

Nooa Nurmi

**“CAN YOU SEE THOSE DARK CLOUDS
GATHERING UP AHEAD?”**

Metaphors of Apocalypse as Social Commentary in the
Lyrics of Jackson Browne

ABSTRACT

Nooa Nurmi: "Can you see those dark clouds gathering up ahead?" Metaphors of Apocalypse as Social Commentary in the Lyrics of Jackson Browne
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This thesis examines the use of apocalyptic metaphors in the lyric writing of Jackson Browne. There has been relatively little research written about the culturally significant movement of singer-songwriters in Southern California in the 1970s, and this thesis looks at the early work of one of these writers, specifically mapping Browne's use of metaphors as social commentary, as well as the lyrics' connections to the surrounding culture, the American songwriting tradition, and the counterculture of the 1960s. The main question this thesis examines is how the metaphors of apocalypse and flood shift in meaning from song to song, and how this change affects the social commentary of the lyrics.

The thesis focuses on the early stages of Browne's career, specifically his first four albums, focusing primarily on the songs, "Rock Me on the Water" from Browne's eponymous debut album (1972), "Our Lady of the Well", "Colors of the Sun" and "For Everyman" from the album *For Everyman* (1973), "Before the Deluge" and "Farther On" from the album *Late for the Sky* (1974) and "The Fuse" and "The Pretender" from the album *The Pretender* (1976).

Analysis of these lyrics is done with a combination of close reading, which focuses on individual details and their meaning within the text, as well as examination on a larger scale, making connections intertextually and to the wider cultural landscape of the time. These methods enable the examination of how Browne's commentary works within the cultural context of its time and in relation to other texts. The theoretical backdrop of the thesis centers on ecocriticism, using the history of environmental writing and the development of ecocritical thought, which happens somewhat contemporaneously with the early part of Browne's career.

This thesis posits that Browne deliberately uses the same metaphors to describe different extremes and even opposite outcomes, making the metaphors themselves a unifying factor throughout his lyrics. The metaphors consistently combine with the same thematic elements, but shift in viewpoint and meaning considerably, for example moving between optimism and pessimism. The thesis combines these elements with Browne's activist stance visible in the lyrics, which connects Browne's work deeply to the American songwriting tradition.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, consumerism, apocalypse, lyrics

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TIIVISTELMÄ

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Tässä tutkielmassa tarkastellaan maailmanloppua kuvaavien metaforien käyttöä laulaja-laulunkirjoittaja Jackson Brownen sanoituksissa. Kulttuurillisesti merkittävästä 70-luvun Etelä-Kalifornian laulunkirjoittajien teoksista on kirjoitettu suhteellisesti vähän tutkimusta ja tämän tutkielman tarkoituksena on kartoittaa Brownen metaforien käyttöä sosiaalisena kommentaarina, sekä tekstien yhteyttä ympäröivään kulttuuriin ja amerikkalaiseen laulunkirjoittamisen perinteeseen sekä 60-luvun vastakulttuuriin. Tutkielman ydinkysymyksenä on, kuinka maailmanlopun ja tulvan metaforat muuttuvat kappaleesta toiseen Brownen uran alkupään levyillä, ja miten nämä muuttuvat merkitykset vaikuttavat Brownen kappaleissa olennaiseen sosiaaliseen kommentaariin.

Tutkielma keskittyy Brownen uran alkuun, josta aineistoksi valikoitui erityisesti tekstejä hänen ensimmäisiltä neljältä levyltään. Valikoidut kappaleet ovat: "Rock Me on the Water" (suom. keinuta minua vedessä) Brownen nimeä kantavalta ensimmäiseltä levyltä (1972), "Our Lady of the Well" (suom. kaivomme valtiatar), "Colors of the Sun" (suom. auringon värit) ja "For Everyman" (suom. jokamiehelle) albumilta For Everyman (1973), "Before the Deluge" (suom. ennen tulvaa) ja "Farther On" (suom. kauempana) albumilta Late for the Sky (suom. myöhässä taivaasta) (1974) sekä "The Fuse" (suom. sytytyslanka) ja "The Pretender" (suom. teeskentelijä) albumilta The Pretender (1976).

Lyriikoiden analysoinnissa menetelmänä käytetään sekä lähilukua, joka keskittyy yksittäisistä teksteistä löytyviin yksityiskohtiin ja niiden merkityksiin tekstin sisällä, sekä kokonaiskuvan kartoitusta, jossa muodostetaan yhteyksiä tekstien välille ja liitetään niitä aikakautensa laajempaan kontekstiin. Näiden menetelmien kautta voidaan tarkastella kokonaiskuvaa siitä, miten Brownen kommentaari vaikuttaa aikansa kontekstissa ja muodostaa suurempia kokonaisuuksia tekstien välillä. Tekstien merkityksellisyyttä teoreettiselta kannalta tutkielma käsittelee ekokritiikin kautta hyödyntäen ympäristökirjallisuuden historiaa ja ekokriittisen ajattelun kehitystä, joka tapahtuu osittain samanaikaisesti Brownen uran alun kanssa. Tutkielma yhdistää Brownen lyriikoista välittyvän viestin syväekologiseen teoriaan, joka painottaa ihmisen yhteyttä luonnolliseen maailmaan sekä tarvetta muuttaa ihmisten suhdetta luontoon.

Tutkielma esittää, että Browne käyttää tarkoituksellisesti samoja kielikuvia kuvaamaan erilaisia ääripäitä ja jopa vastakohtia, joka tekee itse metaforista yhtenäistävän tekijän lyriikoiden välillä. Metaforiin yhdistyy jatkuvasti samat teemat jokaisessa lyriikassa, mutta lyriikoissa ilmaistu näkökulma vaihtelee huomattavasti esimerkiksi optimismin ja pessimismin välillä, joka on nähtävillä metaforien käytössä. Tutkielma yhdistää Brownen kommentaarin näiden metaforien kautta myös aktivismiin, joka on näkyvillä lyriikoissa, ja sitä myötä amerikkalaisen laulunkirjoittamisen vanhaan protestilaulujen perinteeseen.

Avainsanat: Ekokritiikki, kuluttaminen, maailmanloppu, sanoitukset

Tämän julkaisun alkuperäisyys on tarkastettu Turnitin Originality Check -ohjelmalla.

Table of Contents:

Abstract

Tiivistelmä

<u>1. Introduction</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>2. Ecocriticism</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>3. Apocalypse, Time, and Change</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>4. Consumerism</u>	<u>11</u>
<u>5. “Wooden Ships” or: Waiting for Everyman</u>	<u>14</u>
<u>6. Conclusion</u>	<u>16</u>
<u>Bibliography</u>	<u>17</u>

1. INTRODUCTION

W.H. Auden writes: “the sea, in fact, is the state of barbaric vagueness and disorder out of which civilization has emerged and into which, unless saved by the efforts of gods and men, it is always liable to relapse.” (6) This idea of the sea as an ever-looming possibility of the end times of our civilization is a defining feature of the discourse of the past half-century. The myths and stories of floods and rising waters are as old as civilization itself, from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* to the deluge depicted in the Book of Genesis, but the collective realisation of humanity’s impact on the Earth we live on has made the past decades particularly focused on the way in which our actions and inaction might come back to haunt us. A place where the themes of flood and deluge have a particularly strong current is the song writing traditions of North America, beginning to significantly gain traction in the aftermath of the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927, with songs such as “When the Levee Breaks” by Memphis Minnie and Kansas Joe McCoy and “High Water Everywhere” by Charley Patton centring around the event. The imagery of floods and deluge is moved beyond the depictions of actual events to the realm of metaphor to describe and predict a coming cataclysm as well as serving as social commentary by singer-songwriters of the 1960s and 70s like Bob Dylan with lyrics such as “A Hard Rain’s a-Gonna Fall”, and Jackson Browne throughout his early discography and perhaps most poignantly in his song “Before the Deluge”.

The historical viewpoint of floods in American song writing is itself tied to social commentary, as the writers who adapted the experiences of the flood in 1927 into songs in the blues tradition were overwhelmingly African American, the community which also suffered loss of life that was grossly understated, as the authorities counting the number of perished did not consider the African American bodies “important, so most were not included in the official toll”. (Mizelle, 8-9) The fact of the white-supremacist society from which these songs arose, inevitably ties all writing about the event to social commentary, and more specifically commentary on the position of African American people in the Jim Crow era society, a cause which is thoroughly represented in the work of Bob Dylan. Various songs from Dylan’s discography are directly influenced by the Mississippi flood of 1927 and the tradition surrounding it, as mentioned by Leeder and Wells: “Beneath each of Dylan’s flood songs there is a face from this tradition: behind ‘Down in the Flood’ there is Rabbit Brown; behind ‘High Water’ there is Charley Patton; behind ‘The Levee’s Gonna Break’ there is Memphis Minnie. Each of these singers was influenced by the 1927 Mississippi flood, and their musical form, the blues, was rooted in the historical realities of American slavery.” (224) However, Dylan’s use of the flood exceeds the connections to reality and stretches extensively to being used

as metaphor. His song “A Hard Rain’s a-Gonna Fall”, as Beebee points out, famously became a metaphor for the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, though in reality the song was written before the event and is a more straightforward, biblical apocalypse metaphor in the vein of the flood in the Book of Genesis, commenting on the direction society is heading in Dylan’s view (Beebee, 23). This is where the connection leads to Jackson Browne, who was greatly influenced by the lyric writing of Bob Dylan, as he himself has stated in an interview ahead of the MusiCares Person of the Year tribute concert honouring Dylan: “Well, you know, Bob Dylan has always been there, from the time I was about fourteen, Bob Dylan kind of changed everything right around that time. I went to go see him when I was fifteen at the Santa Monica Civic [Auditorium], so I’ve been listening to him pretty much my whole life.” (00:05-00:23)

Browne is of particular interest to me, as I feel his commentary on society and culture combines uniquely with the metaphors of flood and apocalypse to create a lasting impression on the reader/hearer and that is what this thesis will be focusing on. I believe that Browne’s use of the themes of apocalypse and flooding consistently in his lyrics rises from the ideas of environmentalism gathering speed in the culture surrounding his first four albums and combines with the optimism of the late 60s idealistic view of a better society, followed by the fall to hedonism and elitism as the 1970s went on and Browne saw ideas and beliefs around him develop further away from the ideals they had shared in the late 1960s. The ideas of environmentalism that arise in the latter half of the 20th century and partly inspire Browne to use this imagery, also combine into the field of ecocriticism as a viewpoint for looking at literature. Viewing Browne’s work through the lens of ecology and ecocritical thought, which centres on the exploration of how humanity relates to the natural world and environment within culture, opens up a new dimension of his work that gives context and further meaning to his commentary on social and environmental issues. The particular moment of cultural history that shapes Browne’s early work, that of late 60s and early 70s Southern California and the group of singer-songwriters in and around Laurel Canyon, has received some analysis, though relatively little in academia compared to their cultural impact at the time. Their impact, despite its significance in terms of music and culture, was in hindsight politically insignificant due to the rifts in ideals that appear as the 1970s progress. Browne also catalogues these rifts by shifting the meaning behind his metaphors and growing more and more pessimistic.

Because of this ambiguity of meanings for the metaphors in Browne’s lyrics, they can be hard to pin down to a single definition. A simple definition for an apocalypse is some kind of cataclysmic event that profoundly changes life on Earth and the ways in which society organises itself, while simultaneously revealing something new, as characterised by Hernandez:

In the popular contemporary imagination, the word apocalypse...has become synonymous to end of times, straying away from its original etymology. In Greek, the meaning of apocalypse is: to uncover, to reveal what had been concealed. Nevertheless, revelation and end of times are not mutually exclusive. (vii)

Browne certainly works with this definition in some of his lyrics, as for example in “Before the Deluge”, where he describes a destructive flood that changes society in a meaningful way but does not end humanity in its entirety. He uses this imagery to great effect to comment on the flaws that he sees in society, as well as the fall away from the ideals of the 1960s that he still holds. Another interpretation of what an apocalypse can mean that is seen in Browne’s other work is the idea of a flood being cataclysmic, but also being cleansing as in the sense of the biblical flood, as something like a revolution that changes the perspectives of people and changes the attitudes and structures within society. The chorus of “Before the Deluge”, leaves the reader with a sense of hope in the future even after depicting an ecological catastrophe brought on by humanity: “Now let the music keep our spirits high / Let the buildings keep our children dry / Let creation reveal its secrets by and by, by and by / When the light that's lost within us reaches the sky”. (ll. 38-41) The theme of lamenting a loss of something, driven here by the metaphor of an apocalypse, with seeming desperation yet holding on to hope of something better to come is a constant in the lyric writing of Browne: for example in the song “Farther On” he strikes a similar note with “the vision of paradise contained in the light of the past” and still moving on with a “faith in the distance”. Something has been lost to the past, but a sense of survival and need to move onwards remains, with a belief that something promising will be beyond the horizon, which is a relatively common theme in the vast history of apocalypse myths. These developments in his work and their contexts are why I want to explore Browne’s writing from an ecocritical viewpoint along with the specific metaphors of apocalypse and flood, which shift in meaning throughout Browne’s discography.

The approach to the imagery of climate apocalypse is something that appears recurringly and varies in tone in Browne’s writing, though most examples are far subtler than “Before the Deluge”. The song “Rock Me on the Water” starts with a warning of what is to come along with a poignant jeer aimed at those who do not seem to care about what is happening to the environment: “Oh people, look around you / The signs are everywhere / You’ve left it for somebody other than you / To be the one to care” (ll. 1-4). Brownstein makes an intertextual chronological connection within Browne’s work, specifically connecting the songs “Rock Me on the Water”, “For Everyman” and “Before the Deluge” from his first three albums respectively as key points of contemplation via “biblical images of social and/or environmental disintegration” (660). He calls

the three songs Browne's "apocalypse triptych, his attempt to measure what from the 1960s could be saved in the grinding environment of the 1970s." (660) Looking at the three songs separately, Brownstein argues that a timeline of developing pessimism within Browne can be mapped with these lyrics: "The song ['Rock Me on the Water'] is less a lament than a call to arms" (661). This idea of "Rock Me on the Water" being a song of lingering 60s optimism follows through to "For Everyman", in which Browne describes friends planning to leave society behind but is not ready to abandon the "Everyman", who he believes can be won over to make change happen. Finishing off the "triptych" is the unavoidable doom of "Before the Deluge" which, as Brownstein puts it: "offered less chance of renewal or even escape" (664). These three songs in connection with "The Fuse" and "The Pretender" from *The Pretender* catalogue his use of the themes of climate and apocalypse to make his critique more poignant.

2. ECOCRITICISM

When interviewed by the author Ronald Brownstein, Browne recalled the beginning of his interest in environmental ideas: “Browne remembers being affected by a pamphlet called *Eco-Catastrophe*, by Stanford biologist Paul Ehrlich... Ehrlich’s influence was evident in Browne’s gloomy prediction to Cameron Crowe in the spring of 1974: ‘I think it’s all over... When do I think it’s all gonna come down? Seventies, Eighties, Nineties, it doesn’t matter.’” (663) Ehrlich’s ideas revolved around the fact that the earth could not generate enough resources for the growing population. This connection is a window into why it is both important and interesting to look at Browne’s work from a viewpoint of ecocriticism.

As Garrard writes in his book on ecocriticism, “the widest definition of the subject of ecocriticism is the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human, throughout human cultural history” (5). Ecocriticism as a literary or cultural discipline looks at the culture that is being produced through the lens of how it describes or views our relationship with the non-human and with nature. The viewpoint of ecocriticism ranges from studying Romantic portrayals of nature by the likes of Wordsworth and Coleridge and how their politics surrounding a search for liberty is present in their descriptions of the natural world, to the last century of nature writing in popular culture which seems to focus on the environmental decay that the progress of humanity has caused. The relevance that ecocriticism holds regarding this thesis leans on the latter of those two examples, though the presence of the political in connection with the natural is of importance as well. (Bate 19; Bennett and Royle 146)

The facet of ecocritical thought that most poignantly ties into Browne’s writing is deep ecology. Deep ecology in essence is the idea that the relationship between humanity and the non-human needs to be rethought and radically changed through policy from the current perspective of anthropocentrism to one that is based on the idea of the intrinsic value of all life, rather than just humans as characterised by Bennett and Royle:

For deep ecologists, it is a matter of new ways of thinking about our relationship with the world, a new ethics and politics that will challenge the instrumentalist view that the world is and should be available for human exploitation. (146)

This thought ties into Browne’s work strongly, as he often highlights the benefits of a life close to nature, rather than one of industry and technology. The revolutions in terms of technology have led to an increase in production, which in turn has led to an increase in consumption and the rise of

consumerism, the idea that material wealth is an ultimate goal and that the increase in both consumption and production is desirable. Increasing consumption has been accompanied by the growing prevalence of the idea that the natural world is there for humanity's sake and available for exploitation. The growth of the ideas of deep ecology can be seen as being born out of Rachel Carson's significant book *Silent Spring* from 1962 as Drengson and Devall point out:

Carson showed the need for deep changes in our practices and ways of living. Mainstream politicians and other people acknowledged that there are problems, but they believed we only need mild reforms and improved technology to solve them. (50)

In the same article Drengson and Devall also show that the development in ideas also coincides with Browne's career and his cultural surroundings: "The 1960s was a decade of vigorous social activism in the United States... Some activism focused on war and peace and the issue of nuclear weapons." (51) Browne focuses his material to consider all of the above and combines those considerations with a deep criticism of the system he lives in and asks the same questions that Drengson and Devall see as the big questions regarding society:

In our complex social systems our basic values, choices, and priorities determine how the whole system develops and what its effects are. Thus, those calling for basic changes challenged us to ask deep questions about why and how we act as we do. What are our ultimate values? What do we live for? How do we realize our highest ends? What means shall we adopt to realize these aims? (51)

In combining these questions with his own outlook and criticisms Browne goes beyond the mainstream view of acknowledging issues but refusing overwhelming change to address them: instead, he aims to use his voice to advance the change that might not be convenient, but which is in his view necessary.

Tying into the anti-consumerist view Browne presents, along with the deep ecology point of finding sustainable and respecting ways to connect with the environment rather than exploit it, a social-ecological view comes into play. Browne's ideas seem to also correspond with social ecology as summed up by Garrard: "the positions discussed here do not suggest that environmental problems are caused by anthropocentric attitudes alone, but follow from systems of domination or exploitation of humans by other humans" (31). Criticising the exploitation which is integral to the systems of mass consumption is something that goes hand in hand with Browne's critique of the phenomenon of consumption itself along with its consequences for humanity. Browne criticises the elements of culture and society that are most harmful in terms of furthering climate change in mass production and consumption, while simultaneously making a point of separating the corporations and people who forge the earth's beauty into power, from people who are simply born into a society

demanding a nine-to-five existence and are pressured to consume; the Pretender and the Everyman. These figures are essential to understanding Browne's criticisms of culture and society, as they appear in his most poignant moments of commentary. They represent the lives and interests of the average person rather than Browne's own view from a position of relative privilege. The theme of decay within and by society is central in ecocritical discussions, such as questions of whether progress can truly be called progress if it has such far reaching consequences (Garrard 108). The same themes appear equally strongly in Browne's work, as his position in the chronology of the 1960s counterculture is one of apparently arriving late for something which has been enjoyed by those before him and partially by his contemporaries, but which is fading fast by the early 1970s when his first albums are released.

3. APOCALYPSE, TIME, AND CHANGE

Breaking through onto the Los Angeles music scene in the early 1970s, Browne acts as a chronicler of sorts, mapping the disintegration of the values of the 60s and the idea that the singer-songwriter progressives of Laurel Canyon could bring about their utopia by using their gained influence to affect how culture develops and which direction society will head in. The “vision of paradise” as Browne describes it in his 1974 song “Farther On”, is lost by some of his contemporaries who once held the ideals of the 1960s counterculture as dear as he still does. Bruce Springsteen spoke of this fall in his speech inducting Browne to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2004: “In 70s post-Vietnam America there was no album that captured the fall from Eden, the long slow afterburn of the 60s, its heartbreak, its disappointments, its spent possibilities better than Jackson’s masterpiece *Late for the Sky*.” The promises and dreams of the 60s failed to materialise and, as the Laurel Canyon superstars became financially well off and older, the mood changed, as Hoskyns writes: “‘The Sixties’ were finally over.” (188) This is exactly the sentiment that Browne records when describing the fall from grace of the youthful dreamers and fools, making plans to return to nature and turning to each other’s hearts for refuge in the very first verse of “Before the Deluge” on *Late for the Sky*. As the song progresses the young would-be revolutionaries take off on their “brave and crazy wings of youth” and leave to face the world, which inevitably wears down their wings, until their “feathers once so fine grew torn and tattered”. In the end, having traded their wings for “the glitter and the rouge”, the ideals of the 60s and the spirit of significant social reform has faded, and in a way, the counterculture’s biggest supporters have turned into what they spent years campaigning against, and have settled for the status quo. Hoskyns writes poignantly: “for all the egalitarianism they’d espoused in the 60s, they were now distant stars like the silver-screen idols whose old mansions they were buying.” (240)

In the first verse of “Before the Deluge” Browne alludes to the degradation and the fall from grace he is seeing with the lines: “While the sand slipped through the opening / And their hands reached for the golden ring” (ll. 7-8) Browne is using the image of an hourglass, of sand slipping away while people reach for the “golden ring” to attain all that they can, a very different goal compared to the ones they had all shared in the 60s. The theme of time going by, perhaps quicker than anticipated, is a constant in Browne’s writing, but here he uses it specifically as a kind of doomsday clock, a timer running towards the deluge. Once the timer has run out, the dream of achieving the changes he wants and that they all once wanted and thought possible through activism with his contemporaries is gone. Browne ties these disappointments into the image of a flood, the

deluge, which has swept through the counterculture so that “When the sand was gone and the time arrived / In the naked dawn only a few survived” (ll. 32-33).

As the 70s progressed, Browne’s view of society and culture got bleaker and more pessimistic. In 1976 Browne released his fifth album, *The Pretender*, on which he continues contemplating the themes of time and change, or the lack thereof. On the title track, which Mark Bego in his book calls “perhaps Jackson’s most focused song of pessimism about society” (95) Browne directly questions what happened to the ideals of the 60s: “I want to know what became of the changes / We waited for love to bring / Were they only the fitful dreams / Of some greater awakening?” (ll. 10-13) In Brownstein’s book, Browne reflects on this set of lyrics and says: “I’ve always been trying to express... the idea of arriving someplace with more purpose than we have had in the past. So, if I was talking about something that was burning out or flickering, it was people’s hopes or ideals. But you don’t give up on that kind of thing.” (666) Once again Browne ends up with a note of optimism, even concerning perhaps his most pessimistic lyric. The things that the deluge might have seemingly drowned out can still survive elsewhere.

On the opening track of *The Pretender*, “The Fuse”, Browne engages again with the idea of time. As the title of the song suggests, Browne finds that time is fleeting and that his youth is gone:

And the years that I spent lost in the mystery
 Fall away leaving only the sound of the drum...
 Whatever it is you might think you have
 You have nothing to lose
 Through every dead and living thing
 Time runs like a fuse (ll. 9-10, 17-20)

But he also notes that he cannot part with those goals and aspirations that some have abandoned:

Like a part of me
 It speaks to the heart of me
 Forget what life used to be
 You are what you choose to be
 It's whatever it is you see
 That life will become (ll. 11-16)

In many of the songs mentioned above, Browne ties the theme of time and change, whether it be degradation or progress, to the image of a flood. Sometimes the flood is destruction, and in some cases, it is the sign of something good happening, but it seems to be revelatory in some way in all of the examples. In “Before the Deluge” the flood is a destructive, apocalyptic event but in the final verse of “The Fuse” he turns the metaphor into the opposite. Here Browne puts into words his

incredulity over the suffering and trouble that exist in the world even with economic prosperity common elsewhere, but he ends the song on a note of optimism and belief, which are brought by something cataclysmic. He describes the oppressive infrastructure and systems that are in place to concentrate wealth rather than help those who need it, as collapsing and falling to pieces, and he is going to be a part of it and be there to see it happen:

I want to say right now I'm going to be around
 I'm going to be around
 When the walls and towers are crumbling
 When the towers are tumbling down
 And I will tune my spirit to the gentle sound
 I want to hear the sound
 Of the waters lapping on a higher ground
 Of the children laughing (ll. 35-42)

This flood, unlike the one in “Before the Deluge” has left the world better than before and the image of “people starving still” has morphed into children laughing. The metaphor of the apocalypse offers two completely juxtaposed scenes in the songs “Before the Deluge” and “The Fuse”, and the image of the flood moves from one of destruction to one of redemption in the space of two years in the chronology of Browne’s career. The deeper message behind the use of the imagery however stays constant throughout, the systems and structures within society that Browne sees as harmful to both people and the environment, those of mass consumption and production fuelled in large part by corporate greed. They are the same systems that are causing devastation in “Before the Deluge” and the same structures that crumble at the end of “The Fuse”.

4. CONSUMERISM

What Browne hopes will be drowned in the flood of “The Fuse” is a greed of huge proportions, which leads to concentrated wealth on one hand while people starve on the other. Fuelling this kind of greed, that of corporations and billionaires, is the culture of consumption and ownership that society has adopted. Browne writes extensively about what impact these consumeristic ideals have on people both on a personal level and on the whole of humanity as well as by extension the environment. In “Our Lady of the Well” from the album *For Everyman* (1973), Browne imagines an idyllic and rustic existence of working the land and living off of it, and then cuts away to reality:

Oh it's so far the other way
My country's gone
Across my home has grown the shadow
Of a cruel and senseless hand
Though in some strong hearts
The love and truth remain (ll. 14-19)

A cruel and senseless hand, evokes the idea of the invisible hand of the market, moving a free market economy, a concept based on the idea of everyone’s own self-interest being the best thing for society and progress. This line of thinking originates in the writings of Adam Smith in the 1700s, described by Basu in his book: “Smith’s novel theory was that the free market system is like an invisible hand that can unobtrusively coordinate the behavior of a multitude of individuals, interested only in maximizing their own selfish utility, so as to bring about efficiency and a socially optimal outcome.” (28) Browne presents a strong opposition to this way of thinking, which is vindicated by economic study, as is pointed out by de Soysa and Vadlamannati: “Many contemporary social scientists argue, as did Karl Marx over a century ago, that free-market capitalism, even if progressive in terms of creating wealth, is a cause of inequality and inequity within societies.” Browne’s view is clear, that this is the idea that leads ultimately to the steep wealth inequality and the greed of an inherently consumerist society which he criticises.

In the very next track on *For Everyman*, “Colors of the Sun”, Browne tells us what that greed leads to: “Dying men draw numbers in the air / Dream to conquer little bits of time / Scuffle with the crowd to get their share / And fall behind their little bits of time”. People end up spending their limited time struggling with those around them to get their share, while falling behind in their own lives. A society driven by consumption above all else is detrimental to all participants, except those that are benefiting from and therefore perpetuating the culture of

materialism and consumerism, those who turn profits from the struggles of the Everyman. Browne's deepest point of pessimism showcases another character whose life is impacted by the societal drives that are detrimental to the Everyman. "The Pretender" is where his strongest show of contempt for a consumerist society can be read. The changes he was waiting for have not appeared and Browne depicts this frustration as a description of a blue-collar life in a society based on spending. Every morning Browne, speaking as the Pretender, packs his lunch and goes to work, and in the evening comes home and lays down. "And when the morning light comes streaming in / I'll get up and do it again" (ll. 7-8). Being caught in a cycle of nothing more to life than packed lunches and work, he puts into words his conflict, "Caught between the longing for love / And the struggle for the legal tender" (ll. 18-19), returning to the idea that the Pretender is in the world to struggle for money with others, like the Everyman. Like the Everyman, who waits while everyone else is ready to leave, the Pretender also watches, as rising water takes away something he could have gained in an ideal world: "While the ships bearing their dreams / Sail out of sight" (ll. 33-34). In this instance the water is again something that keeps the dreams of the average person unattainable to them, while perhaps for the people who have the means have their dreams within reach.

Browne's Pretender is caught in the life of an ideal consumer, ideal for those that manufacture and profit most from the culture of consumption:

I'm gonna be a happy idiot
 And struggle for the legal tender
 Where the ads take aim and lay their claim
 To the heart and the soul of the spender
 And believe in whatever may lie
 In those things that money can buy
 Where true love could have been a contender. (ll. 44-50)

The incoming stream of ads overwhelms every sense in order to make the consumer consume even more, laying its claim to the heart and the soul, when love and the ideals of the 60s that Browne holds close could have competed and helped break away from greed to help a greater cause. He also connects the Pretender to all of his other characters who have lost something with the passing of time: "Are you there? Say a prayer for the pretender / Who started out so young and strong only to surrender" (ll. 51-52). Like the people of "Before the Deluge" who trade their youthful wings for glitter and rouge, the Pretender started off young with ideals and values of his own, only to fall victim to the culture of consumerism and surrender to the struggle for legal tender.

All of the criticism aimed at consumerism and society basing itself on supply and demand ultimately ties into an ecocritical viewpoint. The fact is that increasing consumption

increases production, and this is a part of why Browne's work combines the themes of consumerism with ecological consequences and outcomes that are detrimental to the environment. Consumerism and a culture of materialism spends exponentially more of the resources of the planet than are available without causing irreversible damage to the planet. This also leads into the reason Browne spends a lot of time drawing parallels and tying together the imagery of consumerism with the apocalypse, which are clearly and importantly interlinked, to the image and character of the Everyman and the Pretender, the epitome of the blue-collar worker. This connection is vital to Browne, as he feels he should use his position of fame and power for good in the form of activism in an effort to win over the average person, in order to make a difference in the grand scheme of fighting climate change. In "For Everyman" Browne emphasises his viewpoint, that as a person in a position of visibility he should be doing everything he can to use that position in order to further a shift towards a more sustainable future, and to do that he believes he needs to engage in activism both in his songs and outside of them. This view was not shared by all of his contemporaries at the time, most notably the folk trio Crosby, Stills and Nash provided an opposite view, to which "For Everyman" is a direct response.

5. “WOODEN SHIPS” OR: WAITING FOR EVERYMAN

“For Everyman” starts with a reference to people waiting for an apocalypse. The song is a direct response to the premise of the late 60s song “Wooden Ships” by Browne’s contemporaries and close collaborators Crosby, Stills and Nash, in which they imagine a future where the enlightened among society depart on ships to leave wider society behind and end up watching horrific events unfold on the shore from aboard their boats, before they sail away “free and easy”. Browne addresses this idea on multiple occasions in his writing. In “For Everyman” he opens with, “Everybody I talk to is ready to leave / With the light of the morning / They’ve seen the end coming down long enough to believe / That they’ve heard their last warning”. (ll. 1-4) This allusion to people waiting for an apocalypse is a further example of how the idea of society being close to the end was common in the circles surrounding Browne in the Los Angeles canyons, but also how they had different views on how the problems are to be solved and whether it is easier to just leave society behind. Browne is clearly on the side of activism and reaching out to people to tell them where society is taking missteps, whereas Crosby wants to gather his group and leave, as Hoskyns puts it: “Passionately intelligent but selfishly hedonistic, Crosby couldn’t make up his mind whether to tune in or drop out.” (102) In his live version of the song on the album *Solo Acoustic vol. 1* Browne makes a clear connection between the songs “For Everyman” and “Wooden Ships” by stating: “This is a song that I wrote having spent some time with some people who were planning to sail away. And they had the boats to do it in... I won’t say they knew what they were doing, but they had a plan.”

The title of the song “For Everyman”, which is also the title of the album, encompasses the idea that Browne is watching what he believes to be society heading in a direction that will end in disaster for both society and the planet. In the lyric he emphasises the point that he has always envisioned something other than what a capitalist and consumerist society has to offer, and portrays the ideas and ideals of the 1960s love and peace philosophies:

Seems like I've always been looking for some other place
To get it together
Where with a few of my friends I could give up the race
And maybe find something better
But all my fine dreams
Well thought out schemes to gain the motherland
Have all eventually come down to waiting for Everyman. (ll. 9-15)

By “waiting for Everyman” Browne means that he is waiting for the majority of society, the average “blue-collar” or working-class American, to catch on to what he is saying and thinking, and that

change cannot happen without the “Everyman” being on board. This can be read as a rebuke to what Hoskyns calls Crosby’s “elitist escapism” in “Wooden Ships” (102). Another allusion to “Wooden Ships” can be found in “The Pretender” as Browne once again speaks of the everyman average American being left behind to “choose off and fight / And tear at the world with all their might / While the ships bearing their dreams / Sail out of sight” (ll. 31-34), depicting the scenario Crosby tells of in “Wooden Ships” instead of Browne’s own view of bettering the world via activism and using his position and stature. Browne is quick to reject the option of abandoning society to form a kind of commune for only the enlightened and, more importantly, those with adequate means: “that was all well and good”, Browne would answer in response to Crosby, “but what about everyone who couldn’t afford a yacht?” (Brownstein, 661) There is also an element of apocalypse involved in all references to ships and departing on the waves, as thematically the image can very easily be connected to an ark like in the biblical flood story, departing with the ones who had foresight enough to see the deluge coming. This reinforces the idea that there is hope for humanity that is present in Browne’s writing in even the direst depictions of apocalypse as there are still people who survive the disaster on their ships.

6. CONCLUSION

Jackson Browne's lyric writing has certain themes and ideas that he circulates throughout his discography, as is apparent by this look into just his first four albums. The themes that appear as constants are those of time, change, consumerism, materialism, and activism. The themes are often discussed in separate songs by Browne but are interconnected through references to shared imagery. The metaphors of flood and apocalypse are used throughout Browne's work to connect different themes together, and used in different ways to indicate differences in what Browne is saying with his lyrics. The flood of "Before the Deluge" is drastically different to the high water of "The Fuse". A key similarity however that binds together Browne's image of the flood across his work is his goal, the point of his art. Whether he is trying to warn us of impending environmental disaster or telling us a flood is what will "wash this planet clean", his goal is always that of trying to convince the average person, the regular citizen, that there is work to be done and that progress can be achieved. Browne's ultimate aim is to impact the world positively via activism, the platform for which is his art. The apocalypse is what Browne sees happening unless some action is taken, and that requires the help of the Everyman, but Browne also sees it as somewhat of an inevitability. A pessimism which is sometimes overwhelmingly felt in his lyrics, but the note of optimism, of survival and children laughing is always there in the end. Tying the image of the apocalyptic flood to multiple very different sentiments almost simultaneously, but never changing the core of his message is what makes Browne's work closely tied to literary tradition, specifically the tradition of American song writing as well as social activism, and it ties Browne's work deeply to the ecocritical point of view.

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