the case of the special issue of *Country Life* given that we cannot know whether Charles actually wrote (all of) the editorial (by) himself. Thus, we refer to Charles as a narrator to whom readers will ascribe the attributes of Charles the public figure.

cultural studies, and philosophy—as an inspiration and interlocutor (Barad, 2007:xiii). For her part, Haraway has stated that when ‘neither biology nor philosophy any longer supports the notion of independent organisms in environments ... Barad’s agential realism and intra-action become common sense’ (Haraway, 2016:37). In alignment with Lovino and Oppermann, moreover, Haraway counts storytelling as a crucial part of the (co)construction, in the face of the threat of environmental collapse, of a new ‘commonplace’ (Haraway, 2004a:127) in which both humans and non-humans can ‘flourish’, now and in the future (Haraway, 2018:103). Storytelling, for Haraway, is a form of ‘thinking-with’ that should involve as many others as possible and should ‘cultivate ... the capacity to care, to respond, to not know so as to know otherwise and to know-with-unruly-others’ (Haraway, 2018:102, 103). The importance of continuing to struggle with this not knowing, knowing otherwise and knowing with, which will never resolve into fixed knowledge, is stressed in Haraway’s (2016) notion of ‘staying with the trouble’.

Barad’s and Haraway’s posthuman theories are not relativist and do not share the disregard of power relations ascribed to Actor-Network Theory (ANT), another prominent framework that has been mobilised to think the rural as more-than-human (Jones 2006:188). In fact, they are strongly invested in a notion of responsibility as response-ability. For Haraway, storytelling is not about simply ‘crafting reality according to political preference and self-interest’ (Haraway, 2018:103), while Barad writes:

We are responsible for the world of which we are a part, not because it is an arbitrary construction of our choosing but because reality is sedimented out of particular practices that we have a role in shaping and through which we are shaped. (Barad, 2007:390)

‘We’ as humans are responsible because we play a part, though not an exclusive one, in the performative manifestation of what *is* and *is not*. The constantly ‘changing possibilities’ of what *is*, and our ability to impact this, thus ‘entail an ethical obligation to intra-act responsibly in the world’s becoming, to contest and rework what matters and what is excluded from mattering’ (Barad, 2007:178). Responsibility, in this perspective, is ‘a matter of inviting, welcoming, and enabling the response of the Other’ (Barad, 2012:81). In our analysis, we aim to expose what responses ‘of the Other’ the special issue of *Country Life* invites and disinvites, and how this defines the overall politics of the rural articulated.

In any given material-discursive narrative, especially one told by an authoritative expository agent like Charles, not ‘all relevant factors figure in the same way or with the same weight’ (Barad, 2007:167). The ‘unique material historicities’ (Barad, 2010:276) of the entangled parts of the narrative affect its overall shape. Thus, when analysing a narrative, ‘[t]he goal is... to understand which specific material practices matter and how they matter’ (Barad, 2007:168). Haraway similarly writes: ‘It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with’ (Haraway, 2013). In the next two sections, we will specify what matters are used to think the matter of the British countryside with in the special issue of *Country Life*, and what matters and stories are excluded, marked as not mattering, first in Charles’ editorial, which revolves around rural resilience, and then in several features dealing with conservation.

3. Prince Charles’ resilient rural communities

Besides being the first-person narrator of the special issue’s editorial, Charles narrates a feature called ‘My Favourite View’ and comments on several other features in boxes labelled ‘The Prince Says’. This ensures that, despite the inclusion of other narrators and focalizers, he is unequivocally positioned as the issue’s authoritative expository agent. In this section, a close reading of the editorial will establish how Charles’ weighty voice drowns out the other human and non-human narrating and focalizing agencies that co-constitute the rural through a particular

invocation of rural resilience.

The editorial follows around fifty pages of advertisements for up-market British rural real estate (from an ‘idyllic family home’ to a ‘historic hall’ and a ‘peninsula estate’), holiday homes abroad, galleries, and auction houses, and the contents pages. When taken as non-human narrative agencies, the interiors filled with art and antiques, and the gardens and land around the properties tell a selective story of the rural as configured in elegant, spacious, and above all enduring ways by a past British elite and now available to a new one. The labour (agricultural and industrial, in Britain and the colonies) expended to build and maintain these imposing rural materialities is excluded from this story. Charles, in contrast, is emphatically marked as included in it by the photograph that opens the editorial, which shows him sitting on a large wooden chair resembling a throne in the gardens of his Highgrove estate.⁷

The editorial itself ostensibly makes the story more inclusive, with its heading quoting Charles as insisting: ‘The countryside and its people cannot be taken for granted’ (*Country Life*, 2018:63). Here, the phrase ‘its people’ suggests ‘all of the countryside’s people’ and not just the rural elite potentially at home in the properties advertised. It also identifies the countryside as an inhabited geography, in a departure from the emphasis on human-free landscapes in other—conservative and progressive—perspectives on the countryside.⁸ By twice describing the British countryside and its people as ‘resilient’, however, Charles makes clear that he is in fact *not* talking about all country people but about a particular subset.

At the beginning of the editorial, after recounting the ‘environmental destruction’ resulting from the ‘drive to “efficiency”’ in agriculture he witnessed as a teenager, Charles notes: ‘Fortunately, the British countryside and its people are extraordinarily resilient. Some hard lessons have had to be learnt, some of the worst excesses are being undone and many splendid initiatives are under way to provide help where it is needed most’ (*Country Life*, 2018:63). This identifies the people Charles is talking about as those capable of surviving challenges, if given assistance. Later, he writes: ‘The countryside and its people are hugely resilient—as everyone who works close to Nature needs to be. But it—and they—cannot be taken for granted’ (*Country Life*, 2018:65). Here, the warning not to take the countryside and its people for granted—presumably directed at those outside the rural—qualifies the ascription of resilience, which is presented as necessary in a rural environment characterised by proximity to nature.

The narrative of rural resilience proposed by Charles simultaneously produces the category of the *non-resilient*, comprising those who ‘fail’ to succeed in meeting the challenges of rural life and who, consequently, are prevented from co-constituting what the British countryside *is*. In addition, it reinforces the well-established link between the British countryside and national identity (Lowenthal, 1991, 1998; Wright, 2009). Charles’ insistence, in the epigraph taken from his editorial, on the importance of the British countryside to ‘our national life’ (*Country Life*, 2018:64–65) chimes with historian and geographer David Lowenthal’s identification of British ‘country life [as] a metaphor for the national soul’ (Lowenthal, 1998:7). The attribution of resilience to the countryside and its people can thus also be seen as a claim for resilience as an aspect of national identity. Lowenthal notably identifies *insularity* and *artifice* as the ‘two special traits link [ing] landscape with national ethos’ (Lowenthal, 1991:214). The former takes the British countryside’s physical separation from other national countrysides as proof of British exceptionalism. The latter, *artifice*, refers to the embedded belief

⁷ On the special issue’s cover is another photograph of Charles in the gardens of Highgrove, which, by picturing him standing in front of various manicured plants and flowers, symbolically assigns him the position of protector of (cultivated) nature.

⁸ We are grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for drawing our attention to this.

that the ‘landscape is not natural but crafted’ by human hands and therefore under human stewardship (Lowenthal, 1991:215). Such stewardship, however, is far from universal, as Lowenthal (1991:218) explains: ‘The aristocracy and gentry alone are fit for this nurturing task’—that is, the task of nurturing the countryside and its people. It is precisely this paternalism that we argue is at the heart of Charles’ account of rural resilience.

On the surface, the editorial reiterates the familiar idea that rural folk are made of stronger stuff than city dwellers, an idea which may be accommodated by progressive and conservative politics of the rural. However, a closer reading of Charles’ second invocation of resilience reveals his adherence to a particular interpretation of this term that, instead of seeking to remove the structural challenges faced by the resilient ruralites he celebrates, keeps them in place, reaffirming the elitist rural hierarchy described by Lowenthal (1991). What is striking here is that where Lowenthal (1991:221) describes ‘a hierarchy consensually united despite the blatant inequality of squire and serf, master and servant’, the editorial sediments hierarchical inequality through recourse to a notion of resilience commonly associated with empowering vulnerable communities.

Resilience has been called a ‘scholarly power word’ (Åsberg, 2014) and described as ‘fast replacing sustainability within the academic literature as the up and coming buzzword’ (Scott, 2013:599). Like most buzzwords, it is a fuzzy or elastic concept that can indicate very different things across and even within academic fields. Its dominant association, however, is with the ability of a system, community or human being, after a disruptive event, to return or ‘bounce back’ to its original state or ‘equilibrium’ and to do so of its own accord (Scott, 2013). From a posthuman perspective, this bounce-back view of resilience has been questioned in terms of the kind of empowerment it offers. Environmental communications scholar Bridie McGreavy (2016), for example, argues that a bounce-back notion of resilience marks all disruption, change, and vulnerability as negative and as having to be overcome, and tends to enshrine the notion of humans as controlling nature—thus reinforcing the human-nature binary. In the face of this, and following Barad, McGreavy proposes a posthuman way of doing resilience that would recognise ‘our ecological dependencies and the subjective standpoints from which we characterize and respond to what emerges’ (McGreavy, 2016:116).⁹

Within rural studies, a similar reformulation of resilience as fundamentally relational is proposed by Darnhofer et al. (2016) in the context of family farming. Invoking Barad, the authors contend that rethinking resilience away from emphasising structures (farms) or social actors (farmers) towards emphasising relations (farming) ‘enables a stronger integration of the biophysical and social aspects that make up farming’ and puts ‘the ubiquity of change at the centre of attention’ (Darnhofer et al., 2016:113). Scott (2013:600–601), moreover, advances an alternative to bounce-back resilience—associated with a conservative politics that ‘largely ignor[es] distributive and normative concerns in favour of aligning with or reinforcing existing power structures or relations’—in evolutionary or bounce-forward resilience, which entails adaptation and transformation, and is politically progressive or even ‘radical’ in its drive to reform.

That Charles’ narrative of rural resilience remains grounded in a conservative bounce-back plot that rejects both posthuman relationality and radical transformation is clear from his above-cited praise for undoing excesses; his references to maintenance, restoration, and

⁹ See also Åsberg (2014) for a posthuman notion of resilience based on Haraway’s notion of the cyborg.

sustainability (which, like resilience, can imply both a refusal of change and an impulse towards radical reform)¹⁰; and his tying of the rural to Nature with a capital N. This connection between rural resilience and an essentialised, reified concept of Nature is a crucial part of Charles’ paternalistic-conservative politics of the rural, in which resilience, far from signalling a need to work *with(in)* precarious communities to improve their situation, naturalises their dependency upon a rural elite.

For Charles, importantly, the natural and the human are not opposed; non-industrial farming, rather than constituting an incursion upon nature, is compelled by it: ‘The natural beauty of those mountains, lakes and valleys has been shaped by farming, just as much as farming practices have been shaped by the need to extract livelihoods from a harsh and testing environment’ (*Country Life*, 2018:64). This statement should not be mistaken for an iteration of Raymond Williams’ deconstruction of ‘nature as separated from man’ (Williams, 2005:80), hailed as ecological by Giblett (2012). For Williams, ‘when nature is separated from the activities of men, it even ceases to be nature, in any full and effective sense’ (Williams, 2005: 81). However, merely saying that ‘we have mixed our labour with the earth’ and that nature can therefore not be separated from man is not enough, as it does not do justice to the fact that people have done so differently and ‘unequally’ (Williams, 2005:84). Nature and the human come to matter through each other, but there is a clear allocation of responsibility to certain humans, who have the most weight in this intra-action. Agrarian capitalists in particular are held responsible by Williams for ‘dispositioning nature according to their own point of view’ (Giblett, 2012:927). For Barad, too, the nature/culture binary cannot hold, as ‘nature is agential trans-*materiality/trans-matter-reality in its ongoing re (con)figuring’ and, as such, ‘an ongoing deconstructing of naturalness’ (Barad, 2015:411, 412). In the intra-active visions of the co-constitution of nature and culture proposed by Williams and Barad, it matters what matters matter and what matter matters most.

In Charles’ narrative, on the contrary, Nature, in its essential harshness, is seen to prompt its cultivation by humans, who are driven to this by ‘need’. Nature is not (trans)formed in intra-action with humans but seen to come before this intra-action and to naturally prompt certain human actions that, because of this relation, are themselves naturalised and come to share in Nature’s inalienable right to protection from change. This absorption into Nature of the rural (which is reduced to the human, as Charles’ account erases other rural matters such as animals and machines) relies on what Barad would call the constitutive exclusion of nature as agentive, articulate matter that ‘writes, scribbles, experiments, calculates, thinks, breathes, and laughs’ (Barad, 2010:268n11).

Another such constitutive exclusion is established by Charles’ remark that resilience is necessitated by working ‘close to Nature’. This disavows the stories of the culturally and historically specific social and political factors that make life in the British countryside difficult, such as the uneven distribution of economic, social, and cultural capital. It is notable, for instance, that the role of government and EU subsidies in sustaining farming communities remains unmentioned in the editorial, which prefers to ascribe rural resilience to natural factors. In associating resilience with Nature, which Charles elsewhere in the editorial associates with timelessness (see footnote 10), it becomes a structural, eternal condition rather than an active, historically situated ability to respond and adapt to changing circumstances. Charles’ biblical-sounding remark that he is ‘continually struck by [farming communities’] fortitude and ability to overcome trials whether of family tragedy, pestilence or flood’ (*Country Life*, 2018:64) underlines his narrative’s participation in bounce-back resilience’s tendency ‘to

¹⁰ Charles writes: ‘My personal conviction is that we should seek to *maintain* and, where necessary, *restore* a diverse and well-managed countryside’ and refers to ‘the more *timeless* aspects of our natural and human environments, which need to be *maintained* for the benefit of generations yet unborn’ (*Country Life*, 2018:65, emphases added).

depoliticise, normalise or indeed naturalise economic crises ... that are underpinned by human behaviour, institutions, rules and ideologies' (Scott, 2013:600). The disempowering implication is that resilient rural communities should continue to deal with the crises that are seen to come their way naturally, rather than push for social and political changes that might make them less vulnerable or, as McGreavy (2016) advocates, reframe vulnerability as something not inherently positive or negative, but rather standpoint dependent.

The disempowerment of the rural communities designated as resilient is reinforced by Charles' insistence that he is their champion, but not one of them. As such, he establishes what Haraway (2004b:87) describes as 'a political semiotics of representation' in which 'the represented is reduced to the permanent status of the recipient of action, never to be a co-actor in an articulated practice among unlike, but joined, social partners'. In being spoken *about* and, to some extent, *for* by Charles, resilient rural workers are kept from telling their own stories and from having their part in intra-acting country life recognised.

In the editorial, for example, Charles champions the nearly '1000 farming businesses in the lake district and ... those families—because the majority are indeed family farms—who are at the heart of securing the future of this latest World Heritage Site' and suggests that this situation is representative of 'elsewhere in our countryside' (Country Life, 2018:64). As just one counter-example, the rural county of Herefordshire, from which one of us hails, paints a very different picture. A 2017 report found that 'in Herefordshire, intensively-farmed animals outnumber the human population by 88 to one' (Wasley and Davies, 2018). Intensive farms are said to 'blight local communities, subject animals to prolonged distress and push out small producers' (Wasley and Davies, 2018), precisely those whom Charles is exalting. Though purportedly telling the story of small-time farmers, in glossing over the intensive farms they compete with, the rural reality intra-acted by these farmers and the extent of the resilience required of them are not fully accounted for.

Another glaring omission in Charles' story relates to the farm animals that, in Herefordshire and other counties, vastly outnumber humans. Such animals are almost entirely absent from the editorial, an absence cemented when Charles, referencing the 2001 foot-and-mouth outbreak, describes 'pestilence' as a 'trial' faced by 'local people', who are once again praised for 'their fortitude' (Country Life, 2018:64). This ignores the impact of the outbreak on livestock, human factors in the spread of the disease, and the pathogen itself (the picornavirus) as having its own story to tell about the outbreak. In the end, resilient rural workers, farm animals, pathogens, and agricultural technologies and machinery are all subordinated to Charles' royal editorial voice, reduced, in Haraway's terms, to 'the ground of a representational practice that forever authorizes the ventriloquist' to utilise those represented for their own purpose (Haraway, 2004b:87).

But what is Charles' purpose in the editorial? It is clear that as a member of the royal family, the majority of whose wealth is maintained via an inherited private estate, he is not part of those who routinely perform rural labour 'close to Nature'.¹¹ This is a position he shares with most readers of *Country Life*, who are unlikely to be farm workers or even the upland farmers making £10,000 a year mentioned by Hedges. Readers of *Country Life* are more likely to belong to the 'new squirearchy', holding managerial, administrative, or professional positions (Heley, 2010:321). Such readers aspire not to replicate the resilient lives of small-scale farmers, but the influence and leisure and charity pursuits of the landed gentry, of which Charles represents the pinnacle.

¹¹ The ITV documentary series *Prince Charles: Inside the Duchy of Cornwall* (2019) makes clear that the Duchy of Cornwall, which has 'at its core, farmland almost twice the size of Greater London' tended by around 700 tenant farmers, 'is a business worth nearly a billion pounds'. It also shows that Charles' farming activities, on a 1100-acre Gloucestershire farm rented from the Duchy, are restricted to the weekends.

In this regard, it is significant that the editorial, rather than associating resilience, in the manner of neoliberal conservatism, with 'self-reliance' and a 'sink or swim stance' (Scott, 2013:606), portrays it as a quality acquired through labouring 'close to Nature' that nonetheless requires the protection and assistance of those whose material comfort means they themselves do not need to be resilient. Thus, referring to the lack of housing for 'elderly farmers and farm workers', as well as for 'the new entrants who will provide the future of farming', Charles writes: 'Many options are now being explored with other landowners who care about this issue' (Country Life, 2018:64). By presenting himself and these 'other landowners' as holding the key to resolving the issue, any critique of the rural housing crisis as resulting from the inequalities built into the British class system is pre-empted. In the end, the story spun by Charles' editorial, despite its title's assertion that 'the countryside and its people cannot be taken for granted' (Country Life, 2018:63), treats the resilience of rural communities as a given and implicitly calls upon the old aristocracy and new squirearchy (as a form of *noblesse oblige*) to keep resilient rural communities—standing in for the nation at large—in the naturalised position of having to constantly labour and overcome adversity.

The authoritative paternalistic-conservative narrative of 'country life' presented in the editorial under the guise of lauding rural communities for their resilience is one that proposes a "lock-in" development path' (Scott, 2013:601), affirming existing power structures and the exclusions they effect—in this case of those actually working the land, as well as of all non-human rural and natural materialities. What is kept at bay is an understanding of rural resilience as 'emerging from the situated and dynamic entanglement of the ecological and the social' and as needing 'to be constantly re-enacted and performed through nurturing diverse and heterogeneous relations' (Darnhofer et al., 2016:119, 120). In the next section, we turn to the special issue's engagement with rural practices of conservation, which, much like that of the editorial with rural resilience, yields a particular conservative narrative—one that reinforces existing class relations and propagates a xenophobic nationalism.

4. The royal road to conservation

Charles closes the editorial by referencing the threat of environmental collapse and expressing his fear that 'we may be the last generation fortunate enough to experience the wonderful people, skills and activities of our countryside' (Country Life, 2018:65). Given his record as an environmentalist, it is not surprising that the editorial hails 'eco-system services (such as natural flood prevention, carbon sequestration and water catchment management, etc.)' and presents a utopian vision of Britain turning itself into 'the most environmentally friendly food producer' (Country Life, 2018:65). The rest of the special issue ties into this narrative of sustainability and conservation (or, rather, sustainability as conservation) either overtly—through features on the return of the red squirrel, wildflower and wildlife sanctuaries, and the imminent extinction of the curlew—or more obliquely by contrasting London tailors carrying Royal Warrants with 'disposable clothes' (Country Life, 2018:164) and presenting the composer Richard Wagner as a proto-environmentalist (Country Life, 2018:220). In the features explicitly concerned with conservation, both the diagnosis of the problem and the proposed solutions turn out, upon careful reading, to be guided not so much by the interests of the endangered plant and animal species, or even of mankind, as by those of a small rural elite.

Although environmentalism has been dominantly associated with progressive politics, it can be accommodated by certain strains of conservative thought (Wenz, 1986; Dobson, 2000; Pilbeam, 2003). In *A Political Philosophy: Arguments for Conservatism*, Roger Scruton argues that 'conservatism and environmentalism are natural bedfellows' as long as environmentalism is defined as a question of 'trusteeship' and consists of 'husbanding resources' for future generations (Scruton, 2007:34). This ties environmentalism to preserving the status quo or

what Scruton calls ‘social equilibrium’, which includes the perpetuation of the ‘hereditary aristocracy’ (Scruton, 2007:34, 40). While a conservative environmentalism is thus certainly no oxymoron, there are, as Pilbeam (2003:505) points out, elements of conservatism that prevent it from ‘going green’ in a convincing way, of which the ‘most serious’ is its entrenched anthropocentrism—its elevation of man as standing above nature rather than intra-acting with it.

This anthropocentrism manifests in Scruton’s goal to ‘pass on to future generations – and if possible to enhance—the order and equilibrium of which we are the temporary trustees’ (Scruton, 2007:34), which illustrates how an emphasis on order and equilibrium can reconcile conservatism, usually seen as focused on the past (Pilbeam, 2003), with a future-oriented perspective. A concern about the interests of future humans also surfaces in Charles’ editorial, where he notes that, in seeking to sustain rural resilience, ‘we do need to be clear about what we want to achieve, thinking particularly about what will be important to our children and grandchildren’ (Country Life, 2018:64), and in an interview with Charles’ son, William, Duke of Cambridge, who remarks:

We have to work together to leave our planet in a stronger position for future generations, especially by helping communities take ownership of their natural environment and ensuring that they get to reap the benefits from the precious natural resources they have. (Country Life, 2018:124)

While Scruton, Charles, and William all leave some room for change in referring, respectively, to enhancement, achievement, and strengthening, the emphasis nonetheless remains on preserving existing social and human-nature relations. This underscores how ‘invoking the imputed interests of absent generations is a powerful means of limiting change in the present’ (Pilbeam, 2003:500).

In addition, the relations invoked are again not intra-active in Barad’s sense. This is clearest in the way William takes human ‘ownership’ of nature as self-evident: it is ‘our planet’ and this planet needs its position strengthened not for its own sake but for ‘future generations’ of humans. Natural resources are not recognised as something that rural communities are entangled with, but as something they ‘have’—by an implied natural right—and to the ‘benefits’ of which they are therefore entitled. As Barad (2007:233) notes, ‘the presumed radical disjuncture between continuity and discontinuity is the gateway to Man’s stewardship, giving him full knowability and control over nature ... We know this story well, it’s written in our bones, in many ways we inhabit it and it inhabits us’.

The conservative-environmentalist narrative that runs through the special issue of *Country Life* not only adheres to this ingrained story of human superiority, but, as suggested earlier, gives it a nationalistic and paternalistic twist. Charles’ and William’s references to future generations conjure what Benedict Anderson (1998) calls ‘the Unborn’, imagined future generations with no symbolic or social marking save for their nationality, in this case their Britishness.¹² For Anderson (1998:362), ‘it is exactly this monochrome purity that guarantees their Goodness, and that allows them to impose on us obligations that we might resent accepting from’ those alive. The special issue literalises Anderson’s ‘monochrome purity’ into a racialised image of the rural as a space of whiteness: apart from a single small picture of Meghan Markle on her wedding day in an overview of all *Country Life* covers of 2018, no non-white people are pictured.¹³ This suggests that the future generations so caringly invoked by Charles and William may not include all British people. A similarly exclusive nationalism inhabits Scruton’s

¹² Both Braithwaite (2009) and Farndale (2016) assert that *Country Life* espouses a particular construction of Britishness that mostly restricts it to Englishness. In the special issue, too, the majority of features focuses on English rural counties.

¹³ For trenchant critiques of the British countryside’s persistent association with whiteness, see Holloway (2007); Knowles (2008); Neal (2016).

argument that only ‘local—specifically national—loyalty’ or ‘love of country, love of territory and love of that territory as home’ can motivate people to make the sacrifices required to protect the environment (Scruton, 2007:41, 42; Pilbeam, 2003). Scruton’s references to ‘territory’ and to the country (which can be read as referring to both the nation and the countryside) as ‘home’ implicitly excludes immigrants.

The link the special issue forges between rural conservation and a racialised nationalism is reinforced by a feature about the ‘revival’ of the red squirrel that presents the British countryside—and, by implication, the British nation—as a territory that needs to be protected from outsiders who happen to be mainly recognisable by their colour (Country Life, 2018:126). The feature recounts how the red squirrel’s ‘nemesis’, the grey squirrel, was ‘innocently introduced to England in 1876 as an ornamental addition to the landscape’ and had ‘managed to infiltrate [Cornwall] by about 1950’ (Country Life, 2018:126). This exoticises the grey squirrel as something foreign with only ornamental value, and paints it as a deceptive, aggressive invader. The rest of the piece emphasises the animal’s speed (it can cover 10 miles a day), ingenuity (it ‘will swim the Helford rather than risk getting mud on [its] feet’ (Country Life, 2018:126)) and robustness (greys are bigger than reds and spend more time foraging, allowing them to gather more food and outbreed the reds).¹⁴ The most serious charge against the greys is that they are carriers and spreaders but not sufferers of ‘squirrel pox’, which is, without evidence, identified as ‘the major factor in the red’s decline’ (Country Life, 2018:128).¹⁵ The feature thus casts the grey squirrel as having traits that make it practically unstoppable and that are presented as unnatural. As estate owner Sir Ferrers Vyvyan notes: ‘If we think back to a natural world—before farming with chemicals, before greys arrived—it was all symbiotic’. He follows this by positioning the red squirrel as belonging in Britain and, for unstated reasons, promoting environmental sustainability: ‘red squirrels have a place in the continuum of land-sparing—that’s wilding and rewilding, plus biodiversity—and land-sharing, which is about the sustainable intensification of agriculture’ (Country Life, 2018:130). This hyperbolic opposition—authorised not just by Sir Ferrers but also by Charles, who is pictured with a red squirrel at the Balmoral estate and quoted as saying that he lets red squirrels ‘come into the house at Birkhall’—allows the segregation and ‘eradication’ of grey squirrels to be presented as natural and environmentally responsible solutions (Country Life, 2018:130, 128). In Haraway’s terms, as mobilised by Crowley et al. (2018:127), the feature’s storytelling works to mark grey squirrels as ‘killable’ in order to save the red squirrel, which, although in the past also considered a pest, is now cherished because of its link to national identity.

Implicitly, the demonising rhetoric used to describe the grey squirrels resonates with right-wing populist-nationalist anti-immigrant rhetoric, ranging from Enoch Powell’s 1968 ‘rivers of blood’ speech (see Gilroy, 2002:104–108) to the ‘toxic metaphors’ of floods, tsunamis, and swarms used by tabloid newspapers in relation to the so-called 2015 European migration crisis (Shariatmadari, 2015).¹⁶ This link between the protection of the red squirrel and nationalism is rendered overt when it is said of Sir Ferrers that, in the face of rural opposition to the Cornwall Red Squirrel Project (presumably on the grounds that culling amounts to animal cruelty), ‘he hopes to encourage local community pride through the idea that an iconic British species is being saved’ (Country Life, 2018:130). The feature’s overall endorsement of the managed restoration of a ‘natural world’ inhabited exclusively by domestic species and

¹⁴ Gurnell et al.’s (2004:27) empirical study of the effects of the introduction of grey squirrels finds ‘no evidence of interference competition between the adults of the two species’ and little evidence of food competition.

¹⁵ Gurnell et al. (2004) identify the parapoxvirus as a possible contributing factor to the decline of the red squirrel in the UK, but point out that it is not present in Italy, where red squirrels have also been replaced by greys.

¹⁶ This resonance has led animal rights activists to accuse grey squirrel cullers of racism and xenophobia (Lay, 2017).

thus, in Scruton's sense, a proper 'home' free of outsiders, signals its espousal of a nativist conservative politics of the rural that conflates conservation, nationalism, and localism.

The special issue includes two more features focused on rescuing endangered animal and plant species. The first, 'The Power of Flowers', describes the Prince of Wales' Coronation Meadows project, which aims to revive wildflower meadows across the UK. This feature, too, brings together conservation, nationalism, and localism in a conservative frame by emphasising the use of 'natural seeding' to 'preserve [the meadows'] local character and identity' (*Country Life*, 2018:146). In addition, its insistence that 'hay cutting and livestock grazing have to be put in place to ensure the survival of wildflowers into the future' (*Country Life*, 2018:146), reiterates the idea of the countryside as part of a reified Nature highlighted in Charles' editorial. In the presented vision of rural activities and Nature as intertwined, the agents that matter are not the flowers, the grass, the hay cutters, the livestock, or even the farmers, but humans who place themselves above these matters as their stewards and saviours: 'we're now working to ensure that the principles and valuable experiences of Coronation Meadows are supported by future agri-environment funding, so that many more farmers and land managers can create species-rich meadows on a much larger scale' (*Country Life*, 2018:147).

The final conservation-themed feature in the special issue focuses on the decline of the Eurasian curlew (*Numerius arquata*). While acknowledging that many factors contribute to this bird's decline, including 'habitat loss, changes in agricultural practice and increasing forestry', the feature presents fox and crow predation as the main causes, allowing it to suggest hunting—euphemistically called 'legalised predator control'—as the obvious, reasonable solution (*Country Life*, 2018:158). According to the author, an ex-gamekeeper (something that only becomes clear halfway through the feature), not just fox hunting but also shooting will help the curlew, as it 'breed[s] well on upland areas that are managed for grouse shooting' (*Country Life*, 2018:157). Rather than focusing on the plight of the curlew, as would be expected from the three large pictures of curlews accompanying the feature, the narrative instead foregrounds the frustrations of Charles and other hunters about 'the reluctance to accept predator control' and posits hunting as not just a but *the* means of saving the curlew. By downplaying other solutions such as head-starting and land management policies, this feature reaffirms the highly selective conservative, nationalistic, and elitist story of rural conservation told across the special issue, which dovetails with that of rural resilience narrated in the editorial.

5. Conclusions

In the editorial, Charles describes the British countryside as 'a rich tapestry' and insists that 'each article [in the special issue] tells its own story' (*Country Life*, 2018:65). However, his contention that 'we have to find ways to pull the threads together', paired with his claim that 'the unravelling of even a single thread puts the whole fabric under threat' (*Country Life*, 2018:65, 64), already signals his inability or unwillingness to recognise the British countryside as made up of differential patterns and multiple stories, and thus as having many meanings that generate complex and potentially conflicting politics of the rural. As we have shown, the special issue as a whole marginalises or excludes many rural matters in order to present a selective conservative narrative of a resilient rural capable of being conserved through the patronage of the old and new aristocracy, which, as such, themselves come to be positioned as worthy of preservation—for who else will save the countryside?

Charles' insistence on the need to 'pull the threads together' and not let any part of the rural fabric unravel is the opposite of the more speculative approach to complex problems that Haraway refers to as 'string figures' (after the children's game of stretching a circle of string over the fingers of two hands to create various shapes). Such figuring is about picking out and responding to particular threads, in 'their tangles and patterns,' in order to facilitate a 'staying with the trouble in real and

particular times and places' (Haraway, 2016:3). This approach is not about groundless, endless speculation, but about remaining entangled with specific materialities in the hope of 'finding something that works, something consequential and maybe even beautiful, that wasn't there before' (Haraway, 2013). Haraway knows that everything cannot always be pulled together but emphasises that dropping one thread does not necessarily destroy a whole fabric. Fabrics, including that of the rural, can be remade with a difference to become better than they were.

Haraway's figuring is about much more than finding 'common ground' among humans through a paternalistic conservatism in which rural resilience does not empower the human and non-human actors that, in their intra-action, make up the rural, but endorses—even idealises—their continued hardship and dependency on the rural elite. Charles' 'common ground', moreover, as a distinctly British—or, rather, English—ground where only those considered native and their descendants are seen to belong, stands in stark contrast to Haraway's transnational, even transplanetary effort of 'learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth' (Haraway, 2016:2). For Haraway, 'nature is, strictly, a commonplace' (Haraway, 2004a:126) and so, in our view, is the rural; it is a *common* place—and the place of the original *commons*—in that it is shared, by humans and non-humans in a communality that is always in the process of being articulated differentially, as Barad would say. In failing to include the stories of the range of intra-acting agencies that make up the rural, the special issue of *Country Life* neglects to rework what the countryside is or can be. Hedges' claim that *Country Life* 'is not just about an elite' may be true in a superficial sense, given that stories of low-income upland farmers and endangered animal and plant species do make it into the magazine's pages, but is not true in any meaningful way. In the end, these stories, as a result of how and from whose perspective they are told, are made to speak for the old and new aristocracy, whose interests the magazine consistently privileges.

To effectively challenge the conservative-paternalistic politics of the rural propagated in the special issue of *Country Life*, it is vital to grasp, in detail, of what this politics is made up and how it is presented. The veneer of inclusivity and environmental radicalism that has characterised Charles' interventions in rural politics has made these interventions appealing to many. What our analysis has made clear is that, under this veneer, the pro-environmental yet politically conservative vision of the countryside shared by *Country Life* and Charles reproduces rural inequalities and hierarchies for human and non-human agents alike. We have shown how the different components of this exclusionary conservative rural politics link up across the pages of the special issue, in ways that are not always immediately obvious, to make up a coherent narrative of the rural that puts a reactionary slant on concepts like resilience and conservation, which, at first sight, might be taken to signal a more inclusive and progressive politics. This is not to say that these concepts now solely or irreversibly belong to the repertoire of conservatism; as we have tried to show, interpreted differently, they can play an important part in the development of a posthuman politics of the rural drawing on Barad's and Haraway's work, as well as that of rural studies scholars like Whatmore, Jones, Hinchliffe, and Darnhofer. Such a politics would be more attentive to the way the rural is continually remade through the intra-action of many different human and non-human actors, and should be advocated not just in academic circles, but also in popular publications that reach wider audiences.

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