JOHN CLARE: HELPSTON'S AMANUENSIS

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2013

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the
Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the
dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

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This dissertation elucidates the ways in which John Clare's relationship to his native environment impacts his poetic philosophy and practice. In order to take up this question, I establish how Clare's environmental engagements influence aspects of his poetic process, including his tasteful witnessing of sources, mimicry of and correspondence with sources, transcription of sources, and composition. I describe and theorize Clare's documentary poetics, which offers a viable way of interacting with nature by listening to, recording, and composing sound. I also identify some of the literary strategies Clare uses to give voice to nature, including the compositional method *sono-loco-documentation*. Lastly, I articulate Clare's "trifling" aesthetic sensibility in order to examine his strategic empowerment of rural obscurity, which seeks to establish original centers of poetic value and to demonstrate specific behaviors of critical appreciation.

As documentary catalogs of sounds and sights, Clare's poems model a poetic natural history over against Romantic genius. This external captivation revises traditional ideas about the Romantic poet. Clare's work of witness, documentation, and testimony presents a new aesthetic in which the speaker's subjectivity is elided or set aside as a function of broadcasting the voices within nature. This bottom-up (or outside-in) aesthetic advocates for the rights of the [enclosed] land, landless dwellers, nature's "trifles," and the "rhyming peasant."

Sound plays a marked role in Clare's identification with his environment. His innovation is to treat sound exchange literally in his poems and use it as a symbol of literary and artistic exchange and evaluation. Thus, his poetic process is characterized by a participatory relation that is auditory, egalitarian, and collaborative. His self-perceived task is to witness and transcribe nature's transmissions; he is Helpston's amanuensis. This framing trope produces an artificial effect (i.e., the absence of, or self-restraint by, a human bard), but it also allows for creative treatment of the loco-descriptive and pastoral modes according to new centers of lyrical value (e.g., rural labor, non-human lives, geographical locus, and aurality).

The personification of non-humans represents certain political and ecological attitudes, but Clare extends personhood because it is an effective literary stratagem that accentuates both individuals and the community of Helpston and because it creates a powerful and eccentric source of interest (which trades in pleasurable, copious sounds). The conceit of a vocal nature forges a compelling, basic, and unassailable symbol of the poet. When every thing sings, certainly we must listen.

To Paul

Acknowledgments

This dissertation would not exist if it were not for the many heads and hearts that contributed to my efforts. I gratefully and humbly acknowledge:

Paul DiGasbarro, my husband, for his vital and trustworthy advice, material support, loving patience, and humor.

Valerie Derbyshire, my mother, for her constant conversation, pep talks, and her strength.

Richard Derbyshire, my father, for his unfailing moral support and quiet confidence.

Richard Derbyshire, my twin brother, for his levity and calming wisdom.

Alan Vardy, my adviser and teacher, who first introduced me to Clare, guided my inquiry, helped to improve my writing by his incisive comments, and showed me what is possible.

Nancy Yousef, my committee member and teacher, who has shared a keen and helpful point of view and given worthy advice about Clare's poetics, as well as academia.

Joshua Wilner, my committee member, who has shown me important considerations for this argument, broadened my sense of its applications, and pointed out crucial pragmatic concerns going forward.

Cristina Alfar, my department chair at Hunter College, for her warmth and sagacity on questions of teaching, research, and employment.

Trish Cleveland, my dear hometown friend, who keeps me thinking and shows me creative ways to look at the universe.

Susan Andreas, my former peer and admirable forerunner, who always gives sensible and sharp opinions as well as her delightful presence. She showed me how by her actions.

Michele Cortese, my former peer and a teacher-activist, for the example of her intellectual curiosity, spiritual strength, silliness, and joy—and for her nurturing presence.

Anne Shisler-Hughes, my mentor and confidant, for her daily listening, guidance, and love.

Norma Hopcraft, my friend and fellow writer, who shared her process with me and listened to mine.

And to Rose DiGasbarro, Monib A. Zirvi, Tiffany Knight, Henrietta Petillo, Joanna Mansbridge, Thom Taylor, Nancy Silverman, Daniel Rothenberg, Carrie Hintz, Rachel Brownstein, and David Richter, who helped me to grow and complete this dissertation.

Note on Usage

As per current MLA style (7th edition), I italicize words referred to as words; I also italicize phrases referred to as phrases. On a few occasions, I add emphasis through italics, which I note. When I explicate a passage of text, however many words, I put it in quotation marks.

Because Clare's spelling is erratic, and because I quote extensively from primitivist editions of his manuscript prose and poetry, I forego inserting (sic). I also refrain from adding punctuation where it does not originally appear, though this may cause some initial difficulty for the reader. Margaret Grainger did not edit Clare's natural history prose to conform to standard usage, and my quotations follow suit. I occasionally drop her marked deletions.

I use three poetic editions as a basis for this study: Jonathan Bate's *"I am": the Selected Poetry of John Clare*; the Oxford English Texts' *The Early Poems of John Clare, 1804-1822*, *Poems of the Middle Period, 1822-1837,* and *The Later Poems of John Clare, 1837*-1864, edited by Eric Robinson; and the Oxford World's Classics' *Major Works*, edited by Eric Robinson and David Powell.

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Introduction

There is a curious moment in "The Progress of Rhyme" when the speaker describes and mimics the song of a nightingale: "'Chew-chew chew-chew' and higher still, / 'Cheer-cheer cheer-cheer' more loud and shrill, / 'Cheer-up cheer-up cheer-up'" (243-5). The bird drops low—"Tweet tweet jug jug jug"—before she stops "just to drink the sound / Her music made" (246-8). After transcribing more of these "witching notes," the speaker reflects:

> Could they be birds that sung so well?
> I thought, and maybe more than I,
> That music's self had left the sky
> To cheer me with its magic strain,
> And then I hummed the words again
> Till fancy pictured standing by
> My heart's companion, poesy. (262-8)

The birdsong produces a transformative effect. When the speaker listens to this magical strain it triggers speculation about an alternate source—a personified entity called "music's self" that rouses his cheer and song. And when the speaker hums the bird's "words," his fancy calls up another entity: "poesy." This powerful and singular instance shows oral mimicry to be capable of conjuring up the force of poetry. It also shows a universal "right to song" spread throughout nature to the "weeds below" and "the birds above" (80, 84). The right to song (a franchise, an authorization) is granted by nature, whose "love is even there" (104). Witnessing it emboldens the humble speaker to "sing as well as greater men" and "str[i]ng the lyre again" (109-10).

At this moment, and others in John Clare's poetry, aural experience of nature prompts mimicry and composition. In a sequence of listening, recording and composing, Clare collaborates with personified aesthetic entities (e.g., fancy, poesy, taste) that mediate between non-humans and humans. These agents represent an active and aesthetic force at work in nature to be tapped into by the "rhyming peasant" (Clare qtd. in Tibble, *John Clare: His Life and Poetry* 84). Throughout his

poetry, Clare champions a mutually affecting and productive relationship between non-humans and humans. In keeping with this reciprocal relationship, Clare's poems assert a fundamental association of natural organisms, objects, and sounds with the world of human language—a metaphoric conflation of land and text. His love of nature and its beauties, particularly its sounds and songs, informs the various aspects of his poetic process, from the gathering of material, to the mimicry of sources, to the recording or transcription of these sources, and up through composition.

The process described above is innovative and important to our understanding of Green Romanticism as well as the history of English poetic form. Clare represents a transitional space between the eighteenth-century English tradition of loco-descriptive poetry and the emerging Romantic aesthetic that foregrounded reflective consciousness. Add to this his musical talent, flair for listening, ecological sensibility, strong local attachment, peasant status, and firsthand experience of enclosure, and he presents a valuable and singular poetic record of the early nineteenth century. He modifies the anthropocentric pastoral mode to display his participation with the Northamptonshire landscape and to showcase its inhabitants.

A primary question guides this dissertation: how does Clare's personal relationship to his environment and to nature shape his poetic philosophy and practice, or his poetics? In order to take up this question, I establish Clare's relationship to nature (broadly conceived as a physical realm and essential force) and identify the literary strategies he uses to give voice to nature. My central aim is to describe and theorize Clare's poetics, which offers a viable way of interacting with nature by listening to, recording, and composing sound. This introduction identifies and defines the fundamental concept of a reciprocal and productive exchange between nature and

humans as well as other important terms in this study: *amanuensis*, *subject*, and *nature*. I then lay out the major principles of Clare's poetics and conclude with a concise overview of the chapters.

Born in 1793 in Helpston, a rural Northamptonshire border village in the eastern flatlands of England, John Clare was the son of Parker Clare, a day laborer, and his illiterate wife Ann. Though the family struggled to get by, they managed to send John to school intermittently until he was eleven or twelve. Clare developed a taste for reading from an early age. At home, he had access to the family Bible and prayer book, his father's penny chapbooks, and a copy of Pomfret's poems with lovely woodcuts which he admired. He managed to get his hands on any reading material that he could: sixpenny romances, fairy tales, and a volume of essays and farming manual lent by a neighbor. He encountered oral literary culture in his father's balladeering and the village folktales. His instinct for poetry was further developed by his study of the Psalms, which he learned by heart and recited for others. Clare's childhood was fortuitously filled with literary, musical, and natural stimulation, and he developed a poetic style that responded to and honored this abundance.

As documentary catalogs of recorded sounds and sights, Clare's poems are imitative, scientific, and alternately personal and impersonal. His dedication to describing nature's beauties makes him a biographer of nature. This external captivation revises traditional ideas about the Romantic poet. Clare's allegiance is not to the imagination or the self, per se. Here we have a natural historian in love with sounds and words, songs and birds—a man with a compulsion to write in spite of poverty, hardship, and mental illness. Here we have a disenfranchised landless poet who attempts to legislate via lyric the rights of the humble versifier, nature's trifles[1], and the enclosed plot of land. At once local, scientific, laboring-class, and English, Clare revisions the task of the Romantic poet as a proxy for voices in nature.

[1] Clare uses this word throughout his poetry and prose to refer to plants, animals, birds, and his own writings.

In referring to the "unconventionality of Clare's poetic vision," James McKusick distinguishes Clare from Wordsworth, who he says "tends to subordinate the description of nature to the inward exploration of poetic self-consciousness" ("Ecological Vision" 227, 232). Clare's work of witness, documentation, and testimony presents a new aesthetic for Romantic poetry in which the speaker's subjectivity is elided as a function of broadcasting a voice within nature. This bottom-up (or outside-in) aesthetic also advocates for the political rights of the land and the landless, and develops and exercises the reader's ecological consciousness. Because his ecological sensibility and poetic imagination cooperate so effectively, he is a primary figure in Green Romanticism.[2]

This is not to say that Clare does not portray his own consciousness in his poems. Nor do other Romantics fail to correspond with nature. Northrop Frye rightly observes that Wordsworth and Coleridge demote the subject-object relation of rationalized consciousness, which is falsely detached from nature (23). According to Frye, the Romantics create a new language of mythology that challenges the older myth about a "great chain of being" in which humans and human nature are fundamentally detached from a fallen, inferior physical world. The Romantic imaginative revolution recovers from God the power of projection. "Romantic poets," Frye asserts, "felt that the reason of the detached consciousness was something different from and inferior to the imagination or faculty of bringing poetic forms into existence." Romantics like Shelley, Keats, Coleridge, and Wordsworth therefore stressed the imagination's participation with nature as a process, and revered its ability to imitate natural creation.

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[2] Though there is no definitional consensus about what Green Romanticism is—is it a critical mode, a poetics, a discipline, a literature?—we can agree that Romantic and ecological concerns do overlap. In *Romantic Ecology*, Jonathan Bate observes: "[I]f one historicizes the idea of an ecological viewpoint—a respect for the earth and a skepticism as to orthodoxy that economic growth and material production are the be-all and end-all of human society—one finds oneself squarely in the Romantic tradition" (9). But Ralf Pite warns that "[l]inking ecology and romanticism looks appropriate . . . but may easily oversimplify both. . . . [B]ecause we can establish such a broad point of contact between the two, romantic poetry is invoked to support any number of different versions of ecology" (357).

Clare shares this sense of a self fused with nature, and sound plays a marked role in this identification. His imagination, though powerful, never triumphs over nature but rather continuously participates with it in a zero-sum game. Frye provides a more neutral account of the Romantic myth that better describes Clare's process: "One's relationship to the rest of life then becomes a participating relationship, an identity of process rather than a separation of subjective and objective creatures or products" (12). Clare's poetic process and its motion are characterized by a participatory relation that is auditory and egalitarian.[3] He performs a specialized sort of imitation. He riffs off, or mimics, the sounds produced by the "living objects" in his environment (Clare, *Natural History Prose* 47). In foregrounding and recreating a sensory experience of nature, Clare's poetics celebrates its mere fact of existence and restores a sense of wonder to the "great chain of being." The work of poetic creation is collaborative. Clare's self-perceived task is to witness and transcribe nature's transmissions; he is Helpston's amanuensis.

An amanuensis, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, is one who "copies or writes from the dictation of another."[4] This denotation implies several important aspects of Clare's perceived relationship to Helpston. First, it stresses the mimetic work of his poems. Secondly, it stresses the written nature of this copy work. Thirdly, it reveals the orality of another party, namely Helpston's non-human subjects. Lastly, the word *amanuensis* implies Clare's ability to listen to and record other voices.[5]

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[3] Also visual, though my project will focus on sound. Clare sometimes uses metaphors of writing and speech to describe visual scenes in nature. My use of the word *egalitarian* extends to non-human entities.

[4] "Amanuensis, *n*." *OED Online*. June 2013. Oxford UP. 9 July 2013.

[5] Contemporary critics and poets have affirmed a sense of Clare as an amanuensis. Jonathan Bate asserts that Clare "saw it as his task to write down the poetry that was already there in nature itself" (*John Clare: A Biography* 101). He also cites a comment made by Clare in reference to Wordsworth, in which Clare writes: "he negligently sets down his thoughts from the tongue of his inspirer [nature]" (Bate, *Biography* 187). Bate concludes that this judgement "makes Wordsworth's method of composition sound more like Clare's own." John Ashberry observes that Clare "is the shortest distance between poem and reader" and that "he is above all an instrument of telling" (17, 16). And Stephen Wade, in his 2002 book on regional writing, *In My Own Shire*, underscores the linguistic basis of

This trope is a ruling concept throughout my analysis of Clare's poetics; and Clare's poems foreground this transcriptive work. But I would first like to observe its origin in critical discourse, with John Taylor's introduction to Clare's first published volume, *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (1820). Taylor in many ways established the foundation for Clare's critical reception, including his images of Clare as a devoted servant and "child of nature."

First, Taylor launches a conceit of obscurity and recordlessness. He reflects on the probability that Clare's compositions might never have come into being:

> His love of Poetry, however, would soon have spent itself in compositions as little to be remembered . . . had it not been for the kindness of Mr. John Turnhill. . . . For it is very probable, that, without the means of recording his productions on paper, Clare would not only have lost the advantage he may derive from the publication of his works, but that also in himself he would not have been the Poet he is. (*Critical Heritage* 46)

Taylor's emphasis upon the obscurity and ignorance looming over Clare (and his inauspicious surroundings) helps to create a sense of unintelligibility. This distressing portrait draws attention to a pattern of benefaction, which Taylor wants to emphasize for commercial reasons, but it also idealizes Turnhill's intervention as a sort of poetic midwifery. Thus Taylor has set up the powerful construct of the intervening agent who helps to deliver another figure's obscure and doubtful voice. He accentuates Clare's helplessness in this regard, in a paragraph which follows, reflecting that there is "perhaps, no feeling so distressing to the individual, as that of Genius thus struggling in vain for sounds to convey an idea of its almost intolerable sensations."

Clare's "inability to find those words which can fully declare his meaning" causes a favorable outcome, though (Taylor, *Critical Heritage* 47). Taylor believes this is the source of his innovation. Clare's peculiar diction and syntax are shown to be part of a history of English literature:

Clare's relationship to nature: "For Clare, Helpston and the Fens are knowable through a grammar of nature in which birdsong, botany, and fieldwork form the integuments of being" (13).

> But a very great number of those words which are generally called new, are, in fact, some of the oldest in our language. . . . Many of the provincial expressions, to which Clare has been forced to have recourse, are of this description, forming part of a large number which may be called the unwritten language of England. (48)

Taylor's phrase "forced to have recourse" is troubling because it portrays Clare as passive, but his effort to praise Clare's resourceful diction sanctions it according to historical terms. More importantly, this defense props Clare up as a preserver of language and it develops the themes of obscurity and life-giving service.

Taylor proceeds to his final argument in favor of the volume: Clare's genuine love for nature. First, he sheds light on what I call Clare's trifling aesthetic[6] by commenting that Clare takes delight in scenes "which no other poet has thought of celebrating" (50). Apart from an emphasis upon novelty, however, Taylor shows Clare's sincerity by noting his "commendation of . . . simple, unthought of, and generally despised objects" (51). In the concluding pages, Taylor further develops the theme of a protective delivery agent. The notion of Clare as a devoted scribe begins here:

> Clare, it is evident, is susceptible of extreme pleasure from the varied hues, forms, and combinations of nature, and what he most enjoys, he endeavors to pourtray [sic] for the gratification of others. He is most thoroughly the Poet as well as the Child of Nature; and, according to his opportunities, no poet has more completely devoted himself to her service, studied her more closely, or exhibited so many sketches of her under new and interesting appearances. . . . He loves the fields, the flowers, "the common air, the sun, the skies;" and, therefore, he writes about them. He is happier in the presence of Nature than elsewhere. He looks as anxiously on her face as if she were a living friend, whom he might lose; and hence he has learnt to notice every change in her countenance, and to delineate all the delicate varieties of her character. (49-50)

Taylor continues the myth of Clare's passivity (and inaugurates another about his childish and/or primitive impressionability) when he suggests that Clare's poetry is simply a devoted attempt to

[6] Clare's trifling aesthetic (or aesthetic of the low or bottom-up aesthetic) upholds the lowness or meanness of various human and non-human subjects as a source of poetic value.

praise and mimic. Certainly praise and mimicry are outstanding features of Clare's poetry, but my thesis suggests that Clare's strategic documentation and representation of Helpston is a means of literary and environmental empowerment. Taylor creates a demand for Clare's scribal service when he reiterates the theme of looming obscurity and loss—for nature is a "living friend" whom Clare "might lose" and thus he "has learnt to notice . . . and to delineate."[7]

In describing Helpston's non-human and human entities, I use an assortment of terms throughout the chapters, including *entity, organism*, *inhabitant*, *dweller*, *object*, and *subject*. These terms refer to animate non-human beings (e.g., plants, birds, insects, animals, fens, and heaths) and humans. They also refer to the inanimate aspects of the landscape, including geological features and human artifacts. Though these terms respectively stress "thingness," biological life, and habitat, the final term *subject* is the most useful and logical word to describe the many other "voices" and "faces" Clare meets with in Helpston and beyond. Subjectivity is "associated with the internal mind—with perceptions and thoughts arising and based in a given individual's mind" (Murfin and Ray 498). Defined as such, it can also be applied to those non-human entities which Clare endows with mind, affect, individuality, and expression.

Strictly speaking, the non-human entities Clare encounters and writes about can be considered objects: they are perceived as external to, or distinct from, the apprehending mind.[8] But they also qualify as subjects, in several senses. Senses I and II of the noun *subject* are separated by only fifty years, and thus mark the early conceptual overlap between the determined subject and the autonomous subject. Sense II defines a subject as "[t]hat of which something is

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[7] Taylor adds to the impression of Clare as an amanuensis by describing his habit of composing under the "immediate impression" of nature "in the fields, or on the road-sides," and by noting the instant necessity of writing them down on the spot—for "[h]e could not trust his memory." He even suggests an alternate and temporary language that prevails during such sessions (or dictations): "if it happened that he had no opportunity soon after of transcribing these imperfect memorials, he could seldom decypher them, or recover his first thoughts." Taylor's cousin, Edmund Drury, noticed Clare's unique ability to accentuate others' subjectivity by blending his own with theirs, writing: "One great thing is the identifying *yourself* with the subject" (*Critical Heritage* 123).

[8] "Object, *n*." *OED Online*. June 2013. Oxford UP. 27 June 2013.

an attribute, is made, or is predicated."[9] The emphasis here is upon the subject's capacity to create or produce. This sense applies to Helpston's non-humans in several ways: the song of birds, the chittering of insects, the non-oral "music" produced by the combination of wind and trees, the locutions ascribed to particular entities (via prosopopoeia[10]), and a broader, fictionalized chorus of nature. All of these predicated sounds support Clare's belief in the reciprocal exchange of linguistic and aesthetic content. Such sounds suggest to Clare the existence of a subject, or a "being . . . that thinks, knows, or perceives."[11] At the heart of this belief is the assumption that sound is fundamentally relational. Clare's powerful innovation is to treat sound exchange literally in his poems, and to use it as a symbol of literary and artistic exchange and evaluation.

To be sure, the personification of Helpston's non-humans represents a certain political and ecological attitude that seeks to grant rights and compassion to all ecosystem members. But Clare extends personhood because it is an effective literary stratagem that accentuates both individuals and the community of Helpston. By attributing dialogue, thought, sentiment, and responsiveness to non-human subjects, Clare creates a powerful and eccentric source of interest for readers (which trades in pleasurable, copious sounds). He also forges a compelling, basic, and unassailable symbol of the poet. When every thing sings, certainly we must listen.

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[9] "Subject, *n*." *OED Online*. June 2013. Oxford UP. 27 June 2013.

[10] The Bedford glossary defines *prosopopoeia* thus: "Prosopopoeia: (1) a synonym for personification. (2) a figure of speech (more specifically a trope) in which an absent, dead, or imaginary person is given voice, typically through another person. In 'Autobiography as De-Facement,' deconstructive theorist Paul de Man defined prosopopoeia as 'the fiction of an apostrophe to an absent, deceased or voiceless entity, which posits the possibility of the latter's reply and confers upon it the power of speech'" (Murfin and Ray 410-1). David Simpson cites a description from George Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie*: the giving of speech "to dombe creatures of other insensible things" (131).

[11] "Subject, *n*." Def. 9. *OED Online*. June 2013. Oxford UP. 27 June 2013.

Based on the evidence of Clare's writings (including early and middle period poems, natural history prose, letters, autobiographical sketches, and topical prose[12]), it is clear that Clare perceived within his local environment the conditions of alterity and reciprocity: the absolutely irreducible existence of other subjects as well as the regular exchange with those subjects. The theme of a reciprocal relationship between humans and non-humans (in a given context) repeats throughout his poetry and prose—it seems to be a condition of dwelling. Reciprocity comprises the symbiotic relationships between diverse species and species members, the acoustic communication that occurs between subjects, the fictional dialogues between Helpston's subjects, the regular visits and interactions between Helpston's subjects via walking, and the aesthetic and affective relations of those subjects.

The theme of reciprocal exchange and the related theme of conversation contain a literal element of sound but they also suggest symbolic and mutual understanding. The fictive nature of this understanding is plain; Clare invokes it for what it suggests about language, poetic voice, and literary appreciation. In Clare's poems, orality is a symbol for poetic aspiration and power and it demonstrates the evidentiary power of sound—whether listened to or created. The symbolic aspect of Clare's reciprocity with Helpston (and with nature) is important because it prompts examination of the crude, materialist worldview that reduces nature to objects and culture to mere images.

In *Green Writing*, James McKusick offers an ecocritical reading of Clare's poetry that supports the notions of a documentary poetics and reciprocity. He refers to Clare's bearing

[12] In this study, I do not examine many works written after 1835. My reading of Clare's reciprocity participates in the recent attempts to dispel the notion of Clare as a victim of editors, meddling patrons, and doctors. One aspect that deserves attention is Clare's willingness to engage with other voices and opinions in the process of manuscript preparation and publication. The concept of reciprocity enables us to acknowledge Clare's active engagement with a literary community beyond Helpston. The fact that he saved his incoming correspondence, "carefully ordering the letters and stitching them together into hand-made books," demonstrates an ethic of care towards the preservation of other human voices as well as the preservation of a physical record of reciprocal communication (Bate, *Biography* 205-6).

"witness" to the community of Helpston and his strategy of "lend[ing] voice," while also pointing out the "inherently dialogical" function of poetry according to which the poet "must seek to engage those inhuman voices in conversation" (*Green Writing* 83, 85, 61).[13] McKusick appropriates a phrase from Clare's poem "Pastoral Poesy"—"a language that is ever green"—to describe this new literary language that is capable of providing "a linguistic analogue to the free, unenclosed landscape" (91). Though McKusick is here addressing the matter of linguistic form, he nonetheless offers a reading of Clare that both recognizes his formal ingenuity and his poetic goals of copying, recording, and representing other sources. My thesis emphasizes the roles of walking, listening, and written transcription in this documentary work. McKusick's insight is to recognize the connection that exists between Clare's experience of Helpston and of language: "Clare's poetic language thus serves as the basis for a compositional praxis that emerges from a deep understanding of the harmony of all creatures with their natural environment" (91). This deep understanding is directly fed by his habits of listening and walking, and these in turn feed his poetic method.

Clare's compositional praxis is facilitated by his non-utilitarian view of the natural world. Such a view emphasizes the equal value and commonality of all aspects of a local environment and levels the field of discourse (to include all sounds and a classless diversity of speakers). Clare's repeated emphasis upon nature's trifles further supports the leveling work of his poetics. Though the framing trope of the amanuensis[14] is constructed to produce an artificial effect (viz., the absence of, or self-restraint by, a human bard), it allows for creative treatment of the topographic and pastoral modes according to new centers of value (e.g., rural labor, non-human lives, geographical locus, and aurality).

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[13] All subsequent McKusick citations refer to *Green Writing*, unless otherwise noted.
[14] Or of the rambling poet—just passing through—who is strangely absent from and yet present in the scene.

My notion of Clare's poetics is informed by the basic observation that there are traceable aesthetic consequences resulting from his ecological sensibility and its core activities of listening, speaking, and walking. His compositional method (which I call *sono-loco-documentation* or SLD[15]) and various poetic frames demonstrate a view of nature as a community of peers to be visited, engaged, and recorded. The amanuensis frame is just one of several which also include the ramble, the song, autobiographical narrative, and the sonnet. Likewise, his compositional praxis—which includes remembering scraps of verse drafted mentally and scribbling passages down whenever the opportunity arose during walks or labor in the fields—shows the complementary nature of his experiences of landscape and language. McKusick elaborates upon this reciprocity, reminding us of Clare's allegiance to "locality" as a poetic principle:

> Clare's experience of the local environment is that of a native inhabitant, one who has experienced the landscape with the freshness and vividness of a child and has managed to convey something of that youthful perspective into the poetry of his adulthood. Throughout his career, he explicitly sought to enhance the "locality" of his writing. . . . Clare is not primarily concerned . . . with the level of factual detail that we might call "local color"; rather, he is seeking to evoke a more profoundly affective dimension of his poetry, which might be specified as an authentic sense of rootedness in the local environment. What is essential to Clare's sense of locality is not the sheer quantity of factual information on local flora and fauna, but a deeper sense of the relation of all creatures to a habitat in which the human observer is also implicated. . . . Rather than merely love "Nature" in the abstract, as Wordsworth is prone to do, Clare eagerly participates in the natural process that unfolds around him in the teeming forests, fields, and fens of Northamptonshire. Clare regards himself as a normal participant in the living world around him, just another inquisitive mammal going about its daily activities. . . . [His poetry represents] an alternative cultural tradition that is more in harmony with the biotic rhythms of the natural world. (81-2)

McKusick's notion of harmony correlates with the documentary and mimetic ethos driving Clare's poetry. This harmony or transparency is a literary effect produced by several formal

[15] In an effort to trim this unwieldy, yet descriptive, piece of jargon, I use the abbreviation SLD.

factors, ranging from diction, punctuation, and syntax to figures of speech, motifs, and narrative framing devices.

I would like to emphasize the mutual recognition inherent in reciprocity as basis for communal relations between non-human and human subjects.[16] The Oxford English Dictionary defines the adjective *reciprocal* in a number of ways. That which is reciprocal is "[o]f the nature of, or relating to, a return (in kind); made, given . . . in response; answering, corresponding" (sense 1.a).[17] This initial sense emphasizes response and return, while sense 1.b stresses mutual exchange: "[r]elating to, or of the nature of, a mutual or simultaneous exchange; given and received mutually; traded, exchanged." Sense 2 develops the idea of mutuality to include shared feeling or experience; sense 3.a emphasizes alternating movement; and sense 5 denotes an ongoing relationship. Many of the synonyms for the word *reciprocal* accentuate voice and dialogue. It is for this reason that I also use the term *conversation* to describe Clare's environmental interaction.[18] Conversation stresses vocal interaction, but it also suggests a more basic alternation of turns that involves multiple subjects and alterity. It is an ingenious poetic trope and conceptual platform for Clare's poetics. This English word only recently developed its current meaning of talk.[19] Its latin root, *conversari*, literally means "to turn oneself about, to move to and fro, pass one's life, dwell, abide, live somewhere, keep company with."[20] This etymon illustrates how this word's significance has shifted from "living amongst" (a place and particular company) to "talking with others."[21] Conversation, like walking, provides a specific

[16] Reciprocity applies to all subject interactions: human—human, human—non-human, and non-human—non-human. This thesis focuses primarily on Clare's treatment of the non-human world, but the paradigm of reciprocity applies to all of Helpston's subjects.
[17] "Reciprocal, *adj*. and *n*." *OED Online*. June 2013. Oxford UP. 27 June 2013.
[18] This interaction occurs according to a number of modes: visual, oral, aural, pedestrian, scientific, laboring, and written.
[19] In the late sixteenth, and early seventeenth, centuries.
[20] "Converse, *v*." *OED Online*. June 2013. Oxford UP. 20 July 2013.
[21] "Conversation, *n*." *OED Online*. June 2013. Oxford UP. 27 June 2013.

action as part of Clare's relationship to Helpston; reciprocity describes the terms of this relationship.[22]

For Clare, the subjects co-inhabiting a place necessarily share a basis of communication and understanding. He does not deal with the complexities and questions relating to the thesis of interspecies (or more broadly, intersubjective) understanding as a matter of fact, though he frequently qualifies the impressions of his speakers and characters with verbs that emphasize perception. The power of place and proximity motivate the conceit of reciprocity, which Clare alternately renders literal (as when young Lubin mimics the "long-silenced strain" of the thrush in "The Village Minsrel"), figurative (as when rose petals "[w]hisper . . . morals" in "Dedication to Mary"), or problematic (as in "A Ramble," when the speaker longs for "wisdom to unseal the hidden cause" of nature's charm).

Walking and aurality/orality share several pivotal roles in Clare's poetics, ranging from their literal use value as sensory tools to their abstract application in literary texts.[23] Both sets of activities entail a basic back-and-forth, propagative movement that symbolizes a broader sort of

[22] Lawrence Buell's concepts of existential embeddedness and mutual constructionism shed light on the paradigm of reciprocity and affirm "attachment to place as a creative force" (17). Existential embeddedness is a condition that involves long-term sympathetic immersion and discipline in a place (14). According to the "myth" of mutual constructionism, the "physical environment (both natural and human-built) shap[es] in some measure the cultures that in some measure continually refashion it" (6). I would expand the range of this myth, so that the mutually constitutive phenomenon can also be applied to the process of communication and the many acts it entails. Other critics formulate embeddedness (and thus reciprocity) differently. Andrew Hubbell refers to Byron's "wandering immersion" and Wordsworth's "dwelling immersion" as ways of knowing (17). James McKusick proclaims Clare's "sense of rootedness in the local environment" (79). Ronald Blythe refers to Clare's native "enthralment" (*Talking about John Clare* 12). John Barrell describes the unique "relations to place" experienced by Helpston's inhabitants (in the early nineteenth century) as a matter of knowledge: "[K]knowledge of the world was, to an extent can hardly reconstruct, an extrapolation from their knowledge of the place in which they lived" (*Poetry, Language and Politics* 118). Barrell reads Clare's use of the phrase "out of my knowledge" (to refer to places beyond the parish limits), and his comment that the heath "made up my being," as examples of his "sense of indifferentiation between self and place" (*Poetry* 118-9). Sam Ward testifies to Clare's deeper connection to Helpston and the many animate and inanimate subjects which dwelled there. The "particularity of Clare's sense of place," Ward writes, "is conveyed not simply through the amount of factual data which he provides in his poetry, but by the implication of a deeper relationship between places, flora, and fauna, in which man is also implicated" (26-7).

[23] These shared poetic functions include: 1) sensory platform for environmental engagement and interaction; 2) tool for the witnessing and documentation of other local subjects; 3) formal literary device (e.g., narrative frames, images); and 4) symbol for reciprocity and poetic appreciation.

give and take between humans and their external environments—a reciprocity in which sounds, gestures, feelings and ideas are shared. In both activities, a primary mode of environmental engagement prompts a secondary mode of creative labor

Walking, like aurality and orality (or conversation), structures connective participation between subjects in nature because it appeals to and exercises commonly shared senses, and because it admits difference and also unifies. It reinforces the recognition of others and self, and it allows the subject to orient himself/herself to the environment. The most basic example of interaction triggered by walking is that between the human subject and the land. Walking, like aurality and orality, also facilitates and inspires writing, historical documentation, and poetic composition. Paradoxically, these activities are a stimulus, a means, and an end to the work of poetic documentation. Specific walks and talks inspire poems, shape the plots of poems, and come to be the results of poems.

Walking and sound are useful to Clare's poetics because they have literal and figurative value and can therefore support Clare's conflation or correspondence of opposites (e.g., nature-culture, land-text, nature-language, or anthropocentric-ecocentric). Their literal value enables real communal interaction and provides concrete and sensory data and images to substantiate the work of documentation. Their figurative value lies in the fact that the structure of these activities suggests alternating interaction, or reciprocity, between two or more subjects. They are ideal instruments and symbols of communal interaction, and because these activities comprise sequence and progression, they serve a textual function for poetic composition. As texts, walks and talks are performative and repeatable.

What kind of nature am I referring to when I speak of Clare's reciprocal relationship to nature? The English word *nature* has a long and complex history dating back to antiquity. Both

Arthur O. Lovejoy and Raymond Williams have recorded the diverse and sometimes contradictory uses of this word. The English noun *nature* originated as a Greek word and then traveled into Latin and later French. Coming from a Latin root in the past participle verb form *nasci* ('to be born'), the first sense denoted nature as the "essential quality and character of something" (Williams, *Key Words* 219). This inherent quality referred to individual persons or objects, and it was conceived of as static and unchanging.

Williams identifies two other areas of meaning, thus illustrating the conceptual shift of this word. Initially signifying essential character, nature came to refer to "the inherent force which directs either the world or human beings or both" and eventually to "the material world itself, taken as including or not including human beings" (Williams, *Key Words* 219).[24] This increasing abstraction involved a switch from nature as a specific singular (the nature of bees) to an abstract singular (the nature of all things). Another contributing factor to this abstraction was the assumption of a primary dynamic force in "the whole material world" which constitutes "a multiplicity of things and creatures" (220). It is the second and third senses of nature to which I refer when I speak of Clare's natural history writings or his relationship with nature.[25]

Williams notes that the third sense provided a basis of contrast between a theoretical state of nature and the existing state of society, and that, broadly speaking, this contrast was formative for both the Enlightenment and the Romantic movement (*Key Words* 223). The Romantic adaptation has "retained currency" as "one of the most powerful uses of nature":

> Indeed one of the most powerful uses of nature, since lC18, has been this selective sense of goodness and innocence. Nature has meant the 'countryside', the 'unspoilt places', plants and creatures other than man. The use is especially current in

[24] Senses two and three correspond respectively to *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*.

[25] Nature thus includes both animate and inanimate things (birds, snails and rocks and water); non-humans and humans; and botanical, zoological, geological, mineralogical, anthropological, and cultural things. This dual usage reflects the common overlap, from the sixteenth century onwards, between the second and third senses.

> contrasts between town and country: nature is what man has not made. (Williams, *Key Words* 223)

Williams exposes the artificial "character of this unspoilt nature," which "depends upon a suppression of the history of human labour" (*Problems in Materialism and Culture* 77-8). Both "improvers of nature" (i.e., eighteenth century proto-capitalist agrarians) and "lovers or admirers of nature" relied upon this myth (*Problems* 78). The problem, according to Williams, is that the "negative was clear enough" but that positive articulations of what did constitute nature were "doubtful" and often rejected as "sentimental" (*Problems* 80).

The philosophy of the agrarian and landscape improvers caused nature to be seen as something separate from humans (*Problems* 79). "Most earlier ideas of nature," Williams writes, "had included, in an integral way, ideas of human nature. But now nature, increasingly, was 'out there.'" Clare's poetry and prose offer a positive articulation of nature that accounts for the history of human labor, the aggregate material world and its individual entities, as well as the overarching sense of an inherent force. Most importantly, his sense of nature places non-humans and humans alongside each other in a shared environment.

In setting out to define Clare's creative principles and his theory of poetic form, I recognize seven conceptual bases: sound, metaphoric conflation of land and text, geographical locus, documentation, collaborative composition, alterity, and symbolism.

1. Clare's poetics presupposes an aural/oral economy in nature and portrays ongoing conversation between non-humans and humans. Sound plays a vital part in his poetic sensibility and process of creation; as such, his poetics is characterized by openness, receptivity, and the recognition of others. Aurality and orality are tools for Clare's experiences in nature and they inform his poetic practice. Additionally, reciprocity and conversation are ruling conceits in his

poetics. This poetics provides another sensory platform for reciprocal engagement between environmental subjects: walking.

2. The focus upon sound, aurality, and orality sheds light on a crucial assumption within Clare's poetics: the fundamental association of natural organisms, objects, and sounds with the world of human language. I refer to this construct also as the metaphoric conflation of land and text. At its root is the notion of the propagative power of nature and texts. This poetics depicts relationships between places and sounds as a formal practice, and as a way to set up an abstract association between nature and language.

3. Clare's poetics is locally-derived. It developed as a result of his repeated experiences with/in his native village and shire. Geographical locus is an inspirational force, subject, and textual motif throughout the poems.

4. Clare's poetics is above all a poetics of documentation that seeks to produce a record of real lives, voices, stories, and places. It gives voice to the traditionally voiceless subjects in nature. It is in this sprit that I repeatedly refer to a "documentary poetics" or a "loco-documentary poetics." A basic tenet of this poetics is the belief that linguistic or sonic accounts of nature do not alienate subjects from nature, but rather circulate between environmental subjects. This poetics models a viable path for environmental engagement by listening to, documenting, and composing sound. The compositional habit *sono-loco-documentation*, or SLD (the documentation of a place by listening to and transcribing its sounds in writing), supports this documentary work.

5. The documentary ethos of this poetics emphasizes a collaborative model for composition. A number of poems portray circumstances of composition as initiated by external stimuli: a bird's call, a beetle's dance, the felling of a tree, and topographic or sonographic impressions in general. We are frequently made to feel that a particular poem stems not from the

poet's imagination, but from scenes in nature, which are transcribed by the rambling peasant. By suggesting a collaborative paradigm for composition, this poetics complicates authorial power. Clare's trope of discovery and copying—"I found the poems in the fields / And only wrote them down"—depends upon the elision (or setting aside) of his own subjectivity in order to broadcast the voices of non-human subjects.

6. Unlike epic poems about nature in which some grand scale is presented (e.g., Thomson's *The Seasons* or Cowper's *The Task*), Clare's poems refuse plurality and extend subjectivity to single organisms. There is a stylistic refusal of grand scale. Clare loves to focus on small, individual entities (trifles). His deference to others' points of view, experiences, and voices, and his effort to imagine these, demonstrate a concern for the "otherness" of nature—a concern which William Cronon considers to be crucial for contemporary environmentalism (McKusick 10).

7. Clare's poetics takes for granted a symbolic fusion of the literal and the figurative. This poetics also comprises aesthetic, moral, ethical, and political values that are germane to his ecological sensibility. His writings distinguish between levels of human taste and morality, particularly as these are manifested by individual actions vis-à-vis the land. The poems and prose writings account for literal sensory values and meanings as they propose and celebrate the existence of an abstract, natural source of value. Beauty, pleasure, taste, instinct, and song are the perceptual agents mediating between the literal and symbolic realms; and both non-human and human subjectivities have access to these agents.

There is a movement in Clare's writing from the literal and the physical to the figurative and the mental. As his understanding of reciprocity and his documentary poetics takes this movement for granted, so my chapters progress from concrete examples of sound and sensory

engagement via walking to broader instances of communication and Clare's notion of natural taste. The paradigm of reciprocity merges the literal and the figurative, and it portrays movement across these spheres. Since walking and sound can be applied concretely and abstractly, both play usefully into this paradigm. Both activities constitute a mode of environmental engagement and poetic production and documentation. As exploratory actions, they search out new discoveries and facts. As such, they serve Clare's documentary poetics well. Clare uses walking, listening, and talking to create transformative moments that connect the disparate realms of nature-culture, land-text, and ecocentric-anthropocentric. Indeed, he employs these tools as narrative frames for encounters with nature so regularly that these activities become symbols of engagement with nature and of reciprocity. Furthermore, his presentation of a naturally–derived standard of taste supports the idea of reciprocal movement between nature and culture and the fundamental correlation of these spheres.

Chapter One: Aurality/Orality: In chapter one, I define aurality and orality and I illustrate how these tools contribute to Clare's participation with his local environment and his conceptualization of nature. I also address the related trope of conversation and theorize how Clare's documentary poetics reveals the presence of an aural and oral economy within Helpston.

Clare's poetic process documents in several senses of the word. It calls for listening and oral response or imitation; it transcribes; and, in a recombinatory act of poiesis, it bears witness to the existence of sound and voice within nature. In chapter one, I define this compositional habit as *sono-loco-documentation* (SLD)—that is, the documentation of a place by listening, transcribing, and poetic representation. Where no sounds exist, he gives voice. The organisms or objects incapable of individually making noise are occasionally described as part of some universal music in which nature and poet rejoice.

By documenting a particular location through its sounds (among other features), Clare's poetry illustrates a link between natural environments and poetic or linguistic description. In order to examine this link, I explicate various poems that use SLD, including "Pleasant Sounds," "Dedication to Mary," and "Helpstone." I also review recent studies of Clare and sound, as well as acoustic science and theory, in order to better understand the voice Clare attributes to nature.

Chapter Two: The Place of Sound: My second chapter continues to develop the sonic approach to Clare's poetics. I turn to Clare's natural history prose for a sense of how he interacts with, perceives, and writes about nature. The chapter explores Clare's figurative and literal representations of the sounds produced by various non-human subjects and phenomena. For examples, I turn to the poems "[Birds in Alarm]," "A Ramble," and "The Lament of Swordy Well." I also address Clare's natural history prose entries, which display a formal pattern that stresses such topics as locus, setting, frequency, names, and dwelling habits. This chapter continues by exploring the conceptual link between locus and textuality, alluding to the work of Wordsworth and Coleridge and suggesting possible linkages to Clare's valuation of local poetic materials. I then analyze literary examples of aurality, orality, and SLD relating to Clare's 1832 move to Northborough, including his attempted transcription of nightingale song and the poems "The Flitting" and "The Progress of Rhyme." Accordingly, I explore the overlap between dialect and onomatopoeia, as these are theorized by Stephanie Kuduk Weiner, Roman Jakobsen and others. De Man's 1979 essay on Wordsworthian and Miltonian autobiography is consulted as part of an examination of the literary device of prosopopoeia. In Clare's prose piece "The Woodman or the Beauties of a Winter Forest," I examine the phenomenon of reciprocal communal response. I conclude chapter two by addressing the subject of human orality and laying out strategies for reciprocity. I close with reflections about Clare's orality.

Chapter Three: Walking: Clare's poetics provides another sensory platform for the poet's participation with, and documentation of, a natural environment: walking. Chapter three explores the mutual association between walking and conversation and analyzes instances in which Clare frames locations by walking and writing. I review the histories of the English words *walk* and *ramble* as a way of accentuating the back-and-forth movement that constitutes reciprocity. I show how "rambling" poems such as "A Ramble" and "Trespass" represent a landscape by physical movement and poetic progression, reframe the land according to poetic authority, and open up alternative paths for travel. In addition, I explain how the trope of rambling conflates language with physical and mental movement, thus underscoring the association between nature and language. This chapter then attends to the effect of enclosure on Clare's ability to converse (via walking) with Helpston's subjects. I suggest that enclosure was somewhat useful to Clare as an inspiration for specific poems and because it modeled for him, however negatively, the possible re-framing of the land. I also address the legal and physical ramifications of walking as represented by Clare's poem "Trespass" and late-career prose piece "Journey out of Essex."

To support my argument about the connective capacity of walking, I utilize critical sources on the subject, including Robin Jarvis's *Romantic Pedestrianism*, Ronald Blythe, and Rebecca Solnit's history of walking, *Wanderlust*. I also examine Andrew Hubbell's reading of Byron's "wandering immersion," and his suggestion that wandering is another possible mode of ecological epistemology. I then explicate several texts to demonstrate Clare's ideas about walking, and how this activity stimulates thought and interpersonal connections. These include excerpts from the natural history prose, including "Autumn" and a famous anecdote in which Clare chases the horizon on Emmonsales Heath; the early walking poem "A Ramble"; the sonnets "Schoolboys in

Winter," "Stepping Stones," "Careless Rambles," and "Trespass"; the asylum poem "A Walk in the Forest"; the prose piece "Journey out of Essex"; and Clare's "Essay on Landscape."

Chapter Four: Taste: If nature has a voice which Clare documents, this chapter analyzes its message. Not only do the speaker and his environment share words, they evaluate and applaud each other and their maker. The reciprocal relation uniting humans and nature, therefore, is an affective and critical one. Taste, among other abstract entities reified and personified by Clare, is a major factor in advancing this reciprocal relation.

Clare has a unique understanding of taste. It serves as a guiding concept in his life, braiding physical, moral, ethical, and aesthetic values. Clarean taste is not a relative standard; it entails real principles and it surpasses the realm of human ideas and commerce to assert the mutual interdependence of culture and environment.

From his very youth, Clare displays a preoccupation with taste. Good taste is cultivated outdoors and can recover loss, whereas the "vulgar taste" of tyrants hangs "the hated sign" of enclosure.[26] The poems portray tasteful scenes in which the speaker receives chitchat and artistic praise from nature, specific organisms, or from "beauty's self."[27] And his speakers praise nature accordingly. Clare's figurations of nature as a teacher in "Dawnings of Genius" or "Shadows of Taste," or as a learned text in "A Ramble" or "Helpstone," enhance the concept of a natural society that operates according to a principle of taste.

In order to better comprehend Clarean reciprocity, and appreciate the literary contribution of his loco-documentary poetics, I begin chapter four with a discussion of aesthetics and taste as these were understood during his period. I briefly review the etymology of the English word *taste* before contextualizing Clare's aesthetic sensibility. This historical effort allows me to scrutinize

[26] "The Mores," line 72.
[27] "The Progress of Rhyme," line 71.

Clarean taste more productively according to the contemporary critical doctrines of associationism, sympathy, and imagination. For this, I rely upon W. J. Bate's authoritative and unsurpassed, if dated, history of taste as well as W. J. Hipple's survey of eighteenth-century philosophical systems. I also examine the related issues of obscurity and sympathy with animals.

My foremost goal in this chapter is to spell out, as clearly as possible, Clare's ideas about beauty and taste. This work is necessarily scattered and drawn out—for nowhere does Clare offer a cohesive account (or system) of taste or art. After establishing the historical context of taste, I proceed to identify and elaborate the elements of Clarean taste as they appear in the following poems: "Dawnings of Genius," "Shadows of Taste," "Autumn Robin," "Eternity of Nature," "Helpstone," "Decay: A Ballad," and "The Progress of Rhyme." These poems illustrate concepts, principles, and criteria of Clarean taste that repeat and subtly evolve throughout his writing career, including: the "man of taste" construct, trifles, animal instinct, obscurity, particularity, locus, temporality, and responsiveness. "Dawnings of Genius" and "Shadows of Taste" reveal Clare's acceptance of the multiplicity of tastes and his assertion of an ideal natural standard of taste. Together with "Helpstone" and "Decay: A Ballad," they stress the importance of locus and trifles to Clare's idea of beauty. "Autumn Robin" and "Eternity of Nature" elaborate Clare's notion of a naturally-derived standard of taste, and they use birds, insects, and plants to realize poetic posterity. "The Progress of Rhyme" acts out the metaphoric conflation of land and text in its portrayal of nature as a lasting source of poetic inspiration and personal support; as such it reveals Clare's desire for reciprocity, understanding, and audience. This conflation is more or less demonstrated in all of these poems because each forcefully asserts, in its own way, a standard and notion of taste that is based in nature. In some measure, Clare's fundamental association of nature with human language correlates with the doctrines of similitude and sympathy and it utilizes these

in interesting ways to suggest interspecies (or intersubjective) reciprocity. In support of this reciprocity, "The Progress of Rhyme" also develops a conceit whereby the speaker invokes (and/or celebrates) the patronage of abstract entities (such as poesy, beauty, or nature). Furthermore, by displaying pleasurable sensory moments from a variety of temporal vantage points, these poems challenge the neoclassical idea that the five senses misleadingly trap us in the present moment and therefore condemn us to ignorance. Clare's deployment of sensory pleasure, particularly in trifling and local objects, not only promotes a naturally-derived taste but it also demonstrates the power of such objects to contribute to a lasting poetic record. The poems are the greatest source of Clare's ideas and attitudes about taste and beauty; there he can develop the implications of his thought most fully. I also examine Clare's prose writings on taste, and apply concepts from these to my analysis of the poems.

In sum, chapters one and two establish the symbolic power of sound (in reciprocal communal relationships) by exploring Clare's literal and figurative portrayals of aurality and orality. Chapter three extends the trope of conversation to walking, which constitutes another mode of reciprocal communal engagement. Chapter 4 approaches that same reciprocal relation, by which Clare supplies himself with audience and patronage, from the affective and aesthetic end. Helpston's subjects share aurality, orality, and walking—the how—as a basis of engagement and documentation. They also share a naturally derived principle of taste—the why—as the basis of communal relations.

Chapter One: Aurality/Orality

> "Listening is the key issue in communication via sound because it is the primary interface between the individual and the environment." Barry Truax (*Acoustic Communication* xviii)
>
> "To dwell you must be content to listen. . . ." Jonathan Bate (*Song of the Earth* 236)

Aurality and Orality

This chapter title addresses the two primary processes that make up Clare's reciprocal relation to the natural world that surrounds him. Clare's poems articulate this relation between the human subject and the natural environment. In the poems, human and non-human subjects are portrayed in the act of listening and in the act of making sound, often in concert with each other. These two activities serve as physical points of contact between humans and nature—a contact characterized by sensory exchange. Listening and communicating imply conversation, shared language, and understanding. As envisioned by Clare, these two physical activities also reveal a metaphysical aspect of the relationship between subjects in nature. The ear is Clare's primary gateway to his surrounding environment; the eye and foot also serve this function, but the ear is particularly privileged. Accordingly, Clare's poetics positions the speaker within an aural/oral economy at work in nature. Moreover, the interchange of factual sounds and active listening initiates an abstract type of economy that posits the existence of exchange of ideas and sentiments across species.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines *orality* as "the quality or state of being oral."[28] The adjective *oral* is defined several ways. The primary denotation describes something that is "done or performed with or by the mouth, as the organ of eating and drinking." The second denotation of *oral*, and the one that applies most to this chapter, describes something "relating to

[28] "Orality, *n*." Def. 1. *OED Online*. Mar. 2012. Oxford UP. 5 Nov. 2012.

communication by speech." This second meaning has several sub-definitions; *oral* can designate a tradition, culture, or society in which the spoken word is the chief form of communication between generations. Another sub-definition emphasizes the verbal communication (as opposed to written) in a legal matter. This speech-only sense applies to other sub-definitions, including teaching and communication with the deaf. Later senses of *oral* re-emphasize the mouth and its various uses.[29] Orality, as one of the primary conditions defining Clare's relation to his environment, combines both aspects of this definition: it foregrounds the mouth as an organ of sound and, by extension, the utterances of sound by humans and non-humans as well as the communicative function such sounds may serve. Orality thus signifies the physical and sensory sound event as well as the possible range of meanings conveyed by that sound event. My use of this term also extends to the broader category of sound making.

Orality, as a conceptual category guiding this thesis, can be applied literally and theoretically. The rustle of foliage, the sound of beetles cutting leaves, or the movement of wings—all these (and more) are singled out as forms of meaningful sound. Though they do not properly fall under the category of oral utterance, nonetheless they are proofs of the existence of non-human organisms and plants. I incorporate them under the rubric of orality because Clare's poems vocalize these sounds by rendering them into lyric. And furthermore, these non-oral sounds are like oral utterances because they draw our attention to the presence of non-humans—they "speak" to us of other subjects.

To broadcast the sounds that non-human organisms and plants make is a representational choice, and therefore a political act. In *Landscape, Liberty and Authority*, Tim Fulford shows how eighteenth-century "discourses on landscape" confer authority upon their writers and

[29] "Oral, *adj*. and *n*." *OED Online*. Mar. 2012. Oxford UP. 5 Nov. 2012.

readers and pose "conflicting ideological and political functions" (1).[30] I read Clare's representations of a wide range of sounds as a radical codification of the peasant's view (or rather, hearing) of the landscape in contrast with the gentlemanly taste for "disinterest" and detachment (Fulford 3). By documenting a large array of sensory experiences of one locality, gathered over time and by habit, Clare represents a particular kind of relation between class and place, which he calls "local" (Clare, *Life and Poetry* 84). Such level of aural detail might vindicate polite ideas about "primitive language" and the notion "that the lowest members of rural society exhibited a kind of primitive state of mind by virtue of their failure to differentiate themselves as subjects from the raw data of experience" (Barrell, *Poetry* 129). But John Barrell insists that Clare's poems "are not at all 'primitive', in anything like the simple sense that they were imagined to be by his contemporary readers" (*Poetry* 134). They are:

> the products of a self-conscious attempt to invent a language to represent a mode of consciousness that is, as he put it, distinctly 'local'. They are written as a deliberate and considered alternative to the style of landscape description he had encountered in Thomson and other eighteenth-century descriptive poets. . . . Thomson's procedures were not, for Clare, sufficiently 'local': they could be applied to any landscape whatsoever, and they acknowledged no distinctions between those landscapes with which we are familiar, and those we see for the first time. In that sense they were the appropriate products of a class which, because it could afford to travel, to move from place to place, had developed a means of constructing its relations with places in a way that represented, exactly, the degree of its abstraction, emancipation, from particular localities and their power to determine our 'knowledge' and our 'being'. (Barrell, *Poetry* 134)

This is not to say that Thomson (or eighteenth-century prospect poets) failed to portray non-oral sounds. Rather, Clare's descriptions of non-oral sounds contribute to a significant element of his poetry—orality and sound making—and they broaden the range of mechanisms for making music. In representing non-oral sound, Clare reaches past the available poetic tools of

[30] Fulford defines "discourses on landscape" thus: "representation which claims simply to describe nature" and "writing which uses the motifs and scenes of landscape-description in the course of critical and political arguments" (1).

prosopopoeia and dialogue to enrich the poetic repository of descriptions. As an inclusive representational gesture, Clare's employment of non-oral sounds subtly influences the questions and expectations that readers have about poems and poetic description.

One poem that illustrates the political value of sound is "The Fallen Elm." This enclosure elegy endows a "music-making elm" with heroic and political force, orality, and aurality. It also exemplifies Clare's strategic use of non-oral sounds in order to advance a political attack on enclosure and the "cant of tyranny." The poem's opening lines describe an old elm tree, a "[f]riend not inanimate," whose various sounds show its survival and protective presence. "How did I love to hear the winds upbraid / Thy strength without—" the speaker exclaims, "while all within was mute" (9-10). The tree's noises are portrayed as truthful language in contrast to the hypocritical and self-interested "bawl[ing]" of "knave[s]" and "enslaving tools."

> Thou owned a language by which hearts are stirred
> Deeper than by a feeling clothed in words,
> And speakest now what's known of every tongue,
> Language of pity and the force of wrong. (31-4)

The speaker transforms the elm's non-oral sounds (caused by wind, rain and storms) into a kind of communication that surpasses words, yet which stirs human hearts and tongues. The force of justice makes this transformation possible. The speaker's love for the elm's sounds in lines 9-10 differs sharply from his hatred of two other sounds: "With axe at root he felled thee to the ground / And barked of freedom. O I hate the sound!" (49-50). These lines illustrate the documentary power of non-oral sound, which can show violence and destruction (as well as life). In animalizing the knave's speech, they also establish a subtle critique of human orality, which mounts as the poem culminates: "Thus came enclosure—ruin was it guide / . . . / No matter—wrong was right and right was wrong / And freedom's bawl was sanction to the song. / —Such was thy ruin, music-making elm" (57, 65-7). The non-oral sounds, which bear witness to the elm

and the way of life it symbolized, help to establish and defend the speaker's local consciousness in contradistinction to the exploitative and unjust "bawl" and "brawl" of the knave.[31]

Though the Oxford English Dictionary does not provide a definition of *aurality*, it does provide one for the adjective *aural*. That which is aural is "of or pertaining to the organ of hearing."[32] We might define *aurality,* then, as the quality or state of being aural, or more precisely, the quality or state pertaining to hearing. The ear is one of Clare's strongest sensory organs, perhaps the strongest. His journals, prose notes, and poems emphasize the power of sound in his experiences throughout Helpston; Clare also foregrounds the sense of sight[33] but the senses of touch, smell, and taste (rarely portrayed to begin with) play small roles in his "song pictures" (Potkay 188). Other words like *audition*, *listening*, and *auscultation*, while they convey the act of listening, do not identify the quality or state of being a listener, which is so fundamental to Clare's way of relating to his local environment. More often than not, Clare's speakers display aurality; additionally, they model the distinction between active listening (as a form of meaning making) and passive hearing. In contrast with the emphasis upon human

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[31] Barrell continues his analysis, speculating about the potential contemporary effect of Clare's unedited manuscripts: "The language of the poems we have been reading was developed, then, to represent an alternative mode of relation; and the danger they would have represented, in their unpublished form, was that they would have suggested that the ways in which the polite constructed their relations with nature were not the only, the natural, the inevitable ways; and therefore that 'mind' and 'nature', as these concepts were constructed by the polite, might have been constructed for purposes which the 'vulgar' did not share" (*Poetry* 134-5). Though Barrell is referring to the political potential of Clare's raw, unedited style (e.g., syntax, punctuation, and diction), which was not made public until very recently, I contend that the published language of the poems does "represent an alternative mode of relation" that foregrounds class and geography. Lord Radstock's objection to the "radical slang" in two stanzas of "The Village Minstrel," which heaps a similar distrust upon orality ("Justice is made to speak as they [tyrants] command"), illustrates the politically sensitive nature of Clare's poetic descriptions, particularly as they relate to enclosure.

[32] "Aural, *adj*.[2]" Def. 1. *OED Online*. Mar. 2012. Oxford UP. 5 Nov. 2012.

[33] Several critics attest to the primacy of vision in Clare; indeed this interpretation has held sway in Clare criticism over recent decades. Consider John Barrell and Timothy Brownlow. In the June 2010 *John Clare Society Newsletter* (no. 108), David Stokes writes: "It seems that the movement and behavior of birds interest Clare more than their songs or calls. Remarkably, this remains the case when he writes about the nightingale and skylark. . . . It is not the bird's song-flight that moves Clare, but, as so often, the nest and its location. . . . [I]t seems clear that it [birdsong] was not central to his experience of nature. . . . However, it would be surprising if there were no exceptions to this rule in the vastness of Clare's work" (13-14). There are quite a few exceptions to Stokes's observation; Clare's poems are filled with aural details (not only relating to birdsong), a fact which is attested to by the recent work of Adam Potkay, Stephanie Wiener, and Sam Ward.

listening, Clare often portrays the orality of non-human subjects in the environment. Though these roles do alternate occasionally, Clare's poems emphasize these respective customary behaviors (i.e., the aural poet and the oral organism or plant) as well as their cooperation in a sort of conversation. If orality emphasizes the mouth and production of [meaningful] sound, then aurality emphasizes the ear, auditory perception, and the creation of [meaningful] sound. The abilities to hear and produce sound are crucial building blocks in Clare's aesthetic vision; the application of these tools in conversation with other subjects is the work of the poems.

Clare's Listening

In the introduction, I established the notion of Clare's reciprocity with nature—a relation defined by mutual exchange. This chapter addresses a central aspect of this reciprocal relation: the conversation and communicative correspondence shared between Clare and non-human subjects in nature. The body of Clare's work displays a network of hearing in Helpston and Northamptonshire. If we consider the significance of sound as it is created, heard, and exchanged in Helpston, we can better appreciate Clare's ecological sensibility.

But conversation goes further. It implies the willful participation in dialogue of two parties—the ritual starting and stopping of talk. It comprises amity, seriality, and the presence of a dialogic text. Though some of Clare's poems represent individual communicative encounters with natural subjects, others represent fluency with a variety of subjects in nature. This linguistic fluency helps to establish the standard of taste shared by Clare and his surrounding environment of "living objects."[34]

In order to understand how important sound was to Clare, we can look at his life habits. Human culture provided him with ample opportunities for listening. In addition to a poet, Clare was an active musician, amateur musicologist, and transcriber of folk tunes and lyrics. Jonathan

[34] Natural History Letter V (*NHP* 47).

Bate describes how "[i]t was through his father . . . that Clare first encountered storytelling and folk songs" (*Biography* 13).[35] A day laborer and thresher, Parker Clare was "in great demand at the September Feast of Statute which 'his village yearly knew,'[36] and also at the Mayday and Whitsun games since, besides skill in wrestling, he was a ballad-singer, said to be able to recite over a hundred songs and ballads, and, having 'a tolerable good voice' he was 'often called upon to sing at those convivials of bacchanalian merry making[37]'" (Grainger 4). Bate continues: "Parker's son grew up to become not only a teller of tales in verse, but also a highly accomplished musician and collector of songs and tunes. In all probability, he was the earliest folk-song collector in southern England. His poetry grew out of an oral tradition that was fully alive in his village and his childhood home" (13). In several poems, including "The Village Minstrel," Clare portrays the primacy and power of village folklore.

Furthermore, Clare was impressed by "Gypsy" culture and spent much time with a local tribe known as Boswell's Crew (Bate 94). This crew was "famous as fiddlers" and one extended member named John Gray taught Clare to play the fiddle "by the ear." Clare earned money by playing the fiddle at village gatherings.

Clare also transcribed song and dance tunes in his journals. Two manuscripts in the Northamptonshire library include over 250 tunes transcribed by Clare, ranging from nautical tunes and military marches to dances and popular ballads. These volumes contain no lyrics. One is undated, and the other is inscribed "John Clare/Helpstone/1818." Clare entitled them "A Collection of Songs Airs and Dances for the Violin" and noted carefully the title of each tune.

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[35] All subsequent references to Jonathan Bate refer to his biography of Clare, unless otherwise noted.
[36] Grainger cites this phrase from J.W. Tibble's 1935 edition *The Poems of John Clare*, Volume 1, page 148.
[37] These latter two phrases Grainger cites from Clare's own *Sketches in the Life of John Clare*, edited by Edmund Blunden, London, 1931, page 46.

Bate speculates that Glinton schoolmaster James Merrishaw probably taught John musical notation (95).

In these song collections, Clare shows a pure love of sound (over lyric) and a preference for traditional form. One example of this early preference is a poem he writes in imitation of the ballad "Peggy Band," which he submitted for publication. Clare writes in his journal that he prizes above all "the memory of the music" and chooses not to transcribe the new version of the song's lyrics:

> Received a letter from Vandyke in which he appears as the Editor of my Poems they choose who they please this time but my choice comes next & I think I shall feel able to do it myself he wishes me to alter the title of my song written in imitation of Peggy Band to Peggy Bland because the old ballad is bad I did it in memory of the music & shall not alter it (*NHP* 222)[38]

In a letter Clare repeats his sentiment that the old tune, not its lyrics, compels: "for the tune of the old one is Capital as my father used to sing it but I cannot say much for the words" (*NHP* 222). Clare records a follow-up in his journal on February 14:

> in my letter to Vandyk I inserted the tune of 'Peggy Band' there is a many beautiful tunes to these provincial Ballads such is the 'White Cockade' 'Wars alarms' 'Down the Burn Davy' old & new 'Through the Wood laddy' 'Dusty Miller' 'Highland Laddie' & a very beautiful one I forget the title it begins 'A withered old gipsey one day I espied Who bade me shun the thick woods & said something beside' but the old woman that sung it is gone—the 'old Guardian Angels' 'Banks of Banna' & a thousand others (*NHP* 223-4)

Clare admires the old tunes and expresses desire to note them down on paper, a fact which attests to his strong aural sense. "[T]he more I hear them," he tells his publisher John Taylor in a 1821 letter, "the more I wish Id skill enough in music to prick them down" (*NHP* 223). Clare has

[38] These natural history passages are not edited to conform to grammatical or spelling conventions. The issue of Clare and grammar is a complex one that I do not attempt to address in this chapter or this thesis. Clare did receive some schooling in his childhood and did have access to grammar books, though he expressed frustration with the system of grammar. Though he acknowledged his need for Taylor's editorial interventions with his poems, he also lamented this fact and demonstrated a protective stance towards his own dialect. In Peterborough manuscript A46, pp. R41 and R43, Clare writes: "to be sure I do not often begin a new sentence with a capital & that is a slovenly neglect" but he also adds "no two [writers] puts them [i.e. points] in the same posts of honour" (*NHP* liv).

acquired this skill by June 1825, when he journals the following: "Got the tune of 'Highland Mary' from Wisdom Smith a gipsey & pricked another sweet tune with out name as he fiddled it" (*NHP* 245). His strong aural sense and memory of the tunes, not the ballad text, inspire his composition of the poem "Peggy Band."

Clare approaches poetry as a matter of music; many of his poems are simply entitled "Song." In *Poems, Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (1820), his first published volume of poetry, he includes a separate heading in the table of contents—"Songs and Ballads"—with 11 titles. The body of Clare's poetry demonstrates this conceptual approach; Clare frequently alternates between a range of synonyms (*music*, *song*, *poesy*, *rhyme*, *lay*, and *tune*) to describe poetry.[39]

Clare's listening extends past human culture to embrace his surrounding natural environment. He transcribed sounds from nature and recorded daily events in a journal—a testament to his compulsion for writing. Extant manuscripts illustrate his daily notation of sounds (among other subjects) from the time of his discovery by the polite literary world in 1818 to about 1850, after his institutionalization at the Northampton General Lunatic Asylum. In his notes for his intended natural history of Helpstone, Clare records details about insect, animal, weather, and bird sounds. He also describes the absence of sound: on 10 September, 1824, he notes the "silence" of asters.

Clare's listening habits, particularly his listening to nature, can be culled from examples from his 1824-5 journal and natural history prose. He also portrays aurality and orality in poems, several of which I will discuss later. Aurality is fundamental to Clare's vocal life and the vocal

[39] "Clare's career as a poet began in eager listening; before he was a pupil of James Thomson and William Cowper, he tells us, he was a student of nature's music. . . . In 'Childhood,' for example, Clare writes: 'Each noise that breathed around us then / . . . Joy never led us wrong / The wild bee in the blossom hung / The coy birds startled call / To find its home in danger—there / Was music in them all'" (Weiner 371).

life he attributes to subjects in nature. As stated earlier, listening is essential to Clare's way of relating to his local environment. In his poetry and prose, Clare deploys both literal descriptions and figurative portrayals of sound. This mutual deployment indicates the symbolic value of sound in his poetics.

Sound (and its components of aurality and orality) is a useful device for Clare's poetics, which re-evaluates poetic images and sounds in order to show hidden worth in the non-human world. There are several reasons why this device is so effective. First, the human phenomenon of hearing is automatic and cannot be stopped; this fact can be theoretically extended, by association, to animals, birds, and even plants in nature.[40] The inalienability of sound is made concrete by the fact that human hearing is a physiological reflex that is involuntary, instinctive, responsive, and unconditional. This inalienability becomes a triumphant civic figure for the inalienability and power of Clare's own sound and song. Clare adds depth and value to the omnipresence of sound when he introduces his aesthetic distinction between the "man of taste," who actively regards the external environment, and the "heedless passenger" or "rustic clown" who hurries through the landscape and fails to consider its beauties.

Secondly, Clare appropriates from sound the pleasure, vitality, and legitimacy that he seeks to cast upon his own art. Thirdly, aurality and orality demonstrate a system of exchange that approximates and stands for the literary marketplace, an abstract location which is unfamiliar yet tantalizing to Clare. Aurality is fundamental to Clare's vocal life (and that of Helpston's subjects) because it conceptually posits in the form of a physiological reflex the existence of an unconditional audience that can provide patronage. Listening functions as patronage. Clare claims from this natural reflexive action the support, praise, and interest he so

[40] A recent program from the WNET/THIRTEEN "Nature" series entitled "What Plants Talk About" introduces scientific researchers who explore the ways in which various plant species (e.g., the wild tobacco plant in Utah and Douglas firs in British Columbia) communicate, and form kinship systems, in order to survive.

earnestly desires. The foregrounding of sound and aurality also fortifies Clare with this same promotional power. As an aficionado of nature's music and poesy he becomes a vital part of a rich, productive, and aesthetic community of his own imagining.

Lastly, sound, and Clare's careful notation of its various forms within Helpston, is the lowest common denominator of song and poetry. Clare emphasizes its value as a way to subvert poetic hierarchies and to propose his trifling (or bottom-up) aesthetic, which locates value in nature's meanest creations. But this radical focus also creates a simultaneous effect of estrangement and alienation—a fact which some of the poem's speakers celebrate. The vehicle of sound is a transformative paradox. The physiological process of hearing sounds promises absolute presence and inalienability, as the existence of sounds themselves (as artifacts) encodes difference and singularity. As an unexceptional (even vulgar) symbol of poetry, sound ensures the fair hearing of the multitude—of all forms of art. It decentralizes the power of critique away from human language and discourses. Wresting authority from tastemakers, it opens up a marketplace that is freely accessible to all. Clare's documentary poetics—his aural ethic—models a behavior for potential readers and patrons. By shifting focus to the pleasure of sounds, he realigns aesthetic expectations and values. This process is paradoxical. Though it sometimes foregrounds strange sonic events and communicative impasses, it also yokes listener and speaker together in an absolute and evolving relationship.

Sono-Loco-Documentation (SLD)

In the years 1824-5, Clare kept a journal more or less every day. In his journal entries, Clare records details about his daily readings and impressions, what he has written, letters or gifts or visits received, walks or attempts to gather botanical specimens, gardening, and Helpston news. Here we see aurality in action. He describes the sounds of animals and the environment

but he also foregrounds his own act of listening. In his review of various poems and scriptures, he often rates the sound of literary texts.

The journal notes also represent sound in a figurative way. Clare stretches the concept of hearing to describe things that do not properly make audible sounds, but which resonate nonetheless. For instance, he describes the power of poetry to create an effect of sound. Isaak Walton's *The Compleat Angler* (1653) is one such text. On Wednesday, September 8, 1824, Clare speaks of "sitting under Waltons Sycamore tree hearing him discourse of fish ponds & fishing" (*NHP* 174). He is so delighted with it that he calls it "the best English Pastoral"; the descriptions are "nature unsullied by fashionable tastes." Like Bloomfield's pastoral ballads, Walton's descriptions "breath of the common air & the grass & the sky." Clare is so transported by the descriptions that he narrates the experience of sound further: "one may almost hear the water of the river Lea ripple along & the grass & flags grow & rustle in the pages that speak of it." In this excerpt, Clare highlights his power of listening and the force of Walton's text to suggest sound. These two operations (hearing and figuring sound) combine to create a simulated experience of nature. The transitive force is the experience of sound.

Clare also notes negative examples of poetic sound in his journal. In an excerpt from October 26, 1824, he complains of Alexander Pope's effect upon the ear: "I know not how it is but I cannot take him up often or read him long together the uninterrupted flow of the verses wearys the ear" (*NHP* 195). Clare extends this figurative approach to poets' sounds to the sounds produced by plants and animals, as well as other entities in the natural environment. Often he personifies these subjects in the act of speech or expression, using the rhetorical device of prosopopoeia.

Though his prose shows copious instances of straightforward listening, the poetry is where Clare develops various meanings of aurality. In his prose, Clare portrays his own aurality and its counterpart: the orality of other subjects. His poetry extends this relation further: birds listen and reply to his speech. Clare's poems portray, foreground, and thematize aurality and orality as modes of contact between Helpston inhabitants. Frequently a speaker experiences identification with a surrounding environment as the result of hearing. In copying out Helpston's sounds, Clare emphasizes the experience of listening twice over. That is, he uses one oral text (the poem) to portray a different oral text (the documentary sounds of Helpston).

Clare's poems produce sound effects by a large variety of means. A poem's speaker can directly describe, passively allude to, attempt to re-perform, or figuratively imply the sound produced by another Helpston inhabitant.[41] He may relate another person's report of sound and extend the gossip chain into the space of the poem. He may also transcribe the sound and present it as an interpolated text; this approach, which evokes dramatic dialogue, most directly portrays the vocative subject. In all of these scenarios, the speaker, in effect, becomes a transmitter of Helpston's sounds. An important distinction applies to this relationship. In presenting Helpston's sounds and voices within the space of his poems, Clare acts as an instrument of sound, not an original source. Gerard Genette's concept of focalization[42] is useful in understanding how Clare utilizes the speaker persona as a device to project other content. Though the speaker is the figure from whom we receive information (i.e., he focalizes the narrative gaze), he relays information outside of his experience. Clare also accentuates the orality of Helpston's subjects via

[41] To adopt Wayne Booth's useful distinction between narrators who show and tell—Clare's speakers can show, tell, or imply sound.

[42] As well as Melba Cuddy-Keane's revision of this concept according to audition/aurality: *auscultation*. I will discuss this concept later in this chapter in the section on the science of sound.

association, using poetic devices (e.g., alliteration, anaphora, anthimeria, and rhyme) to stimulate the reader's ear and to [re]create an experience of sound.

One poem entitled "Pleasant Sounds" is loaded with aural imagery, which is related in a straightforward manner.[43] The speaker recalls and lists pleasant sounds in a plain style. The poem begins somewhat ungrammatically: "The rustling of leaves under the feet in woods and under hedges. / The crumpling of cat-ice[44] and snow down wood rides, narrow lanes, and every street causeways" (1-2). It continues with six other sounds; each reads like a verbal noun. Clare does not attempt to perform these sounds. The speaker simply describes them, emphasizing that these sounds are pleasing—a central criterion in Clare's notion of taste. This unadorned, documentary approach to portraying nature's voices is innovative, but Clare's poems recreate more than the physical dimension of sound: they also thematize and reflect on it. The poems are a place where sound is recreated as well as imagined and celebrated as a vital element of communal life.

In addition to aurality, locus is a prime factor in Clare's ecological sensibility and environmental engagement. These two elements are connected, as acoustic science has demonstrated—for sounds offer meaning because they represent a context.[45] Numerous critics point out Clare's intimate connection with Helpston and the Northamptonshire landscape, and his lack of travel.[46] Except for a trip to Wisbech; work in Stamford, Bridge Casterton, and Pickworth; a visit to the sea in Boston, Lincolnshire; four visits to London; a visit to Bloomfield's grave in Richmond; his short tenure in Epping Forest; and his years in the Northamptonshire General Lunatic Asylum, Clare never traveled more than a few miles from his

[43] This prose poem is also discussed in chapter two.
[44] Very thin ice from under which the water has receded.
[45] "A sound means something partly because of what produces it, but mainly because of the circumstances under which it is heard" (Truax xi).
[46] Robin Jarvis refers to his "lococentrism" and his familial and neighborly concept of the landscape (190).

native village of Helpston. His experience of landscape was proximal and habitual; he did not view the land as a tourist or a land-owner. Helpston and its nearby loci form a family network for Clare and his poems do the work of preserving this family history. Because he was so intimately connected with the microcosm of Helpston (especially its non-human inhabitants), and because he objected to the enclosure of Helpston's open and common areas, Clare demonstrates a prescient ecological sensibility. He understood the interrelation between human forms of culture and the external environment. Agricultural improvement was one form of human intervention that disrupted the prevailing tradition of land use. In his effort to present the non-human subjects (i.e., flora, fauna, insects, as well as inanimate entities) that inhabited Helpston, Clare disrupts the false nature-culture binary. There is no wilderness from which the poet is ejected or upraised.[47] Rather, there are only other subjects with which to interact and converse; and these non-human subjects are implicated by Helpston's cultural history as well as its political and economic history. Though he uses personification and prosopopoeia as a means to dramatize these other subjects in nature, Clare avoids assimilating these natural entities; his speakers may experience moments of connection, or yearn for them, but they also present moments of estrangement and foreground the alterity of these other beings.[48]

Clare's poetics emphasizes aurality, orality, and locus as part of a recommended cultural program of environmental engagement and remembrance. Always, Clare fights forgetting. In his ecocritical history of American environmentalism, *Green Writing*, James McKusick sheds light on just how crucial forgetting is to the American vision (2). McKusick alludes to D.H. Lawrence's notion of the symbolic American act in which the child murders "Father Europe"

[47] This is a somewhat problematic statement in light of Clare's application of Edenic tropes to the enclosure of Helpston and to his own maturation. Nonetheless, alienation from the landscape is often assigned to other subjects in the poems—those rustic clowns and heedless passengers with whom the rapt speaker takes issue.

[48] Clare methodically hedges speakers' perceptions with hermeneutic details; he uses the constructions *seem*, *as if*, and *appear*. He also refers to speakers' active senses.

(Lawrence qtd. in McKusick 3). Thoreau, speaking of the "Atlantic Lethean stream," enunciates the necessity of severing the cord between east and west in order to enable that freeing, Westering impulse so influential in American life (2-3). McKusick works to combat this willful act of forgetting by pointing to patterns of ecological thought which span from Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Clare to Emerson, Thoreau, and Muir. Wilderness, McKusick argues, is "constituted by an act of forgetting" and is "therefore a deeply suspect concept" (2-3). John Clare's personal experiences in Helpston and his ecological sensibility, both of which are so formative of his poetic style and method, demonstrate the crucial roles that remembrance and textual documentation can play in environmental advocacy. He shows another nature without severing extant ties; in fact, his poetry memorializes the ways in which humans tend to such ties. Above all, I would like to emphasize Clare's method of commemorating the historical connections between human and non-human inhabitants in a given locale. To this end, his poems and prose notes seek to document and record lives, habitats, and the connections between them.

Clare's poetics documents locations by noting their sounds, among other features. His poems, notes, and letters record the sound bites of nature. He is unparalleled in the extent to which he gives voice to subjects in nature. In the work of documenting, Clare acts as copyist and mouthpiece—a reflective consciousness which foregrounds external content. This reflecting work is a compositional habit, since it is a device used primarily in writing. I call this compositional habit *sono-loco-documentation* (SLD)—that is, the documentation of a place by listening to and transcribing its sounds in writing.

Frequently Clare listens to and transcribes sounds; he then recombines these in fresh poetic representations. By documenting a location this way, Clare forges a link between a particular environment and linguistic description and, more broadly, between nature and

meaningful sound or communication. This documentary process is displayed in Clare's natural history prose, poetic drafts, and published poems. Looking at particular natural history notes sheds light on Clare's writing habits. Margaret Grainger, editor and compiler of the natural history prose, addresses this method of composition in her introduction to MS 198 from the Pforzheimer Collection:

> As so often happens his poetry and prose are intimately connected, and here [Note A, Pforzheimer MS 198] the prose description is the first working draft for what eventually is refined as the sonnets 'Wood Pictures in Summer', 'Wood Pictures in Winter', and 'Wood Pictures in Spring'. . . . I wish to draw attention to the cancelled poetic fragments which occur . . . on the pages immediately following the prose description and in similar ink, so there is some likelihood that the drafting of the poems was started soon after the prose was written, possibly even at the same sitting. (*NHP* 314)

Grainger's observation and Clare's MS supports the notion that Clare's compositional process utilizes a collaboration (in time) between listening, prose notation, and versifying. The process usually begins with sensory experience followed by prose notation of some sort. Clare works on this raw material in his poetic forge, usually after the recorded moment has passed. Pforzheimer MS 198 contains a variety of poetic drafts; each of these recycles particular phrasings and images jotted down in prose "Note A" (e.g., the "rich brown umbre hue"). As Grainger observes, parts of these fragments find their way into finished sonnets.[49] But Grainger is not only interested in showing how the prose is worked into these sonnets, but also "the recurrence of ideas and phrases in the prose passage and in other poems" (*NHP* 316). She carefully notes such overlaps throughout her footnotes. Grainger's experience with MS 198 reflects both the documentary and creative aspects of Clare's poetics. Clare's sensory experiences (which he records so dutifully) form a poetic repository—a roiling mixture of images and wordings. He reaches into this basin immediately or long after depositing these objects. Further, this repository operates in a manner

[49] The "Wood Picture" sonnets were included in the manuscript for *The Rural Muse* (1835) but were not published.

similar to conversation: its contents are perennially renewed by Clare's experiences out and about in Helpston, his journaling, his composition of poems, and the publication of his poems.

SLD can run according to a sequence of steps in which aural experience prompts duplication and composition. Because this sequence relies upon an experience of sound, it is a cooperative and layered process. Clare frequently describes a particular sound or personifies a source of sound as a collaborator within his poetic process and he grafts a familiar narrative onto the scene: the poet hears, records, and replies in kind to a source of sound, and a synthesized level of conversation occurs.

I would like to anatomize the steps of this documentary poetic process, SLD. These steps are not static, linear, or irreversible; they are important more as individual states in poetic composition. They include: 1) the active listening to a particular sound; 2) the recording or copying down of the particular sound (by transcription, writing); 3) the oral imitation or mimicry of the sound (or occasionally, a reply in the form of a new sound); 4) the recombination of the sound in an act of poetic representation and composition; and 5) the witness or testimony, by publication, of the existence and value of this sound.[50]

Let us address one example of SLD: Clare's experience listening to the Northborough nightingale in 1832.[51] Peterborough MS A58, Notes C & D, as well as Clare's poem "The Progress of Rhyme," illustrate SLD as a compositional process. In Note C, Clare describes sitting at his window and hearing a nightingale singing in the orchard. "I attempted to take down

[50] Two poems particularly bear this sequence out. Consider lines 136-42 of "The Progress of Rhyme": "When I was in the fields alone / With none to help and none to hear, / To bid me either hope or fear, / The bird or bee its chords would sound, / The air hummed melodies around, / I caught with eager ear the strain / And sung the music o'er again." Consider also "November": "Sybil of months & worshipper of winds / I love thee rude & boisterous as thou art / & scraps of joy my wandering ever finds / Mid thy uproarious madness . . . / . . . / I love the wizard noise & rave in turn / Half vacant thoughts & self imagined rhymes / Then hide me from the shower a short sojourn / Neath ivied oak & mutter to the winds / Wishing their melody belonged to me / That I might breath a living song to thee" (1-4, 9-14).

[51] A lengthier analysis of this example appears in chapter two.

her notes," he writes, "but they are so varied" (*NHP* 311). Note D provides Clare's attempted transcription (in Roman letters) of the bird's song. Some of the phrasings of Note D find their way into "The Progress of Rhyme," a fact which demonstrates steps four and five of SLD.

Another example of SLD demonstrates Clare's figurative treatment of sound. The early poem "Dedication to Mary" illustrates Clare's aural sense and how it informs his poetry. The poem rehearses some familiar preoccupations for Clare: nostalgia for a prelapsarian childhood, affection for Mary Joyce, taste, memory, and the afterlife. The speaker dedicates his thoughts to an absent but beloved Mary with the hope that her smiles will be "like dews of heaven" to "cheer" his "lone walks" and repay his toils. This treatment of the subject (i.e., Mary's patronage) reveals Clare's figurative tendencies. First, he associates the human and natural worlds. Mary's approval of his lay is compared to the process of the morning dew. Clare attributes the power of a natural process (in this case, meteorological) to his addressee. Despite her continued absence, Mary's smiles and implied affection diffuse into the atmosphere and like water vapor, condense and revive the speaker. The metaphorical vehicle of dew signifies a physical connection between Mary and the speaker. Though she is physically removed from him, the dew's circulation connects them. The dew also encourages the speaker. Its daily appearance and link to the landscape provide a sense of familiarity and cyclicality to the relationship between Mary and the speaker. Secondly, Clare associates the metaphor with heaven or providence (Mary's smiles are the "dews of heaven"). Mary's esteem has salvational power for the speaker; like his Beatrice, she dwells in some removed yet hallowed space. Thirdly, Clare sustains the metaphor into a conceit by playing upon multiple senses of a word. In this case "heaven" refers both to the place where God dwells and where precipitation comes from. This symbolic conflation (of literal and figurative senses) is characteristic of Clare's poetics.

Several forces combine here to inspire Clare: the past, the future (or eternity), heaven, nature, his verses, and the figure of Mary herself. In "Dedication to Mary" Clare portrays listening and orality figuratively. These become devices by which he and Mary can recall and relive the rapture of youthful love. However, Clare does not rely upon sound imagery only to create poetic effect; he thematizes sound as a transformative force in his world. Listening, speaking, singing, and consuming verse become plot points. Mary is praised for her "artless gaze" (7) and sincere appreciation of the natural environment: "O thou that did sincerely love / The cuckoo's voice and cooing dove, / And stood in raptures oft to hear / The blackbird's music wild and clear" (9-12). Mary also stays out late "To list the cricket's chittering song" (16). The speaker's fond reminiscence of Mary foregrounds her aural appreciation of the cuckoo, dove, blackbird, and cricket's sounds and expresses his desire that she likewise listen to his song.

But the speaker is not content to let listening lie. He extends the association between the human and natural worlds to attribute literate voice to rose blossoms, which are "whispering morals as they fall." They speak to Mary and the speaker transcribes their speech thus:

> "What thou ere this hath proved too well,
> Picturing stories sad and true
> Beneath thy bright eyes beaming blue,
> How youth and beauty fades and dies,
> The sweetest has the least to prize,
> How blissful pleasures fade away
> That have the shortest time to stay,
> As suns that blest thy eyes and mine
> Are but allowed a day to shine
> And fairest days without a cloud
> A gloomy evening waits to shrowd."
> So spoke the fading dropping flowers
> That perished in thy musing hours,
> I know not whether thou descried
> But I could hear them by thy side. (24-39)

The speaker emphasizes twice that these petals speak as well as the fact of his own listening—something which seems to set him apart from Mary. He knows not whether she detects the sound—whether she "descried" it. This peculiar choice of verb creates confusion between sight and sound. The history of the word *descry* supports this confusion. It includes three senses that range from the oral act of crying out and announcing the presence of something to the visual act of discovery or espying.[52] When he questions whether Mary recognizes the petals' speech, he presents her listening as visual act. Mary is not on guard to discover such phenomena, as he is. The speaker emphasizes her sight three additional times in this passage. Admittedly, a woman's eyes seem an appropriate subject in an amatory poem, but Clare introduces a kind of synaesthesia by which eyesight is reduced to hearing. Further, Mary's feelings for the speaker are also reduced to a matter of hearing. He alludes to her previous love of the cuckoo's voice as a basis for her current audition of his lay. Yet he doubts her aurality and taste for such pleasures while he portrays the continuation of his own. In losing her sense of sound, and her attentive rapture, Mary has abandoned the speaker as well as nature.

So far, in this simple love poem, Clare has demonstrated several key aspects of his compositional habit, SLD. He foregrounds, and then calls into question, Mary's listening and portrays his own. He records the speech of the rose petals—though he projects that speech via prosopopoiea. Other instances do exist in which Clare more plainly transcribes sounds. But in this poem he is content to attribute speech and morality to plants. It is worth noting that where heard sounds do not exist, Clare's speakers often give voice to subjects in nature. Often this

[52] "Descry, *v.*[1]" *OED Online*. Mar. 2012. Oxford UP. 6 June 2012. This verb has a military sense as well. To descry the presence of an enemy is also to challenge that enemy to fight. Though I do not think Clare imagines waging war on the petals, his speaker does seem to be more attuned to the petals' maneuvers—like a look-out, or a listen-out (in this case).

attributed sound or voice represents a broader conceptualized universal music (of praise, taste, morality).[53]

The speaker in "Dedication to Mary" goes on to recombine or recreate the effect of sound, another key aspect of SLD. In the poem, natural subjects (birds, bees) create sound but in a new and different context than the sound witnessed by the childlike Mary. The speaker notes: "The birds still sing thy favoured lays / As though they sung for Mary's praise, / And bees hum glad and fearless by / As though their tender friend was nigh" (74-7). Clare depicts song but he personifies the birds and bees with a memory of, and affection for, Mary. Their rehearsal of sound prefigures the speaker's own verses, which also attempt to honor, touch, and thereby allow the speaker to re-commune with Mary.

Lastly, the speaker attests to the value of these sounds and his painful removal from them. The sound of Mary's "voice so long in silence bound" is forgotten. In lieu of this sensory thrill, he desires the dew of her smile—a sort of drift of sentiment and aesthetic appreciation for his verses. For this to happen, Mary must accept the trifle that he offers and listen to it. His own voice is made to compensate for the absence of her voice; it becomes a vehicle by which, like the bird's songs, re-chanting can produce a sort of personal presence.

In the above example, Clare portrays the aurality of Mary, himself, and, to an extent, the birds and flowers (who also seek her praise yet meet with silence). He portrays the orality of various bird species, the rose, and himself. He invokes Mary's voice by referring to its absence. The exchange of sound, praise, and sentiment in "Dedication to Mary" displays the productive relation between humans and nature. SLD, or the transcription and playful treatment of sound, is a useful tool for conveying this productive reciprocity.

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[53] Chapter Four will examine how Clare imbues the music of nature with aesthetic and moral value.

When Clare documents sound, he is careful to note where it comes from as well as the agent producing it. As previously stated, locus is just as important to his poetic process as sound is. And depending on the poem or prose piece in question, locus can be represented by any number of plant, animal, or insect species from the Northamptonshire region. Sometimes a locale is represented by a specific piece of land or geographic feature (e.g., Swordy Well), the sounds or actions of its animal or human inhabitants (e.g., thrushes, gypsies, children), or a more generalized account of the place. The songs, utterances, and folk tales produced by inhabitants also represent their dwelling. This is why Clare frequently emphasizes and explains Helpston coinages, customs, fables, and superstitions. Just like the puddock's "peelew[54]" or the crackling of hay, such folk accounts are part of an aural/oral ecosystem. In a journal note for November 24, 1824, Clare refers to the communal tales about a grove of Elm trees in Helpston:

> I have often been struck with astonishment at the tales of old men & women relate on their remembrances of the growth of tree<s> the Elm groves in the Staves acre Close at the town end were the rooks build & that are of jiant height my old friend Billings says he remembers them no thicker then his stick & saw my [*del.* Uncle] fathers uncle set them carrying a score on his back at once I can scarcly believe it (*NHP* 207)

The passage relates disbelief as well as fact. Clare's own great uncle is said to have had some role in the planting of the Elm grove at Staves Close. Frequently, these communal anecdotes highlight historical events that connect Clare to the matter in question (if the act of listening or the subject itself does not). The note also shows Clare's reverence for the past, particularly as this relates to the land and its inhabitants. The story, like the elms, acts as a living proof of Helpston; it is an artifact of an ecosystem.

[54] Puttock, or red kite.

Sound and John Clare

Since roughly 2000, critics of Romanticism have demonstrated increased sensitivity to the science of sound and the role that sound plays in poetry as well as poetic subject matter; this trend is also reflected in the literary criticism of other periods, notably the Victorian Era and Early Twentieth Century.[55] Modern approaches to sound originate in the late nineteenth century with Herman von Helmholtz's *On the Sensations of Tone,* the birth of the science of acoustics, and the advent of modern sound technology (Cuddy-Keane 383). In 1933, T.S. Eliot wrote about the "auditory imagination" and its ability to penetrate the subconscious and invigorate every word (qtd. in Wolfson, par. 4). And in his 1942 essay "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," Wallace Stevens reminded us that poetry is words, which are, above all, sounds (qtd. in Wolfson par. 1).

In recent decades, the study of sound has inaugurated a variety of research applications, including the study of acoustic environments and acoustic ecology[56], radio technology, the psychology of hearing, and narrative acoustics. Current literary approaches to sound demonstrate this swell. Critics have fashioned vocabularies to deal with the sounds of texts in response to the science of acoustics and the increased influence of neuroscience and cognitive studies. Andrew Welsh, for instance, writes about the "aural imagination" (9). Garrett Stewart has his "phonotext." In the introduction to the 2008 Romantic Praxis Series, *"Soundings of Things Done": The Poetry and Poetics of Sound in the Romantic Ear and Era*, Susan Wolfson identifies

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[55] See, for instance, John M. Picker's *Victorian Soundscapes* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003); Matthew Campbell's *Rhythm and Will in Victorian Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999); Eric Griffiths's *The Printed Voice of Victorian Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1989); Garrett Stewart's *Reading Voices: Literature and The Phonotext* (Berkeley: U California P, 1990); Yopie Prins's "Voice Inverse," *Victorian Poetry* 42.1 (2004): 43-59; and Melba Cuddy-Keane's "Modernist Soundscapes and the Intelligent Ear: An Approach to Narrative Through Auditory Perception," *A Companion to Narrative Theory* (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 382-398.

[56] R. Murray Schafer and The World Soundscape Project at Simon Fraser University (1960s-1970s) developed a "sonic vocabulary" that supplants the primacy of eye/sight analogies in describing environments: "soundmark" instead of "landmark," "soundscape" instead of "landscape," and "sound signals" and "keynote sound" instead of "figure" and "ground" (qtd. in Cuddy-Keane 385).

the critical caché of sound demonstrated by President Marjorie Perloff's invitation in 2006 for an MLA convention "mega-colloquium on 'The Sound of Poetry'" (par. 1). The essays in this collection, by Wolfson, James Chandler, Garrett Stewart, and Adam Potkay, address the topic of sound in the poetry of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, and Shelley. It should be noted, however, that several specific approaches to sound in Romantic criticism predate Perloff's invitation.[57]

This acoustic trend in literary studies has also touched upon the work of John Clare in a number of recent articles treating the role of listening in his poetic oeuvre. But these accounts seem peripheral to the major critical issues that have engaged Clare scholars and Romanticists. This inattention is evidenced by the fact that neither the 1994 collection *John Clare in Context* nor the 2000 volume *John Clare: New Approaches* include any essays dealing explicitly with Clare's expert ear and the role of mimicry in his poetry or his natural history prose. Nor did *The John Clare Society Journal*, from its inception in 1982 until very recently, address this topic. Scholars have published about mimesis, semiosis, voice, folk songs, musicianship, and storytelling, but listening seems to have been ignored in the wake of post-Barrell accounts of Clare's visual sense and the relationship between prospect poetry and Clare's descriptive poetry.[58]

Of course, as with any thread of study, early articulations and vibrations do exist. In his 1982 book *From the Headlands,* which refers to Clare in some measure, Ronald Blythe connects rural life to the topics of hearing, silence and composition. Tim Chilcott speaks of Clare's "aural

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[57] These include: John Hollander's 1972 essay "Wordsworth and the Music of Sound" and his 1975 book *Vision and Resonance*; M.H. Abrams's 1972 essay "Coleridge's 'A Light in Sound': Science, Metascience, and Poetic Imagination"; Geoffrey Hartman's *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* (1987); David Haney's 1997 *Studies in Romanticism* essay on "the eye and ear" in Wordsworth; Elizabeth A. Lawrence's 1999 ecocritical article on the Keatsian nightingale; and more recently, J. Mark Smith's essay "'Unrememerable' Sound in Wordsworth's 1799 *Prelude*" from the Winter 2003 issue of *Studies in Romanticism*.

[58] The fact that sound and listening have "arrived" in Clare studies is also demonstrated by the John Clare Society of North America's proposed MLA 2014 Convention Panel, "John Clare: The Voices of Nature." Consider also the title of one of the sessions from the 2010 John Clare Festival: "John Clare and the Music of What Happens."

precision" in *A Real World & Doubting Mind* (1985). The issue of a speaking nature has not been overlooked either. John Barrell (*The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place*, 1972) and James McKusick (*Green Writing*, 2000) both reckon with "The Lament of Swordy Well" and its unique conceit in which the place itself, and not its genius, speaks. David Simpson addresses this conceit more explicitly in the 2003 *Wordsworth Circle* issue devoted to Clare, arguing that "no simple genre or rhetorical category . . . prefigures what Clare is doing here. . . . Prosopopoiea comes closest" (131). Richard Mabey establishes a critical connection between Clare's ornithological and ecological knowledge and his poetry. In a recent piece on the Suffolk nightingale, he alludes to Clare's "pure, unselfish attention" to the Northborough nightingale's song (Mabey 27). And in a short piece entitled "Outdoor Symphonies," from the 2003 *John Clare Society Newsletter*, John Ward expounds upon the musicality of nature sounds in Clare's poetry.

Since 2010, the work of Stephanie Kuduk Weiner and Sam Ward has finally begun to acknowledge Clare's aural sense as a fit subject of investigation.[59] Weiner's 2009 essay, "Listening with John Clare," maintains that Clare's "sense of hearing is equally fundamental to the themes and techniques of his descriptive works," even though it is his "sharp, discerning vision that has garnered the lion's share of critical attention" (371).[60] For Weiner, mediation is one of Clare's central themes (372). Furthermore, Ward's 2010 essay "'To list the song & not start the thrush': John Clare's Acoustic Ecologies," is the first essay in the *John Clare Society Journal* to apply acoustic science to Clare's poetry, a fact which demonstrates just how prescient

[59] Sam Ward's doctoral thesis for Nottingham Trent University, "Presentations of Sound & Song in the Poetry of John Clare," was completed in 2006. His essay "Melodies in the Marketplace: John Clare's 100 Songs," also appeared that year in the *John Clare Society Journal.* In this chapter, I refer to Ward's 2010 essay "'To list the song & not start the thrush': John Clare's Acoustic Ecologies."

[60] The John Clare Society website prominently refers to Clare's "unwearying eye" in its short biographical sketch on the main page.

Clare's treatment of sound was. In their focus upon Clare's ear and their application of theories of onomatopoeia and acoustic science, Weiner and Ward have helped to combat the misleading idea of Clare as a pictorial poet who is at best relegated to anthologies. By expanding knowledge about Clare's aesthetic practices and poetic tool-shed, these two critics have combated what Alan Vardy calls Clare's "minorness." Their work shows that Clare is responsible for more poetic innovation than we are aware of.

Adam Potkay's 2011 essay "Ear and Eye: Counteracting Senses in Loco-Descriptive Poetry," addresses Clare's expert listening as an adjunct to his visual sense, thus confronting a tradition of Clare criticism (and Wordsworth criticism) that deals mostly with sight.[61] Potkay blurs the line between loco-descriptive verse and descriptive verse, arguing that eighteenth and nineteenth century topographical poets share a rich tradition—exemplified by the influential Thomson—that represents both the sights and sounds of a place. Like Weiner and Ward, Potkay attempts to foreground listening as a meaningful poetic and analytical device, particularly its role in descriptive poetry from the eighteenth century. "Audition and attachment," he writes, "are the unsung and ecologically critical counterparts to the qualities that have come to characterize descriptions of long-eighteenth-century loco-descriptive verse: observation and control" (Potkay 180). He points to Thomson's music in *The Seasons*, particularly the portrayal of birdsong, as an index of "generative love"—the "*Venus Genetrix*" to which Lucretius hymns the prologue from *De Rerum Natura* (182). Thomson's "insistence in categorizing birdsong as 'melody,' as 'music,' has . . . the effect of making music itself seem a natural sign of the un-individuated

[61] "But one element of Clare's corpus to which Barrell does not attend is his remarkable investment in hearing as well as seeing, often imagining the two as inextricable. For Thomson as for early Wordsworth, absorption in a soundscape is opposed to the theatricality of landscape, and sweet sounds may counteract terrible sights. For Clare, by contrast, vision and audition are symbiotic, and they work within an environment that admits no simple oppositions (e.g., inside/outside, natural/artificial). . . . Clare's images embody the interdependence of visual, aural, and to a lesser degree tactile responses to an environment" (Potkay 189).

libidinal force that manifests itself in all individuated life forms" (Poktay 182). For instance, Keats's immortal nightingale sings music that spans across eons. The Romantic "insight" about music (developed later by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche) is that it spans across "individual existences" (186):

> The music of things delights, and if there is a consolation here beyond delight itself it lies in the very proximity of music to the motion and force of life, beneath and apart from individual existences. Keats addresses his singing nightingale, "Thou wast not born for death, immortal bird! / . . . / The voice I hear this passing night was heard / In ancient days" (61, 63-4); neither, in this limited sense, are we hearers mortal. (Potkay 186)

In Potkay's hands, Thomson's music has phonetic and thematic resonance. He traces its influence upon Wordsworth, who exposes a tension between seeing and hearing, and Clare, for whom these senses are symbiotic. Potkay's discussion of Thomsonian music as a symbol for "the life force that undergirds all phenomenal beings" elucidates the good faith Clare places in listening (186). This "un-individuated force" of music wielded by Thomson strongly resembles the notion of a reciprocal exchange between dwellers in a given environment. Thomson's positive impact on Clare as a young writer was first publicized by Taylor's introduction to Clare's first volume of poems. *The Seasons* had a tremendous influence upon Clare's poetic sensibility and practice. "Hitherto," Bate writes, "his knowledge of poetry had been confined to ballads, tales and Pomfret's moralizing 'Love triumphant over Reason'" (89). After having read a battered copy of *The Seasons* at age 13, Clare made it his first purchase ever.[62] Thomson's

[62] Bate relates the story of Clare's purchase. On a weekday, when the Stamford bookshop was open, Clare executed a plan to escape his job of tending horses. He paid another boy two pennies to mind his work discretely. Walking home in the sunshine with his one-shilling copy of *The Seasons*, he decided to climb over the wall into Burghley Park. "He nestled on a lawn beside the wall," Bate writes, and soon became enchanted and inspired by Thomson's verses (90). Clare goes on to recount this experience in his autobiographical *Sketches*: "and what with the reading the book, and beholding the beauties of artful nature in the park, I got into a strain of descriptive rhyming on my journey home" (Clare qtd. in Bate 90). After this formative experience, he composed "The Morning Walk," the first committed to paper and followed soon with a companion piece, "The Evening Walk" (Bate 90). This anecdote demonstrates a version of the process of SLD. Clare's listening stimulates composition. It is interesting to note that his "strain of descriptive rhyming" coincides with the rhythmic activity of walking.

vivid portrayal of the awesome sights and sounds of nature's eternal cycles provided templates for Wordsworth and Clare. More importantly, though, the poem's "moral and religious agenda" and "celebration of the divine order behind the apparent chaos of nature" helped to make listening into an activity that was capable of transcending the self (Bate 89-90). Potkay's reading of Thomson's poetic music as a sort of universal life force buttresses Clare's notion of reciprocity amongst nature's subjects. The reciprocity Clare experienced (and imagined) between Helpston's human and non-human inhabitants was of a particularly vocal nature. It comprised both listening and oral expression, and as a poetic principle, it helped generate his own verses and build a thematic, so strongly articulated throughout his work, around nature's poesy and nature's voice.

Potkay takes his essay's title ("Counteracting Senses") from a passage that appears early in Book XI of *The Prelude*. His intent is to lay bare the Romantic discourse of a "balance or commonwealth of the senses" and topple the exclusive prominence of vision as a critical construct. The Wordsworth passage he cites demonstrates the concept of conversation so often portrayed in Clare's poems:

> Gladly here,
> Entering upon abstruser argument,
> Would I endeavor to unfold the means
> Which Nature studiously employs to thwart
> This tyranny [of the eye], summons all the senses each
> To counteract the others and themselves,
> And makes them all, and the objects with which all
> Are conversant, subservient in their turn
> To the great ends of liberty and power. (175-83, qtd. in Potkay 187)

Wordsworth's verses display an analogy between land, text, and speaker, in various ways. He draws on the educational strain of this analogy (seen in "Expostulation and Reply" and "The Tables Turned") by referring to Nature as a "studious" entity. His own "abstruser argument"

prefigures (and precedes in the verse) Nature's mysterious and strategic "means." That he would "unfold" these means implies a sort of explication of Nature *qua* poetic text. The appearance of the word "conversant" in line 182 furthers this sound-sense connection, which implies the existence of three sorts of verse: the poet's lyrics (with their phonetic function); Nature's own cryptic scheme (which the speaker imbues with a comprehensible telos); and a set of sensory verses (like alternating strophes, or antiphons) that mediate between objects and sentient beings. Clare does not engage the trope of conversation in service of "the great ends of liberty and power," as Wordsworth does. Rather, he embellishes it for its own sake, relishing the reproductive and compositional force promised by the music of Thomson's verse .[63] Potkay later analyzes Clare's poem "Summer Images," and observes how "[s]ounds themselves trigger sound, including human imitations," a phenomenon which Clare calls, according to Potkay, "vibrating joy" (191).

The pastoral convention of finding music within nature[64] illuminates Clare's trope of conversation and SLD, both of which draw upon the fundamental notion of an aural/oral economy at work in nature—an association of natural objects and sounds with the world of human language and letters:

> Natural "music" is typically an unacknowledged cultural category structuring a response to the rhythmic and/or "melodic" repetitions of nonhuman agents or forces. . . . Clare . . . renders disarmingly literal the pastoral convention, deriving from Theocritus, of nonhuman music as source and benchmark for human song. (Potkay 189-91)

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[63] Potkay argues that Thomson's birdsong is more than a simple "salient element of a concerted environment" (182). It gestures towards a universal generative power. Music seems "a natural sign of the un-individuated libidinal force that manifests itself in all individuated life forms" (Potkay 182). The dis-individual capacity needs to be addressed in reference to Clare's poetics, protests, and eventual institutionalization. Aurality and orality are prominent tools in his personal experiences in (and with) Helpston and his poetic practice; and reciprocity and conversation act as ruling conceits and principles in his poetics. In these chapters, I emphasize the reproductive capacity of listening and response in Clare's verse, though the nihilistic potential of infinite reverberation is a serious subject also worth considering.

[64] For example, Clare writes: "I found the poems in the fields, / And only wrote them down" (15-6) ("Sighing for Retirement," *The Later Poems of John Clare* I.19).

Natural music, and the voices of nature, must be acknowledged as the cultural categories that they are; though Clare employs nontraditional means to give voice to nature's subjects, he is careful to foreground the conceit. As Weiner ably notes, mediation is one of his central themes. Aurality and orality underpin almost all of his personal experiences in Helpston and with its inhabitants; they are prominent tools in his poetic practice and they set up the ruling conceits of reciprocity and conversation.

Murray Cohen, a linguistic historian, traces a twofold shift in late eighteenth-century writing about language that helps to account for orality as a sign of subjectivity. Words "come to function less referentially or logically and more affectively" and "*sounds* . . . become the object of new and widespread interest" among linguists (Cohen qtd. in Chandler par. 3). Cohen notes that the grammars of this period are based not on "the order of things," but on "manners of speaking." James Chandler connects this "new attention to the sound of words" to vitalism and the poetry of Keats, Shelley, and Wordsworth:

> The new paradigm, Cohen explains, "defines the linguistic expression of mental activity in a . . . context [that stresses] communication of intention through oral/aural signals associated with feelings or intentions" (106). Ultimately what is implied is a shift in the concept of "mind": from the mind "evident in syntactic logic" to "the 'mind' that is expressed by vocal tones [that give] evidence of passion" (106). (par. 3)

It seems that the rise of Associationism would have something to do with the notion that the passions, as demonstrated by [non-lexical] sounds, prove the existence of a mind. Though critics such as Weiner, Potkay, and Sam Ward have demonstrated the significant role that listening and sound play in Clare's corpus, none have attempted to consider how his aurality influences his poetics—that is, his aesthetic values and practice as well as his compositional habits and principles. This study analyzes the implications of Clare's aurality and his documentary poetic

ethos, particularly in terms of his rambles and his notion of taste. It argues that Clare's aesthetic inspires and directly influences his documentary poetics (specifically SLD and his use of sonic literary devices) and that it provides a symbolic basis for an abstract aesthetic economy in which listening stands for patronage. Clare uses listening as a source of poetic interaction and play, and as a framing device to challenge traditional poetic modes.

The Science of Sounds

In her approach to the rich acoustic texture of Virginia Woolf's novels, narrative theorist Melba Cuddy-Keane notes how sound has always played a significant role in literature. It has been narrativized (converted into description), thematized ("used to represent . . . nonaural meaning"), or spiritualized ("treated as yielding access to a transcendent suprasensual world") (382). Cuddy-Keane proposes helpful terms and concepts for the analysis of what she calls "narrative acoustics." Her observation that the "act of auditory perception" was a "distinctive new focus, in the modernist period"[65] disregards the role that listening plays in the poetry of Wordsworth, Keats, Coleridge, and Clare. Cuddy-Keane illustrates how a "further dimension of sound appeared in the immediate and concrete way that narrative began mimetically to record a vast repertoire of sound, and to transcribe the actual process of listening" (382-3). This mimetic approach to sound did not originate in the early twentieth century, though perhaps the soundscapes Woolf describes (peppered as they are with the sounds of modern technology) do represent a "vast repertoire" compared to Clare's Helpston. What is worth noting is that both writers acknowledge and portray perception as an active form of engagement with one's surroundings (Cuddy-Keane 384).

[65] Cuddy-Keane alludes to the work of Sara Danius (*The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics*, 2002), who argues that perception became an aesthetic end in itself with Joyce (384).

In earlier work, Cuddy-Keane proposed auditory terms to parallel the existing terminology (inaugurated by Gerard Genette) of *focalization*, *focalize*, and *focalizer*. These terms are *auscultation*, *auscultize*, and *auscultator* (385). This specialized terminology is germane to Clare studies, especially because critics have used the term *focalizer* to describe Clare's speakers and their habit of tuning in to the actions, sounds, or situations of birds, animals, plants, etc. In many of Clare's poems, a speaker directs his attention towards the sounds of his environment and the orality of specific organisms within that environment; this auscultation paradoxically uses the position of the speaker, and his auditory perception, to shift focus away from human subjects onto non-human subjects. In other poems by Clare, the speaker both focalizes and auscultizes in order to emphasize the non-human world.

Cuddy-Keane and Sam Ward both apply the work of Murray Schafer and Barry Truax to the analysis of literature, particularly Schafer's concepts of the soundmark and keynote. A soundmark is a "prominent feature of the soundscape, possessing properties of uniqueness, symbolic power or other qualities which make it especially conspicuous or affectionately regarded" (Schafer qtd. in Cuddy-Keane 387). Such sounds "imprint themselves so deeply on a listener that they become associated with a particular place or time" and their loss is deeply felt (Ward 17). Certain soundmarks, such as the chiming of Big Ben or the bells of a parish church, can also define an audible zone, which in turn defines a community.[66] Ward notes that in Clare's habitual listening, "[c]ertain sounds were . . . associated with specific states of mind" (17). For instance, the bells of Glinton Church cause Clare to feel a mixture of melancholy and pleasure (NHP 197-8). Thus, a soundmark "refers to a community sound which is unique or possesses qualities which make it specially regarded or noticed by people in that community" (Ward 29). A

[66] "The parish used to be defined as that area over which the parish church bells may be heard; when you can no longer hear the bells you are in another parish—or none at all" (Schafer qtd. in Cuddy-Keane 377).

keynote, by contrast, is a plurality of recurring sounds. One might define it as the general hum of sounds that is distinctive to a given place. Schafer explains, "The keynote sounds of a landscape are those created by its geography and climate: water, wind, forests, plains, birds, insects and animals" (qtd. in Ward 28-9).

While it is true that Clare was certainly "alive to the tiniest variations in sound" and that "auditory phenomena are a crucial part" of his descriptions, we should not underestimate the power and "inclusiveness" of auditory perception in general (Ward 15, 25; Cuddy-Keane 388). According to J. Douglas Porteous, sound is "omnipresent in the environment; it fills all space and tends spherically to envelop the hearer" (qtd. in Ward 16). Geographical range distinguishes hearing from sight, which is less comprehensive. Whereas peripheral vision operates within a range of 140-80°, and acute central vision within a range of 5°, hearing detects sounds within a 360° range (Cuddy-Keane 387). There is a "centripetal" effect to hearing—it does not offer the secure detachment of looking (Ward 16). Hearing is also more inclusive than seeing because it serves an evolutionary warning purpose: "we can more easily shut our eyes against unpleasant scenes than, lacking earlids, shut our ears against uninvited sounds" (Cuddy-Keane 387-8). Hearing works at night, and it works when our eyes are closed.[67]

Because hearing is more inclusive and comprehensive than seeing, Cuddy-Keane concludes that its work is relational. Hearing "lends itself to narrative inscriptions of integrative perceptions" and it can produce "a heightened awareness of separate and disparate events" (Cuddy-Keane 388). Part of its "crucial work" is "perceiving, or trying to perceive, relationships." Cognitive approaches to hearing have helped us to understand hearing less as a

[67] Cuddy-Keane thanks Dr. Roy Patterson for this comment (388, 396).

passive process and more as an active process in which sounds are translated into "percepts[68]" by "highly sophisticated and complex perceptual acts" comprising the use of our ears, nerves, and brains (Cuddy-Keane 388). Thus, when John Barrell writes that Clare "does not detach himself from the landscape" as most descriptive poets do, but that he strives "to suggest what it is like to be in each place," a critic like Ward can conclude that the "concept of space" suggested by Clare is "inherently acoustic" (Barrell, *Idea of Landscape* 166; Ward 16).

That hearing is comprehensive need not imply its primacy over other senses. As the work of David Haney, Stephanie Kuduk Weiner, Adam Potkay, Sam Ward, and Melba Cuddy-Keane demonstrate, the eye and ear (and to a lesser extent the tactile, olfactory, and gustatory senses) engage in a productive tension or interdependence that is productive of much meaning. Potkay points to how Clare "rhapsodized his native environment" with what Clare called "song pictures" (188). Both Potkay (who addresses attitudes towards eighteenth century topographic description) and Cuddy-Keane (who parses modernist narratives) refer to the prevalent assumption that the eye is associated with rational clarity (and hierarchical control) and the ear with empathetic merging and attachment. Potkay identifies *The Seasons* as the standard of a deconstructive poetic genre that offsets the eye with the ear, and according to his analysis, Clare alone manages to weave these senses together in his descriptions. For Cuddy-Kean, the "senses in Woolf are distinct, but in an interactive, co-operative relation. . . . [T]he ear may give us a more inclusive knowledge of the world than the eye, but it perceives the same reality" (394). Cuddy-Keane's discussion of the "auditory acuity" lurking throughout Woolf's corpus would seem to apply to Clare as well. His poetry of place relies upon, and dramatizes, aurality and orality as a primary means to access the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature.

[68] The term *percept* is applied by Reinier Plomp in *The Intelligent Ear* (2002), one example of a cognitive study of hearing.

Sam Ward acknowledges the fundamentally acoustic nature of Clare's sense of place, which Clare conveys not only through the use of factual data, but also by "the implication of a deeper relationship between places, flora, and fauna, in which man is also implicated" (26-7).

> It is in his descriptions of listening, that this aspect of Clare's art is particularly apparent. This is largely due to the characteristics of what Barry Truax chooses to call 'acoustic communication'. Listening, as Stephen Handel makes clear, is not the same as hearing. The physical pressure of a sound wave hitting the ear may enable perception, but it does not force it. 'Listening is active; it allows age, experience, expectation and expertise to influence perception'. The soundscape, then, needs to be understood not as a set of isolated phenomena, but as an ecological system of relationships. Listeners are never separate from the environment, but, as soundmakers themselves, are involved in a reciprocal relationship with it. (Ward 27)

Handel's distinction, endorsed by Ward, between hearing and listening diminishes the inclusiveness of perception. In the passive condition called "hearing," the ear is constantly subject to the presence of sound waves. However, the action of listening implies attention and choice; listening filters information. Truax observes this same distinction, noting that listening is "a path of information exchange, not just the auditory reaction to stimuli" (xii). As an example of Clare's recognition of the mutual capacity of listeners-as-soundmakers, Ward refers to the poem "The Nightingale's Nest," in which the speaker enjoins the reader to silence so as not to startle a female nightingale. This poem conveys a sense of that "deeper relationship" by "recogni[zing]," not "appropriati[ng]," the bird ("We will not plunder music of its dower") (Ward 27). The bird raises "a plaintive note of danger" and suddenly "stops—as choking fear / That might betray her home." The hypothetical adverb *as* indicates the speaker's speculation about the bird's state. It is uncertain whether this scene demonstrates the "path of information exchange" characteristic of listening or "the auditory reaction to stimuli" characteristic of hearing. It seems to hover somewhere between the two. Though the speaker can only speculate about the bird's mental state, which may after all be an automatic reaction, her "subtle" behavior and silence convey a

distinct message to him ("leave!"). It is in his portrayal of this message that the poem's speaker demonstrates how listeners are part of "an ecological system of relationships" (Ward 27).

Truax's term *acoustic communication* refers to "all of the phenomena involving sound from a *human* perspective" (xi). As a specific methodology of study, acoustic communication "attempts to understand the interlocking behavior of sound, the listener and the environment as a *system* of relationships, not as isolated identities" (xii). Fundamental to this mode of study is the contention that "sound connects us to the environment and to others" and that it affects human behavior (xi). Urbanization and technology, particularly the advent of "electroacoustic technology," impact these relationships. Not only does sound connect us to our environment and to each other, but it creates a "complex system . . . between people and the environment." In this complex system of sound, in which "everything interacts with everything else," the listener is also a soundmaker and even the sound of his own voice comes back to his ear "coloured by the environment" (xii).[69]

Truax's work is useful in examining Clare's poetry because it applies communicational concepts to the field of sound. "After all," Truax writes, "a scientist may study 'vibratory motion,' but the individual experiences its effects as a form of communication" (xi). The notion of the soundscape articulates the intersection between auditory stimuli and personal perception; not only is a soundscape an acoustic environment but it is a basic concept in acoustic communication. The soundscape

> refers to how the individual and society as a whole *understand* the acoustic environment through listening. Listening habits may be acutely sensitive or distractedly indifferent, but both interpret the acoustic environment to the mind, one with active involvement, the other with passive detachment. Moreover, listening habits create a *relationship* between the individual and the environment, whether interactive and open-ended, or oppressive and alienating. It is possible

[69] Recall Buell's myth of mutual constructionism, according to which the environment and culture(s) participate in a mutually constitutive relation.

> that two individuals in the same sound environment might have contrasting relationships to it. What is different is the *pattern* of communication in each case. (Truax xii)

Truax's broad understanding of the mental and perceptual implications of listening emphasizes the individual's experiences of environmental sounds as well as the "pattern of communication" set up by these sounds. The communicational approach to sound study also offers the "very useful notion of *context*" and it highlights the importance of context "to the understanding of messages" (Truax xii). The acoustic consideration of context is particularly relevant to the study of Clare's ecological sensibility and how it shapes his poetry. It implies the fundamentally relational quality of sound—the same relational quality that sustains Clare's reciprocity with his local environment (and its inhabitants) and, consequently, his poetic trope of conversation and his aesthetic principle of taste as something which radiates throughout all subjects in nature. "A sound means something partly because of what produces it, but mainly because of the circumstances under which it is heard" (Truax xi). There is system of relationships at work in nature that comprises the "interlocking behavior" of sound, the listener, and the environment (Truax xii). Clare's poetics bears witness to this acoustic system of relationships.

In the context of this study of Clare's poetics, the term *acoustic communication* refers to Clare's experience of the Helpston soundscape, "an ecological system of relationships" in which Clare is himself implicated and responsible (Ward 27). The question of whether "The Nightingale's Nest" demonstrates listening or hearing is imprecise, and it ought to be applied specifically to the poem's speaker. Handel's and Truax's notions of listening apply to human communication; for it is the voluntary process of human listening that makes sounds meaningful. Though the speaker's couched personification of the bird (as subtle and fearful) does project a certain content onto on the bird, it is the result of his awareness of his own acoustic properties

(she cannot be afraid of him unless he "sounds" his presence); the personification also demonstrates how the speaker's listening calls upon his age, experience, and expertise in forming percepts. Truax resolves that "[l]istening is the key issue in communication via sound because it is the primary interface between the individual and the environment" (xi-xii). Clare's speakers acknowledge their dual capacity as listeners (capable of gleaning information) and soundmakers (capable of producing information). They assiduously document instances of sound and voice in nature; this documentary, secretarial work has the effect of exhibiting the human role in an ecological system of aural and oral relationships.

Clare engages acoustic communication by aurality, orality, and SLD. His ethic of recognition and attentive listening demonstrates the documentary, secretarial role he frequently plays vis-à-vis his poetic subjects. Indicative of that "deeper relationship[70]" which he feels with nature, he often wonders whether nature recognizes him (and his sounds). Such wonder seems only natural. Clare's speakers frequently express a hope in the possibility of interspecies communication. Poems like "The Progress of Rhyme," imagine that a general force of poesy, represented by nature, listens to the songs of humans. Some poems identify more specific subjects in nature as an audience for the human speaker. In "Ballad [A weedling wild]," for instance, a meadow weed listens to and converses with the speaker. Other poems hypothesize interspecies understanding by using the literary device of prosopopoeia to attribute speech to non-human subjects. In "Dedication to Mary," for example, the speaker's beloved listens to the prophetic speech of rose petals and "[t]he birds still sing" her "favoured lays / As though they sung for Mary's praise" (74-5). Still other poems by Clare, such as "Natures Melodys The Music of the Storm," imagine the ways in which listening occurs between various non-human subjects in the environment.

[70] (Ward 27).

The Sound of Helpston

Clare's poetics is a documentary poetics, and in several ways. First, his longer poems in the autobiographical vein (e.g., "Helpstone" or the "The Village Minstrel") document a figure's relationship to Helpston and Northamptonshire as a type of social history. Helpston is defined by its various scenes, pastimes, customs, seasons, holidays, people, stories, songs, landmarks, and work life. Together, these various elements illustrate an ecological community that is united by a system of listening and speaking relations, which create meaning and value. Secondly, he records details about the specific vocalizations of birds and the sounds produced by other organisms in this aural/oral ecosystem. Sometimes he tries to approximate and script these sounds (showing) and other times he describes them according to the perspective of a human figure within the poem (telling). Thirdly, he uses prosopopoeia to attribute imaginary dialogue to specific subjects in nature (typically non-verbal in the pastoral or loco-descriptive traditions) as a figural means of representing these subjects. These latter two methods depict the orality of Helpston's various subjects (whether real or pretended) as a primary means of recording their existence. The poem "Helpstone" is a fitting example of these three loco-documentary approaches.

Clare begins "Helpstone," the opening poem in his first published volume of poetry *Poems, Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (1820), by stressing just how obscure, unlettered, and unheard the place is. His verses hail and praise this village, which is shrouded in silence:

> Hail humble Helpstone where thy valies spread
> And thy mean village lifts its lowly head
> Unknown to grandeur and unknown to fame
> No minstrel boasting to advance thy name
> Unlettered spot unheard in poets song
> Where bustling labour drives the hours along
> Where dawning genius never met the day
> Where useless ign'rance slumbers life away
> Unknown nor heeded where low genius trys
> Above the vulgar and the vain to rise (1-10)

The repetition of negative prefixes and suffixes (*un*, *less*) and words (*mean*, *lowly*, *no*, *never*, *low*, *vulgar*, and *vain*) create a sense of Helpston as an unintelligible and lowly place. No bardic celebrity "boast[s]" its name—instead, "useless ign'rance" dwells here as "low genius" tries to rise above such an inauspicious setting. Thus Clare craftily sets up our low expectations for the lettering of this terra incognita. The repetition of negative and blank terms implies that the speaker is the first to sing (or complain) of such scenes. A sense of pride of discovery pervades the speaker's voice. Later in the poem, the speaker will repeat his refrain ("Hail") and reveal his affection for such "scenes obscure." But for now he is content to remain a passer-by who merely muses on Helpston: "Still shall obscurity rehearse the song / And hum your beauties as I stroll along" (49-50). These lines represent silence as a form of singing; according to this paradox, obscurity implies publicity.

The speaker's walk down memory lane, and not his lay, serves as the structural principle for the poem. True, the poem's heroic couplets, repetition, anaphora, and monosyllabism tighten it up into a nice song. But the reader is told Helpston has no minstrel, save obscurity. The speaker first raises this possibility, dismisses it, and supplies an alternate narrative for his beloved, humble Helpston. This alternate narrative is characterized by different schemes than the forms of topographic poetry traditionally allow. The speaker addresses Helpston rather than directing his loco-descriptive address to a circle of readers (cf. Pope's "Windsor Forest"). The narrative also proceeds according to spatial, temporal, historical, and communal directives, rather than by political exigency or concern with patronage. Though his use of heroic couplets places the poem within a tradition of topographic poems, the speaker reduces his role from poet to biographer of place.

Clare's presentation of Helpston as unlettered is savvy, and telling. It seems to be a condition he modestly attempts to remedy. But there is something more to his characterization of Helpston as free from poetic representation. In crafting the "happy Eden of those golden years," the speaker admits "those pastimes [are] now beloved in vain" (163, 56). The bounty and delight have "long vanish'd from the plain" (55). These lines convey a sense of irreparable loss that the speaker attempts to restore by reminiscing and reporting. But the attempt is ineffective; it offers an admixture of pleasure and pain. Enclosure is responsible for Helpston's fall from grace and present obscurity, for it sets up barriers to access. The poem presents visual images of boundaries and graphic markings to underscore the simultaneous presence and absence of Helpston lands.

The unlettering of Helpston extends to its children. Clare describes the children's fun in specifically non-lingual or pre-lingual terms:

> When happy youth in pleasures circle ran
> Nor thought what pains awaited future man
> No other thought employing or employ'd
> But how to add to happiness enjoy'd
> Each morning wak'd with hopes before unknown
> And eve possessing made each wish their own (57-62)

The children and their activities are characterized by a lack of thought, a sense of happy bounty, and the diurnal processes of waking and sleep. Each day marks a cognitive cycle of sorts, as the child passes from "hopes before unknown" to full knowledge or possession of his or her desire. A sense of unpremeditation or lack of knowledge is figured by the geometric form of "pleasures circle," which suggests a lack of new direction or input.[71] The speaker repeatedly refers to the children's pleasure in terms of knowledge and possession. He continues:

> The day gone bye left no pursuit undone
> Nor one vain wish save that they went too soon
> Each sport each pastime ready at their call
> As soon as wanted they posses'd em all

[71] The lack of new input in underscored by the fact that this village has "no minstrel boasting to advance" its name.

> These joys all known in happy infancy
> And all I ever knew were spent on thee (63-8)

If children wake, run, and pursue happiness with little thought, adults view and trace the past:

> And who but loves to view where these were past
> And who that views but loves them to the last
> Feels his heart warm to view his native place
> A fondness still those past delights to trace
> The vanish'd green to mourn the spot to see
> Where flourish'd many a bush and many a tree (69-74)

The children's experience of the Helpston landscape lacks temporal and cognitive continuity or progress. Each day they are visited anew by hopes and pursuits, their lives like a palimpsest of time. Yet this youthful amnesia achieves knowledge and possession. The adult speaker, conversely, experiences Helpston in terms of temporal continuity, absence, and loss. He views scenes past and present collapsed into one landscape. His praise is noticeably unlettered—he does not speak, write, or even listen—just as the landscape is "vanish'd" and emptied. As mentioned, his stroll through Helpston (the place and the idea) structures the poem's progress. His walking denotes two modes of narrative progression: spatial (topography) and temporal (memory). The anaphora of the first two lines in the above stanza calls the reader to attention in time to hear the word *view* repeated twice. Variants like *trace* and *see* further emphasize the speaker's self-perceived role in his participation with Helpston. The speaker's ken—his view and knowledge of the place—is impacted by time. He cannot view his native place without remembering past scenes, images, and events. The location and his perception of it unify past and present experience.[72] All impressions are rewritten onto his mind and they coalesce into one bare fact: Helpston.

[72] The speaker's interaction with Helpston is like the children's, in a sense. While their Helpston provides pleasure and possession, their experience of pleasure's circle lacks temporal continuity. Yet the image of the circle suggests Helpston as a unity all the same. The speaker's Helpston entails temporal progression, sadness, and loss, but it is also a unity because it is a consistent location. The speaker reconciles these two versions while visiting Helpston.

As he begins to trace—a peculiar verb because it operates in a visual sense as well as a linear and therefore temporal one—beloved scenes of the past from present ones, Clare finally "letters" his subject. Or, rather, Helpston finally letters itself. The first appearance, however slight, of oral imagery relates to one of Helpston's non-human residents: "Where once the brook for now the brook is gone / Oer pebbles dimpling sweet went whimpering on" (75-6). True, it is only a whimper, and a whimper from a bygone time, but Clare chooses to break the spell of silence with the figure of the brook's oral expression, not his own. Helpston may be unlettered, "unheard in poets song," but this text restores representation, knowledge, and voice to this enclosed village. This oral attribution personifies the brook and extends to it the speaker's feeling of loss. Enthralled by the brook, the speaker fixes his attention to another text of nature:

> Oft on whose oaken plank I've wondering stood
> (That led a pathway o'er its gentle flood)
> To see the beetles their wild mazes run
> With jetty jackets glittering in the sun
> So apt and ready at their reels they seem
> So true the dance is figured on the stream
> Such justness such correctness they impart
> They seem as ready as if taught by art (77-84)

The speaker's activity is again visual and his walking is implied. He describes several sights: the beetles' wild mazes, the glittering of their black shells, and their dance upon the water. These images combine to form a visual text, which the speaker interprets. More importantly, the speaker attributes aesthetic agency to these entities. "So true," so just, and so correct is their dance, "they seem as ready as if taught by art." In this scene, Clare moves past orality to portray in nature a broader sort of meaningful expression. Clare's simile foregrounds a tutelage motif in which nature (as book or text) instructs, or in this case is instructed by, Art. The speaker assimilates the brilliance of the beetles' mazy movement to a standard of taste which is familiar

to him (using words like *true* and *justness*)[73] though he also stresses their distinctive qualities and vitality.

"Helpstone" stages the loss of commoning and the way of life before Parliament's Enclosure Acts.[74] In this respect, the poem acts as a documentary history. Clare's "unletter'd" conceit conveys a lackluster midland poetic obscurity, but it also implies the physical voiding of Helpston's commons, wastes, hedges, trees, and inhabitants.[75] The speaker of "Helpstone" establishes a historical attitude early on, when he conflates his own aging with that of Helpston: "The pride of life with thee (like mine) is oer" (116). Time's progress is sinister, though plant and animal species avoid the speaker's fate and are thus valorized. The beauties of past scenes lay in obscurity now, "laid waste by desolations hand / Whose cursed weapon levels half the land" (123-4). In opposition to "Accursed wealth" (127), which remains the cause of every evil, the speaker hails the "happy Eden of those golden years / Which mem'ry cherishes and use endears" (163-4). This "dear beloved spot" comforts the speaker in "life's decline" and he expresses a belief that Helpston's charms will revive upon his death. He names a specific desire to die in Helpston:

> When weary age the grave a r[e]scue seeks
> And prints its image on my wrinkl'd cheeks
> Those charms of youth that I again may see
> May it be mine to meet my end in thee
> And as reward for all my troubles past
> Find one hope true: to die at home at last (173-8)

Clare rehearses the theme—seen in Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" and Coleridge's "Reflections of having left a place of Retirement"—of vain or compromised remembrance. But he

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[73] The speaker also reveals his perceptive role with words and phrases like *wondering*, *see*, *seem*, *figured*, *impart*, and *as if*.
[74] Helpston's enclosure began in 1809, when Clare was sixteen years old.
[75] Enclosure drove the Roma out of Helpston; and individual birds, animals, insects, and plants (not to mention microscopic organisms) were affected by the destruction of trees and hedges.

incorporates an additional literary association with his *locus amoenus*, which can be described as *locus-thanatos*.[76] His birth and death in Helpston participate in what I have been calling the reciprocal and mutually affecting and productive relationship between humanity and nature. *Locus-thanatos* implies a circular movement. His experiential horizon, like "happy youth in pleasure's circle," is Helpston and its surrounding wilds. The geometrical emphasis underscores the cycles of the sun, moon, seasons, and all the attendant cycles of nature.

In these closing lines, Clare describes himself semiotically, as a sort of canvas. The personified character "weary age" imprints its image on his face. This figure illustrates Clare's "bottom-up" aesthetic. In portraying himself as a passive field for the inscription of another text, Clare demonstrates the openness and receptivity that characterize his poetics as well as the trope of reciprocal communication (and impact) amongst entities within an environment. The fact that Eden is figured as a real place further supports the notion of Clare's loco-driven and bottom-up aesthetic. Soteriology is geographic. The speaker expresses a hope for restitution and salvation in homecoming, when time's effects will somehow be reversed ("[t]hose charms of youth that I again may see"). This conceptual version of Eden synoptically comprises and reverses the historical events associated with Helpston's enclosure. Clare's notion of Eden is therefore a differential one. Edenic Helpston no longer exists. Unlettered and obscure, it can only be visited in the imaginary space of the poem.

The historical temper which rules "Helpstone" and the corresponding prominence of time foreground a series of presences and absences—of language, of life. The tragedy of enclosure is

[76] A *locus-thanatos* is a death place that the speaker longs for. Oliver Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village" (1770) influenced "Helpstone," a fact which Clare notes in a letter cited by Raymond Williams in his 1986 selected edition of Clare's poetry. Both poems use heroic couplets and treat the subject of landmark destruction (Williams, *John Clare: Selected Poetry and Prose* 225). *Locus-thanatos* is not original to Clare, who pulls directly from Goldsmith's lines: "I had still had hopes, my long vexations past, / Here to return—and die at home at last."

represented by the speaker's conceit of poetic nonexistence and unlettered[ness], though this conceit provides the speaker a neutral space from which to speak about, or rather "walk" about, Helpston.[77] Aurality and active listening, as acoustic theory demonstrates, involve meaning making and context. The work of Sam Ward has also shown that listening is formative of the relationships within an ecological community. Hence, Clare represents the breach of this community's integrity (by enclosure) as a breach of language and sound. He employs imagery of silence on behalf of his aesthetic program, which shifts significance to the low or lacking as a means of realigning values. The aural/oral exchanges which once made up this soundscape are relegated to the space of the poem, which attempts to rectify this loss by documenting it. True to Clare's bottom-up aesthetic, the poem presents obscurity and silence as paradoxical metaphors for recognition and song. If sound is the vulgar substrate of poetry, inalienable and yet evocative of difference and unintelligibility, so too—"Helpstone" implies—is its absence.

Early in this chapter, I referred to an "abstract type of economy" in which ideas and sentiments exchange freely between the aural/oral subjects of a given community. Clare's figure of reciprocity represents this economy (or ecosystem) and it can be understood according to two levels: the physical exchange of sound in aurality and orality, and emotive and meaningful communication. Truax's concept of the soundscape (and Ward's application of it) supports Clare's sense of reciprocity with Helpston because it accounts for sound phenomena and listening as part of an "ecological system of relationships" (Ward 27). Clare is presciently aware of the fact that active listening forms relationships; he models aurality in order to advocate it as a form of communal engagement. His poems exhibit the Helpston soundscape (whether active or dormant), but they also posit the existence of a theoretical system of exchange—which is affective, aesthetic, and invulnerable to external force.

[77] The better term here is *ramble*, whose dual associations of talking and walking I explore in chapter three.

Truax's theory of acoustic communication accounts for the individual's experiences of environmental sounds, the "pattern of communication" set up by these sounds, and the context of these sounds (xii). In the context of this study of Clare's poetics, the term *acoustic communication* refers to Clare's experience of the Helpston soundscape, "an ecological system of relationships" in which Clare is himself implicated and responsible. As Truax observes, there is system of relationships at work in nature that comprises the "interlocking behavior" of sound, the listener, and the environment (xii). Clare's poetics bears witness to this acoustic system of relationships and his speakers acknowledge their dual capacity as listeners and soundmakers.

Chapter Two: The Place of Sound

"The poet doesn't invent. He listens." Jean Cocteau

Two Kinds of Sound Notation

For a sense of how Clare interacts with, perceives, and writes about nature, I now turn to his natural history prose, which contains many examples of his notation of sounds. For her Oxford edition, *The Natural History Prose Writings of John Clare* (1983), Margaret Grainger exhausted the Clare manuscript holdings at the Petersborough Museum and Northampton Public Library, as well as a few key manuscripts from the Berg and Pforzheimer collections from the New York Public Library and an Egerton manuscript from the British Library. She provides nearly four hundred pages of Clare's writings about Helpston and its flora and fauna, including manuscript notes, correspondence, essays, journal entries, poetic fragments and drafts, and lists. The natural history prose spreads across a thirty-year period, from 1820 to 1850; though it mostly represents the span of time from 1823 to 1833, with the "heaviest weight" in 1824-6, the years of the natural history of Helpston project and Clare's journal (Grainger, *NHP* lvii). The natural history letters from 1824-5 represent Clare's attempt to put together some prose samples for a larger proposed work: a natural history of Helpston which he intended to call "'Biographys of Birds & Flowers' with an Appendix on Animals & Insects" (*NHP* 228). His daily journal spans a similar period, from September of 1824 to the following September.

Reading these writings, one is impressed with a sense of just how daily and regular is Clare's habit of walking "out of doors" (*NHP* 335). Other notable habits surface too: fern-hunting, collecting flower specimens, observing birds and their habitats, reading and writing, and recording village news. His notes, letters, and journal entries provide concrete examples of his listening habit, though they also show other ways that Clare interacts with subjects in nature. The prose abounds in visual descriptions of the landscape, sky, plants, birds, and animals, and rich

details, findings, and observations from his walks. But it is Clare's special preoccupation with listening to sounds in nature, as well as a more general figurative stance towards sound, that characterizes his unique relationship with Helpston. If he is not describing actual heard sounds, he is often speaking in terms of sound. He amuses himself, for instance, by sitting under "Waltons Sycamore tree hearing him discourse of fish ponds & fishing" (*NHP* 174). The aggregate of these sensory experiences presents a vivid portrait of an inhabitant and his habitat, and it models an ecology that is based upon reciprocal, sensory exchange between an inhabitant, his habitat, and other inhabitants.

Generally, there are two kinds of sound description: literal and figurative. It is the object of this study to explore the association of natural subjects and their sounds with human language and writing, particularly as this association is a fundamental ingredient in Clare's poetic practice. Because Clare bridges a gap between actual sounds in nature and a figurative sort of communicative sound, I look closely at literal and metaphorical representations of sound in this chapter. Some of Clare's nonliteral descriptions of sound are not particularly meaningful; they are just turns of phrase. But some nonliteral descriptions of song, sound, or chatter qualify as part of a larger force of communication at work in nature.

This chapter first examines Clare's figurative descriptions and deployments of sound and then his portrayal of actual heard sounds. Next, I address the pattern of his natural history prose entries, as well as his treatment of nontraditional poetic sounds, both of which emphasize locus and context. Clare's careful notation of the sights and sounds of birds, insects, animals, plants, landscapes, and humans amounts to an ecology, by which he presents his advocacy for Helpston and his philosophy of sensory embeddedness and reciprocity. I then explore the conceptual link between locus and textuality, and analyze figurative and literal examples of sound notation

relating to Clare's move from Helpston to Northborough. Next, I address the notion of reciprocal communicative response portrayed in Clare's prose piece "The Woodman or the Beauties of a Winter Forest." I conclude this chapter by addressing the subject of human orality, strategies for reciprocity, and Clare's orality.

Figurative and Literal Sound Notation in the Natural History Prose

Clare's natural history letters provide many examples of sounds created by animals, birds, insects, the movement of plants, and weather events. In addition to recording heard sounds, the letters allude to imaginary and figurative sounds and the sounds of other people's poems. Written in response to James Hessey's suggestion, the natural history letters record details about many organisms in the Helpston environment, including: fern owls, night hawks, nightingales, thrushes, land rails, quails, robins, wrens, and sparrows. The letters also describe the habits of snakes, frogs, fish, snails, eels, beetles, and moths, as well as countless plant species (celandine, anemonie, orchids, and ferns). I turn to these letters as examples of Clare's use of aurality and orality, beginning with some more abstract uses of sound. Then, I move on to examine literal descriptions of sounds. Clare deploys both sorts of sound in order to create a sense of his poetic taste, which prioritizes local embeddedness as well as aural and visual sense experience.

Clare's third natural history letter uses sound and orality to initiate a call and response movement with James Hessey. This call and response proposition demonstrates Clare's penchant for echoing "scraps of Poesy" (*NHP* 41). In Letter III, he provides a list of authors (ranging from Chaucer and Spencer to Cowley, Milton, Gay, and Bloomfield) who admirably go "to nature for their images" and he asks Hessey to send him literary "extracts" in his next letter:

> I always feel delighted when an object in nature brings up in ones mind an image of poetry that describes it from some favorite author. . . . it might seem

> impertinent in me to advise you what to read if you misunderstood my meaning for I dont only do it for your pleasure but I wish you to make extracts from your readings in your letters to me so that I may feel some of my old gratifications agen—a clown may say that he loves the Morning but a man of taste feels it to a higher degree by bringing up in his mind that beautiful line of Thompsons 'The meek eyd morn appears mother of dews' (*NHP* 39, 41)

Clare goes on to cite Milton on the moon, Collins on evening, Wordsworth on the celandine, Burns on the daisy, and Chatterton on the buttercup. Poetry indeed "magnifys" the pleasure he experiences in nature, so much that when he encounters any given species, Clare indexes some published verse (*NHP* 38, 41). I call these poetical citations *cuttings* because they behave like transplants. As with the interpolative technique employed in "The Woodman[78]," Clare often quotes topical verse in the midst of his prose and proffers it up as a gift, a clutch of verses, a nosegay to take root in the reader's mind.[79] The extracts are a garden of beautiful verses selected according to direct personal experience and taste. In the following line, Clare refers to literary extracts as flowers: "other flowers crowd my imagination with their poetic associations but I have no room for them" (*NHP* 41). This practice of intertextual sampling highlights the propagative quality of poetic images and sounds. Like hardy field flowers multiplying, images or percepts beget other images by fertile mental association. Clare's metaphoric conflation of

[78] I discuss "The Woodman" later in this chapter.

[79] A *posy* (a variant of *poesy*) can be a small bunch of flowers or a collection of pleasant poetry or rhetoric. ("Posy, *n*." *OED Online*. June 2013. Oxford UP. 20 July 2013). There was a local custom in Helpston of gathering flowers in summertime, attaching them to a piece of turf, and decorating a cottage thus. Clare explains the custom in a draft preface to a proposed volume which he originally intended to call *The Midsummer Cushion*: "It is a very old custom among villagers in summer time to stick a piece of greensward full of field flowers and place it as an ornament in their cottages, which ornaments are called Midsummer Cushions" (qtd. in Bate 373). Clare compares this proposed volume of poems—later published as *The Rural Muse*—to this ornamental and seasonal practice of gathering flowers. In fact, he and Mrs. Emmerson exchanged real bouquets and short poems, which they called "nosegays." The comparison between poems and flowers is another instance of the underlying association between nature and language. Clare continues: "And as these trifles are field flowers of humble pretensions and of various hues I thought the above cottage custom gave me the opportunity to select a title that was not inapplicable to the contents of the Volume" (qtd. in Bate 373). In his fourth natural history letter to James Hessey, Clare describes the gold finch's song, plumage, nesting habits, etc. Then, in the intertextual style of Elizabeth Kent's *Flora Domestica*, Clare includes topical excerpts from poems by other authors. From memory, he incorrectly cites a few lines on the gold finch from John Hamilton Reynolds's "The Romance of Youth" (1821). Margaret Grainger notes that Clare adopts this "method of combining first-hand natural history observation with illustrations from the poets" in his natural history letters (81). He considers this method at several points in his early prose. He even proposes a title for a potential collection of poetic passages alongside natural history notes: "a garden of wild Flowers" (*NHP* 195).

flowers and verses stresses this propagative quality, which empowers his own status as a writer and reader of poetry.

Clare's citations are designed to provoke Hessey to cite back. In this respect, Clare is like a bird that sings a tune and thus stimulates repetition or response from some other bird. Chatterton, Milton, Collins have slipped his memory and he wishes to repeat these "old gratifications," as though they were primal exercises. Clare restates his thesis that "to look on nature with a poetic eye magnifys the pleasure" and then adds to it: "she herself being the very essence & soul of Poesy" (*NHP* 41). By this expression, Clare seems to place nature above (or prior to) poesy—but the two are certainly engaged in a productive relation. He then muses that such poetic cuttings would make a perfect accompaniment to a work of natural history: "if I had the means to consult & the health to indulge it I should crowd these letters on Natural History with lucious scraps of Poesy from my favourite Minstrels & make them less barren of amusement & more profitable of perusal" (*NHP* 41). This is the plan of Elizabeth Kent's *Flora Domestica*, a work published by Taylor and Hessey and given to Clare. Clare experienced some ambivalence towards Miss Kent's request for assistance with her proposed *History of Birds*, but he admired the intertextual approach she employed in *Flora Domestica*. Though he often referred to his plan in the subjunctive tense, he employed it throughout his natural history prose. This intertextual strategy uses both the sound and memory of real verses as a way of increasing pleasure and stimulating further conversation. By this unique example of sound use, Clare shows the indexical and provocative power of orality.

Clare practices orality—in this case poetic allusions—not only to set up a linguistic volley, but also to critique and correct poets' descriptions and improve the poetic record. In his sixth natural history letter, he identifies two poetic images "in the book of nature" (i.e., the

landrail and the quail) though "the poets have hardly mentioned them" (*NHP* 51). He expresses the desire to write an essay to help correct mistaken poetic expressions:

> I think an able Essay on objects in nature that would beautifye descriptive poetry might be entertaining & useful to form a right taste in pastoral poems that are full of nothing but the old thread bare epithets of 'sweet singing cuckoo' 'love lorn nightingale' 'fond turtles' 'sparkling brooks' 'green meadows' 'leafy woods' &c &c these make up the creation of Pastoral & descriptive poetry & every thing else is reckond low & vulgar in fact they are too rustic for the fashionable or prevailing system of rhyme till some bold inovating genius rises with a real love for nature & then they will no doubt be considerd as great beautys which they really are (*NHP* 51)

Clare frames his critique and remedy in terms of the descriptive and pastoral modes—the eighteenth century poetic forms he learned and practiced.[80] He considers the "right taste" in pastoral poetry to consist of accurate descriptions, informed by direct observation, of those "objects in nature" ordinarily "reckond low & vulgar."[81] For instance, he points out several times throughout the natural history prose that the female nightingale never sings.[82] He cites from Chaucer's "The Parliament of Fowls" to correct the assertion that all drakes destroy young ducks (*NHP* 94-5). Gray's "moping owl" is "not destitute of beautys to the Poets rambles" (*NHP* 98) and he wonders why Shakespeare insists upon calling the owl's note a merry one (*NHP* 98). The poetic critique in letter six curiously blends the eye and ear. For instance, words like *images*, *mentioned*, *speaks*, *notice*, *epithets*, *rhyme*, and *beautiful* simultaneously stress visual and sonic

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[80] Gilbert White's natural history prose also influenced Clare.

[81] James McKusick speaks of one of Clare's later sonnets, "Sand Martin," as a "displaced version of pastoral" (92). This comment may apply more generally to Clare's poetry as a whole. McKusick observes that in this sonnet, Clare is "not overtly concerned with traditional pastoral themes." I would extend this note to his other poems. Husbandry and classical antiquity are not his primary subjects though genial nature, idylls, and innocence are. The poems' settings and subject matters are simple, like pastoral poems, but Clare does not display the neoclassical "snobbish" attitude towards the rustic figure (McKusick 92). Rather than embrace a "crude anthropomorphism," Clare's pastoral "respects the difference that separates human from non-human beings, at the same time that it evokes a deep sense of identity between the speaker . . . and the bird" (McKusick 92).

[82] Though he leans upon this convention in several poems, including "The Flitting."

details.[83] His passage implies that direct sensory experience gained by listening and seeing can help bring about poetical taste—a taste that is embedded in a locale.

In contrast with these abstract and critical applications of aurality and orality, Clare's note on "Wood Pigeons" cites a literal example of sound in order to show his poetical taste. In this passage, he offers a specific idea of what constitutes poetry: pleasing sounds. Though "[o]ur landscape is not poetical enough . . . for the far famd turtle dove," he writes, "we have nothing more then the wood pigeon here which is a very poetical object in nature both from its \soft/ cooing voice & its rustling rambles in the forest foliage" (*NHP* 104). Here, Clare sarcastically invokes the word *poetical* to identify a more substantial beauty in the wood pigeon's cooing and the rustling sound it produces with its feet. This correction of poetic taste is based upon two unique criteria: the local (the prevalence of this species in Helpston's ecosystem) and the sonic (the sounds it produces). At the center of this critical spirit is Clare's idea of taste and poetical feeling, which always prizes the direct sensory experience of the surrounding environment. In Letter III, he expresses disdain for the alienating practices of naturalists and botanists:

> for my part I love to look on nature with a poetic feeling which magnifys the pleasure I love to see the nightingale in its hazel retreat & the cuckoo hiding in its solitudes of oaken foliage & not to examine their carcasses in glass cases yet naturalists & botanists seem to have no taste for this poetical feeling (*NHP* 38)

This letter presents two phrases—"poetic feeling" and "poetic eye"—that stress the importance of sensory experience of *natura naturata* (*NHP* 38, 41). Throughout the natural history letters, Clare asserts that poetic feeling is missing from both pastoral description and botany. In addition to prioritizing the organism's embeddedness in a specific environmental context, poetic taste operates by sense and emotion; it listens and sees, and it feels pleasure. "Poetical," for Clare, has to do with a living phenomenon accurately described, often in terms of sound and appearance. In

[83] Poetic images may be aural, and one may notice sounds. Similarly, poetic objects can be beautiful for the visual or aural qualities they suggest.

Letter V, Clare complements his respondent and attributes to him this same kind of poetical feeling when he comments that "you prefer the living objects to the landscape" (*NHP* 47). Clare's poetics thus attests to the non-human inhabitants and topographical features of Helpston by documenting their sonic (or oral) and visual qualities. These sounds and sights supply sensory experience for the human poet and reader, and they prioritize local embeddedness and interaction as aesthetic modes. Moreover, hearing and seeing are more accessible as literary tools than the world of polite, literary discourse. As basic human faculties and tools for poetic composition, they support Clare's notion of poetry as a craft that is individual, autonomous, and yet engaged. Clare's conception of poetry, and poetic composition, though it esteems intertextuality, ultimately derives from these very basic sensory processes. His autobiographical poem "The Progress of Rhyme" portrays his nascent impulse to versify specifically as it arises from his direct aural and visual encounters with nature. His extensive appeal to the senses of hearing and sight in his poetic descriptions models ecological embeddedness and it supplies poetic images that are fresh and independent.

As mentioned above, Letter VI asserts sonic and visual details as a way of correcting poetic descriptions. It also provides literal examples of sound from Clare's childhood that illustrate the importance of aurality to his poetic taste. Clare describes how he and other boys would hunt after sounds. The land rail (or corncrake) and quail particularly challenge him:

> Were is the school boy that has not heard that mysterious noise which comes with the spring in the grass & \green/ corn I have followd it for hours & all to no purpose it seemd like a spirit that mockd my folly in running after it the noise it makes is a low craking very much like that of a Drake from whence I suppose it got the name of Landrake I never stirted it up when a boy but I have often seen it flye since (*NHP* 49)

In the passage, listening is a common and irresistible childhood game. It also presents mystery and awe, though Clare tendentiously balances that by mentioning small details about the bird (its

habitat, name, noise, and appearance). The passage models the action of listening as well as its related actions. It also presents several key features of Clare's poetic taste: the common appeal of aurality, a sense of otherness about non-human inhabitants, and careful attention to physical and contextual details.

Clare portrays such hunts in his poems as well. In a poem entitled "Spring," intended for *The Shepherd's Calendar*, Clare describes sound-hunting as an activity of spring. In a letter to Hessey, he notes that he is especially pleased with the following passage:

> & soon each hayfields sunny solitude
> Were sheep no more with bleating lambs intrude
> Shall spindle up it thick grass anckle high
> & roll its green waves neath the summer sky
> & tempt the land rail to its haunts again
> Whom herd boys listen & pursue in vain
> Its craiking noise how often when a child
> Ive heard & followd with delusions wild
> Wading knee deep he downy grass among
> Startling grass hoppers from ther idle song
> & frogs that hopd to sleep till day was done
> Bouncing glittering onward from the burning sun
> Ho<w> have I trackd the close & meadow round
> Listening & following the deluding sound
> That onward still its craiking note renewd
> Nor nearer seemd then when I first pursued
> Hunt were I would & listen as I might
> Twas here & there & ever out of sight
> A very spirit to my wondering thoughts
> Heard on & never to be seen or caught
> Till wearied with the chase I turnd away
> & sought new pleasure in my former play
> Still it seemd following & kept craiking on
> & seemd to mock me when my hopes were gone (*NHP* 30)

Clare's childish speaker does not hunt to kill—he hunts to find, observe, and perhaps temporarily catch. As in "The Woodman," the speaker prizes interaction and conversation with living subjects in the environment. He expresses dismay that listening is of no help in finding the landrail. Yet the speaker's movement is led by the bird's "craiking" note. The bird's orality and

the speaker's aurality are the structural forces in the passage. Words such as *vain*, *delusions*, *wild*, *deluding*, *spirit,* and *mock* portray the bird as a wraith. This supernatural association (also seen in "A Ramble") often adjoins Clare's early childhood accounts of nature.[84] The passage is tightly structured by couplets that sound out the landrail's repeated calls. The speaker contrasts the jarring noise with undulating hay, the continuous bleating of the lambs, and the idle song of the grasshopper. The hunt for the bird damages the boy's hope of actually seeing it; he can only represent it as a spirit. The childish desire to merge listening with seeing—to encounter the sound source in an alternate sense—brands these aural and visual images, and the spring activity of sound-hunting, into the poet's imagination.

In a series of notes appended to the natural history letter manuscripts, Clare continues to record observations about various species, habitats, his personal experiences in the landscape, and of course, sounds. In a piece entitled "The Butter Bump," he attempts to describe the exact sound the bittern makes:

> This is a thing that makes a very odd noise morning & evening among the flags & large reed shaws in the fens some describe the noise as something like the bellowing of bulls but I have often heard it & cannot liken it to that sound at all in fact it is difficult to describe what it is like its noise has procurd it the above name by the common people the first part of its noise is an indistinct muttering sort of sound very like the word butter utterd in a hurried manner & bump comes very qu<i>ck after & bumps a sound on the ear as if eccho had [del. attempted] mockd the bump of a gun just as the mutter ceasd nay this is not like (*NHP* 89)

In the passage, Clare runs down the common knowledge about the bird, its habitat, and its popular nomenclature. He then corrects this, first by establishing the difficulty involved in describing it and secondly by attempting to describe the bittern's call all the same. This

[84] There is a humorous account of the young Clare walking home late at night through Oxey Wood. He encounters something standing in the shadows that terrifies him. Is it a ghost? He writes of running away from the wood in fear of his life. Returning the following morning, he discovers it was a young foal. This episode is presented in chapter three.

transcription fails him ("nay this is not like") and he proposes a small experiment that might recreate the sound:

> I have often thought the putting ones mouth to the bung hole of an empty large cask & uttering the word 'butter bump' sharply woud imitate the sound exactly after its first call that imitates the word 'butter bump' it repeats the sound bump singly several times in a more determind & loud\er/ manner—thus 'butter bumṕ bumṕ bumṕ butter bumṕ [85]' it strikes people at first as something like the sound of a coopers mallet hitting on empty casks (*NHP* 89)

As with his notation of fiddle songs, Clare demonstrates zeal for correctly documenting sound. This is the only instance in his natural history prose in which he uses accent marks to show the stress of an oralized sound, in this case the increasing "sound bumps[s]." Clare avoids, for the most part, scrupulous punctuation. But in this passage, he goes beyond mere notation and description of sound; he desires to recreate the sound (as a sort of test, to gain more accuracy in observation). This example demonstrates his aural sense, as well as his interest in echoing perceived sounds. The description of the bittern's call triggers association and nostalgia, and Clare is off on another sound-hunt. He continues in the same note:

> when I was a boy this was one of the fen wonders I usd often to go on a sunday \with my mother/ to see my aunt at peakirk when I often wanderd in the fen with the boys a bird nesting & when I enquird what this strange noise was they desribd it as coming from a bird larger then an ox that coud kill all the cattle in the fen if it choose & destroy the villager likewise but that it was very harmless & all the harm it did was the drinking so much water as to nearly empty the dykes in summer & spoil the rest so that the stock coud scarcly drink what it left (*NHP* 89)

The adult Clare cannot help but recount the boys' naïve report about the marsh bird. In fact, this story proliferates among the parents—"[s]uch is the power of superstition over ignorant people who have no desire to go beyond hearsay & enquire for themselves" (*NHP* 89-90). In addition to recording the qualities of specific sounds in the environment, Clare also emphasizes the cultural meanings associated with those sounds, whether those be based in names, hearsay, or folklore. In

[85] Clare inserted accent marks over the letters to note the stresses in sound.

this prose account, Clare's initial description of the bird's call is a heuristic tool that enables further learning and knowledge. It is his aural experience of the bittern that catalyzes his inquiries about the bird and constitutes the majority of his prose account. Clare then addresses and dismisses the belief (upheld in Thomson) that the bittern uses the reed to magnify its call, further emphasizing his mutual (and sometimes conflicting) interests in folklore and firsthand personal experiences of nature.

Throughout the natural history prose, Clare attempts to put into words the noises that various birds make, both voiced and non-voiced. This is SLD at work. The quail, he writes, "makes an odd noise in the grass as if it said 'wet my foot wet my foot'" (*NHP* 50). He adds a piece of oral history relating to the quail's utterance: "Weeders & Haymakers hearken to" this call "as a prophecy of rain & believe in it as \an/ infallable sign" (*NHP* 50). In another literal prose note, Clare states that the ground lark utters a pleasant "cree creeing" note (*NHP* 85). And in another, he observes that the owl's "solitary note of 'Tewit [?tewho'] is often echoed in the songs of the bard" as well as Grays' elegy (*NHP* 98). And young owls, he adds, "make a noise with their beaks" which he compares to "cracking nuts" (*NHP* 98). Clare also distinguishes between two types of noise that nightingales make. The haunts of young nightingales "are easily known from the plaintive noise of 'toot toot' that the old ones are constantly making at passers bye" (*NHP* 78). The nightingale:

> often makes another noise of 'chur chur' which on hearing I have seen the young one instantly hopping down from the hedge into the bottom of the dyke & when she made the noise of 'toot toot' they would in a moment be all as still as if nothing was there but the old one I always took the 'chur chur' as a food call & the tooting noise as a token of alarm (*NHP* 78)

Clare's ability to observe multiple calls and their contexts, and to hypothesize about the purpose of each, demonstrates his auditory skill and fascination with nature's trifles. This aurality directly

informs his poetic sensibility. The sonnet "[Birds in Alarm]" also shows the role aurality plays in Clare's poetry, as well as his habit of noting down sounds (SLD). In the following excerpt, I italicize the specific sounds or oral utterances that Clare attributes to the birds, though the speaker also refers to a more generalized sort of communication between birds and humans with words and phrases such as *tells*, *makes a noise*, *silence*, *noisey*, *hollos/hollow*, and *stops her song.*

> The fire tail tells the boys when nests are nigh
> And *tweets* and flyes from every passer bye
> The yellow hammer never makes a noise
> But flyes in silence from the noisey boys
> The boys will come and take them every day
> And still she lays as none were taen away
> The nightingale keeps *tweeting churring* round
> But leaves in silence when the nest is found
> The pewet hollos *chewsit* as she flyes
> And flops about the shepherd where he lies
> But when her nest is found she stops her song
> And cocks [her] coppled crown and runs along
> Wrens cock their tails and *chitter* loud and play
> And robins hollow *tut* and flye (emphasis added 1-14)

The bird's voiced sounds, as represented here, are Clare's approximation in an onomatopoeic, linguistic form. The speaker portrays these sounds and their affiliated behaviors, but also the relation between such sounds and the surrounding environment, which includes trees, nests, noisy boys, shepherds, and passers-by. Clare's onomatopoeic coinage "chewsit" (to describe the pewit's cry) illustrates the importance of a poetic language that, in McKusick's terms, evokes "with concrete immediacy the natural phenomena of his native place" (89).

It is important that Clare also use dialect terms as well as personal idiolect in his documentation of Helpston's sounds. SLD treats the sounds produced by all inhabitants from a specific setting, including humans and their dialects. In his analysis of Clare's acoustic effects, Sam Ward contends that "a major way by which Clare conveys a sense of place in his poetry,

and which helps give his verse its characteristic sonic variety, is his use of dialect vocabulary" (18).[86] Stephen Wade attests that Clare's "unobtrusively successful" use of dialect provides local flavor and local identification; regional talk gives the reader the poem's place in time ("Dialect" 83-4). The dialect poet is "closer to the local people, . . . their honest feelings and attitudes" (Wade 84). We might call this closeness *linguistic embeddedness*. In a letter to Isaiah Knowles Holland, Clare demonstrates this value when he critiques Shenstone's pastorals and asserts that appropriate language use is critical to poetry. "Putting the Correct Language of the Gentleman into the mouth of a Simple Shepherd or Vulgar Ploughman," he writes, "is far from Natural" (Clare, *Letters* 12). Clare applies this natural standard to his loco-documentary work, and thus implies that Helpston (or any other locality for that matter) can be best understood and represented according to its own terms.

In "Stepping Stones," dialect words accentuate a locality by emphasizing its biodiversity as well as its cultural pastimes. The nouns *struttle* (6) and *pooty* (10) provide regional names for two species: a small fish and a snail. Both dwell in Helpston, and more importantly, both provide sport for young boys; in fact, Clare tends to slip into dialect when describing the habits of boys. However, Clare's diction does not only emphasize locality—for many dialect words could do that. It also produces alliteration, a fact that demonstrates Clare's deliberate and intentional switching from standard English to Northampstonshire vernacular. The unique word *struttle* echoes the [st] sounds of the poem's title. This example illustrates two strategic uses of dialect: documentary and phonic.

[86] Sam Ward notes that the *Glossary of Northamptonshire Words and Phrases* (1854) leaned "extensively" on Clare's poetry for examples (29).

Clare's linguistic embeddedness also manifests in his increasing resistance to editorial intervention and "improvement." Clare's written dialect, as well as his creative coinages[87], was a source of chagrin for Taylor and for critics. Taylor's introduction to the 1820 volume helped to disseminate a myth about Clare as a natural genius, as it set up a "crude binary" between literary and oral culture, depicting dialect as the "unwritten language of England" (Ward 21). The volume's glossary—bidden by Taylor—paradoxically problematizes Clare's dialect as it legitimizes it. Some critics found Clare's technique of strewing local dialect words throughout his writing to be like "a spraying of weeds among fine flowers" (Wade, "Dialect" 81). This recalcitrance towards dialect, demonstrated even by Charles Lamb, undermines the value of local sounds and overlooks their usefulness in the sound play of poetry. The negative criticisms of Clare's vernacular also imputed to Clare an uncritical and involuntary diction—as if the use of dialect words was merely reflex. On the contrary, Clare utilized dialect sparingly as a literary device. Ward cautions readers against assuming that Clare's use of dialect was automatic, uncritical, or merely political. Furthermore, Clare was aware of a number of subcategories of dialect vocabulary[88] as well as a great variety of "literary languages" (Thornton 49).[89] Barbara Strang, Mark Storey, and Stephanie Kuduk Weiner interpret Clare's spelling and diction as conscious poetic choices, rather than mere dialectal exigencies. Ward maintains the written

[87] Some of Clare's neologisms include: *fox fern*, *break heath*, and *muzzled*. Grainger notes that some of Clare's meanings run counter to normal usage (e.g., *lilac*, *painted lady*) (*NHP* 366).

[88] The poet Norman Nicholson distinguishes three sections of a dialect's vocabulary, which Ward paraphrases: "words in common use, but not recognizable to the local community as dialect, dialect words used as such, and dialect words no longer heard spoken, but which he felt he had a right to 'inherit'" (21).

[89] Sam Ward, Kelsey Thornton, and James McKusick all argue this point in various ways. Thornton asserts that while the dialect in Clare's poems "is usually derived from the dialect he spoke, he knew the difference between dialects and a great variety of literary languages, and spoke and wrote several different ones" (49). In "Beyond the Visionary Company: John Clare's resistance to Romanticism," McKusick describes Clare's deliberate artistic choices: "Over the years, Clare invented many masks as he struggled to conform to the literary world's expectations while still remaining true to his origin in the peasant community that was so rapidly disappearing around him. Within his poems he speaks with many voices, sometimes producing a mere pastiche or parody of contemporary styles, but often creating a significant juxtaposition of discursive elements that allows us to regard him as more than simply a 'dialect poet'. Regional dialect, in Clare, is only one ingredient in a variety of linguistic types that he deploys with increasing effectiveness throughout his poetic career" (226).

English that Clare encountered—e.g., in William Enfield's *Speaker*—was more familiar to him as a model for poetry, and he further argues that Clare's use of dialect placed him in the literary marketplace as poet in the line of Burns and Bloomfield (22, 25). Clare's primary motivation was literary success. His "decision not to write entirely in dialect reflects both an awareness of his status as an author (fragile at best) and the methods by which he could most successfully communicate a sense of place through his poetry" (Ward 25). That Clare's dialect phrasings are basically understandable demonstrates his desire to communicate to readers successfully. Both Wade and Grainger agree that usually Clare's words are not obscure. "[T]hey are basically similar," Wade avers, "to many other regional vocabularies in most cases" ("Dialect" 82). Take Wade's example from "The Mole-catcher": "He is so lame he scarce can get abroad, / But *hopples* on and growls at anything." The dialect word *hopples* easily translates to *hobbles*; the unvoiced [p] provides the line with a pausing effect that suggests the mole's slow progress.

Clare's choice of dialect, as mentioned, documents Helpston's history and it produces sonic effects for poetic play. This choice is effective, given the ideophonic nature of dialect by which sound denotes or symbolizes an idea. Stephanie Kuduk Weiner observes the strong tendency in Clare's day for writers to associate onomatopoeia and dialect—to "restore [the] primitive identity of word and world" (Bruns qtd. in Weiner 375). Clare's sonnet "Open Winter" uses dialect to create sound effects and to provide an intimate portrait of dwelling. The poem's emphasis upon locality is plain by its opening word "Where," and the fact that it is essentially an extended list of adverbial clauses. In the following line, the dialect words *crimpled* (wrinkled) and *curdled* (twisted, curled) alliterate as they modify the landscape's "sheltered" primroses: "Thus ere the Christmas goes the spring is met / Setting up little tents about the fields / In sheltered spots—primroses when they get / Behind the wood's old roots where ivy shields /

Their crimpled curdled leaves will shine and hide" (6-10). The alliterative sound play of these dialect words foregrounds the image of the primroses (as they pop up) and emphasizes the importance of their pre-seasonal appearance. Nearly all of the poem's images stress the habitations and nooks of various plants, which are embedded and sheltered within each other. The poem's layering of sounds via alliteration, assonance, and internal rhyme enact the physical embeddedness of the plants. In emphasizing these native abodes, the speaker's choice of vernacular adds sound symbolism. The [mp] of *crimpled* and the [rd] of *curdled* are softer consonantal clusters than the [nk] and [st] of *wrinkled* and *twisted*; their bilabial sounds suggest the softness of the primrose's tender leaves. Dialect words and phonemes provide original aural sense experience for the reader and they impress an idea of location.

Furthermore, it is appropriate that the speaker uses local words to portray the residence of these plants and stress the seasonal passage. This particular season seems to be somewhat early, or "open" as the title suggests. So regular is the onset of spring that winter has scarcely happened: "—Cart ruts and horse footings scarcely yield / A slur for boys just crizzled and that's all. / Frost shoots his needles by the small dyke side / And snow in scarce a feather's seen to fall" (11-4). The dialect words *slur* and *crizzled* describe the little pools of water that can form frozen slides for children to glide on; but since this winter is so mild, these slurs are only crizzled over with a rough surface of ice and they are not completely frozen. These vernacular terms document the weather patterns and related phenomena of the Northamptonshire landscape, where crizzling and cat-ice frequently form. In his strategic uses of dialect, Clare merges ecological embeddedness with linguistic embeddedness. To tell the story of his native region requires that he record its sounds, including its colloquialisms.

In addition to vernacular speech, Clare also records and uses non-verbal sounds to create an impression of Helpston. His wood pigeons ramble through foliage and "make a startling rustle as they leave their nest or perch from a thick bush or tree" (*NHP* 107). In "breeding time they flye after each other in couples among the green trees & by clapping their wings in a sharp manner make a peculiar noise like the clapping of hands" (*NHP* 107). Field Fares "make a busy chinnying[90] as they flye" whereas the Red wing "flyes silent" (*NHP* 134). And in a note from November 4 1841, Clare records that "a immense flock of starnels settled on an ash tree in the orchard & when they took wind it was like a large roll of thunder" (*NHP* 338). All of these brief notes demonstrate the importance of aurality in Clare's attachment to Helpston, his poetic sensibility, and his descriptive praxis.

Clare also explains the sonic origins of various bird names, characteristically blending his interest in sounds, names, and folk accounts. In a brief note from Peterborough manuscript A46, the single largest manuscript comprised of natural history prose, Clare writes: "Heard the Pettichap so calld for its note which resembles that word" (*NHP* 115). In a May 10, 1825 journal entry, he records that he "saw a Pettichap in Bushy close its note is more like 'Chippichap' it keeps in continual motion on the tops of trees uttering its note" (*NHP* 239). A month later, he records a bird sighting: "Saw the Blue Grey or lead coloured Flycatcher for the first time this season they are called 'Egypt Birds' by the common people from their note which seems to resemble the sound of the word 'Egypt'" (*NHP* 246-7). These examples of the practice of naming something based on its sounds illustrate the power of sound to testify to place and to inspire naming and linguistic description. Clare notes multiple levels of Helpston's sounds,

[90] Grainger's glossary to the natural history prose defines *chinnying* thus: "n., ?chattering (from chinny, talkative)" (*NHP* 368).

ranging from bird and animal calls, to non-oral sounds produced by non-human organisms, to human dialect terms that encode natural sounds.

Literal Sound Notation I: Natural History Profiles and Bird Biographies

A Clare natural history note is a profile of a living thing encountered in the landscape, a type of biography. It is not by accident that Clare wishes to call his proposed natural history of Helpston "Biographys of Birds & Flowers." Patterns emerge in his description habits that reflect this biographical sensibility. A typical profile consists of various stock elements, including details created by aural and visual sense experience within a specific location. When writing about a bird, mammal, or plant, Clare often indicates first that he hears it; he might try to transliterate its sounds into his own language. He discusses the organism's location, nest, and behavior. He also shares folk wisdom about the species—passing on colloquial names and their origin—as well as anecdotes (personal or communal), childhood experiences, and poetic allusions. He mentions the time of his sighting/hearing, whether this timing is consistent with previous experiences, and how a particular instance is exceptional. Many notes record seasonal regularities or irregularities.[91] In his careful attention to habitat and context, Clare reflects the strong influence of Gilbert White's style of natural history prose. White's *Natural History of Selborne* evokes the proto-ecological, eighteenth-century concept of the "economy of nature" on a local scale to describe "in meticulous detail the interaction of plants and animals species throughout the parish" (McKusick 26). White's curiosity and concern for Selborne's non-human inhabitants is blended with his Christian belief that the earth is created by God for human purposes—a belief that Clare did not share. Still, White's anecdotal mode of presentation and his use of vernacular diction provided a working model for Clare, who owned two different editions of White's *Natural History* (McKusick 26-7).

[91] Take for instance this simple and concise note from 1821: "birds sing in summer silent in winter" (*NHP* 288).

The following note serves as a typical example. Clare notes details about sound, species, lingo, location, and behavior:

> Heard the cricket Bird or Grass hopper Bunting last night (April 22) making its odd chittering note it exactly resembles the noise that childern make with their screekers[92] as they are calld—& it continues it for a minute to gether before it stops & then starts agen it began just as a shower begun & continued chittering on at its odd song till night fall—I have seldom heard this bird any were but in the woods (*NHP* 114)

The level of aural detail in this passage (almost forensic) suggests that Clare is attempting to make sense of this bird, or at least develop a degree of familiarity with it. He even attempts to compare the sound of its call to a familiar human sound. Clare wrote extensive bird lists with dozens of local species; many entries contain similar information about the bird's calls and oral practices. This example demonstrates the principal Clarean insight that hearing is a form of knowing and identifying, and that all sounds involve a physical context.

Clare repeats this contextual profile pattern when he describes anything that catches his fancy, even things that do not make proper sound. For instance, when he finds a particular plant species, Clare records its location, vernacular name, and the regularity of its appearance. In this sense, finding a plant species is akin to hearing an animal: it is an instance of physical contact with a non-human inhabitant. On December 3, 1824, he writes in his journal:

> Found a very beautiful fern in Oxey wood suppose it the White Maiden Hair of Hill it is very scare here (*NHP* 209)

and five days later:

> Found the common Pollopody on an old Willow tree in Lolham Lane & a very small fern in hilly wood scarcly larger then some species of moss & a little resembling curld parsley I have named it the Dwarf Maiden hair & believe it is very scarce here (*NHP* 209)

[92] A *screeker* is Northamptonshire dialect for a wooden rattle (*NHP* 372).

In both examples, Clare's thorough notation of physical setting provides a visual record of a living inhabitant. Listening makes sense of the world, and so does seeing; as media of communication, both convey a sense of place and allow one subject to pinpoint another. The sort of reciprocal interaction that Clare advocates between humans and their environments involves seeing as well as hearing.[93] In the latter journal entry, Clare gives a name to the fern, thus demonstrating his orality as another mode of interaction.

In his biographical notes about birds, Clare observes the oral habits of birds in connection with the seasons. On January 11, 1825, as he gathers soil for his flower beds, he records hearing "the Mavis thrush sing for the first time this winter" (*NHP* 216). The bird, he continues, has sung even earlier in the season; it "has been heard on christmass day when the weather has been open." About two weeks later, Clare writes an especially succinct journal entry: "A robin whistling on the plumb trees by the window I never heard one so early before" (*NHP* 217). In this entry, Clare does not begin by indicating his perception of the sound (e.g., "heard a robin"). He skips ahead to the true subject: the robin. The robin whistles "by the window," though he cannot help remarking that this experience is exceptional ("I never heard one so early before").

In addition to the seasonal emphasis in the bird profiles, Clare is keen to note the location of a given bird sighting or hearing. Just before the family moves to Northborough, Clare records hearing "the Black cap sing to day in Heath close wood almost as beautiful as the nightingale" (*NHP* 318). Where the bird sings is just as important as when. He goes on to share the colloquial names for the Black cap: "it is called march Nightingale & mock nightingale." It is fitting that both names describe the timing and habits of the Black cap—two regular elements in a Clare profile. Clare's profiling habits demonstrate the discourse practices of the Helpston and

[93] Moreover, sight and hearing mutually reinforce each other in the medium of print (e.g., letters, words, or pictures), which can be construed visually and orally (and thence aurally).

Northamptonshire community. According to this tradition, the best-fitting names describe observed behaviors, proliferate in the speech and song of a community, and circulate through that community and its successive generations. Clare's profiles (and their emphasis on location, time, history, and vernacular language) provide the sense that naming and linguistic description are activities best practiced in a consistent, serialized, localized, and physical relation between parties. A name grows from a specific experience in a time and place. The repetition of this experience authenticates the name as it proliferates.

Often dialect names convey observed traits or mimic sources in some way (as with ideophonic bird names like Pettichap and Butter Bump). As stated, dialect words have strong onomatopoeic resonances, and the "particular association between onomatopoeia, dialect, and the idiom of non-specialist natural history was strong in Clare's day" (Weiner 389).[94] The reciprocal condition of embeddedness, which includes linguistic practice, is asserted by anthropologist Stephen Feld: "as place is sensed, senses are placed; as places make sense, senses make place" (qtd. in Ward 18). The pattern of Clare's bird profiles and natural history notes illustrates this reciprocal embeddedness. When Clare asserts in his third natural history letter that poetry augments the pleasures of nature, sounds (and the imitation of sounds in language) play an important part in this reciprocal phenomenon between places and senses.

In describing a sound, Clare does more than emphasize his listening or how the sound affects him. He ascribes orality to the source of a sound, especially to birds. In his Peterborough A46 bird list entry for the Magpie (replete with details about its nest-building, habits, and egg clutches), Clare describes the bird's ability to process and imitate words; it is "easily tamed &

[94] This association has been confirmed by the linguist Adrian Roon (as well as the literary critic Theresa M. Kelley), who traces bird names to the sound of their calls. Robert Mugerauer also supports the notion that dialect conveys features of the landscape; it "holds together *local environment* and *mother tongue*, *place* and *local language*" (qtd. in Ward 19). For E.P. Thompson, dialect is "studded with words which point not only towards forgotten tools, measures, things, but also towards forgotten modes of thought and habits of work" (qtd. in Ward 19).

learnd to talk" (*NHP* 128). Clare writes from personal experience, having kept one for years. He continues:

> it imitated many words readily & when it heard a sound or word that it coud not imitate readily it woud become silent & pensive & sit ruminating on an eldern tree & muttering as it were to itself som inaudible sounds till at length it got by heart the thing it was aiming at & then it was as lively & as full of chatter as ever (*NHP* 128)

Clare also observes the bird's behavior during silence, when it cannot imitate a particular human utterance. He carefully notes the magpie's placement on an eldern tree, attributing vocal intention and a pensive mood to the bird, which seems to aim at mimicry.

The starling, Clare notes, is also easily tamed and can "learn to whistle tunes & talk words & even speak short sentences" (*NHP* 133). In both accounts, Clare shows an interest in the bird's ability to listen to and mimic human sounds and words. That such details are made to stand as part of this bird list (intended for Clare's natural history of Helpston) reveals the fundamental roles that aurality and orality play in Clare's ecological and literary senses. How well a bird hears is an important part of knowing it. This conversational habit amongst various creatures in a given environment inspires Clare's sensibility, which assumes the reciprocal give and take of listening to and creating sound, and it manifests in his literary descriptions.

Clare's bird biographies acknowledge birds' ability to listen and to make sound; they also describe a bird's readiness to recognize and engage with humans and other birds. In an entry on the great spotted woodpecker, Clare notes that it "seems to have a quick ear at the approach of any thing" (*NHP* 131). In his Macloc bird lists, he comments upon various birds' orality and teachability: "Mag pie . . . readiness to learn to talk," "Jay . . . learnt to whistle or talk Its call to warn other birds of approaching danger," "Starling . . . learnt to talk," and "The Mavis Thrush . . . Singing thrush a different bird" (*NHP* 353). This schematic emphasis upon bird chatter

demonstrates the privileged role of aural/oral exchange in Clare's understanding of who or what a person or thing is.

Literal Sound Notation II: Orality of Insects, Reptiles, Animals, and Thunder

Though there are many instances of bird sounds throughout his prose and poetry, Clare uses the same profile format to document other sounds and sources in his 1824-5 journal. Very little seems to escape his habit of sound notation, a fact that reveals the extent of his documentary aesthetic. In the following examples, each sound memo includes information about time, behavior, location, direction, names, and frequency. Clare also speculates about causes and he attempts to interpret acoustic information, sometimes comparing one sound with another. On January 27, 1825, for instance, he hears the "buzz of the black beetle or cockchafer that flyes about the autumn evenings & early in spring" (*NHP* 219). On March 11 that same year, he blots: "the frogs have begun to croke" (*NHP* 228). He hears a "terrible kick up with the Rats in the ceiling" some time around April 25, when he also records a "Thunder storm several claps very loud in the distance" coming from the southwest (*NHP* 236). Later that week he writes: "Heard all thro last night the sort of watch ticking noise calld a death watch & observed there was one on each side the chamber & as soon as one ceased ticking the other began" (*NHP* 237). He speculates that the beetles' ticking is "a call that the male & female use in the time of cohabitating." His journal entry for May 29 describes more thunder: "[h]eard the most severe thunder clap yesterday that I ever in my life it was heard instantly (only 3 pulses) after the flash—" (*NHP* 243). And in a manuscript note from 1832, Clare describes two snakes on Cowper green. He writes about how the smaller one pursues the larger one "uttering a low tremulous noise not unlike the shrew mouse" (*NHP* 322). In all of these examples, Clare establishes a sense of place by describing sounds and the contexts of those sounds. Data about

frequency, timing, duration, and seasonal cycles play a crucial part in this sonic sense of place. His record keeping also notes rare events and lesser-known species, and he carefully comments on such scarcities.

McKusick refers to the "truly radical and innovative character of Clare's ecological consciousness" and the "unconventionality" of his "poetic vision" (78). What differentiates his poems from other ecologically-minded Romantic poems is that they "typically represent the landscape through the point of view of a local resident, often a peasant, shepherd, or woodman, or even within the imagined consciousness of a native animal, plant, or waterway" (McKusick 78). This deference to others' points of view, experiences, and voices, and the effort to imagine or learn these perspectives, demonstrates a concern for the "otherness" of nature—a concern which William Cronon considers to be crucial for contemporary environmentalism (McKusick 10). Clare practiced environmental embeddedness by listening to and recording sounds (SLD), and he judged his progress in terms of the "locality" of his writing (McKusick 80). In an autobiographical fragment, he discusses his disappointment with "The Village Minstrel" because "it does not describe the feelings of a rhyming peasant strongly or localy enough" (*John Clare by Himself* 113-4). His poems use prosopopoeia, regional vernacular and dialect words, the narrative device of the local walk, and what McKusick calls the "frequentive mode[95]" to enhance the element of locality. McKusick's analysis of Clare's ecological vision concurs with the notion of a documentary poetics. "The task of the 'peasant poet,'" he writes, "is to bear witness to this fragile community of creatures whose very existence depends on the continued integrity of their ecosystem" (McKusick 83). The extent to which Clare experiences and presents sound as a vital

[95] "The events recounted in his poetry are said to occur frequently or customarily, and several of his poems begin with the phrase 'I love to…' which likewise indicates frequently repeated activity. This frequentive mode is at odds with the dominant Western cognitive categories of causality and chronology, placing his poetry outside the technological mainstream and within an alternative cultural tradition that is more in harmony with the biotic rhythms of the natural world" (McKusick 82).

element of the Helpston ecosystem is underestimated. Listening is a habitual activity that bonds Clare to his dwelling-place, but it also serves as the basis for his poetic style, which recreates the experience of listening for the reader. In presenting the orality of unconventional entities within the external environment, Clare serves as an environmental witness. This ecological and resourceful approach to sound provides additional sonic material for the poet, who encodes within his poems other "poems." In its presentation of orality as a shared power (or at the very least the capacity to produce meaningful sound), Clare's documentary poetics repositions the poet as a receptor figure who echoes external nature. McKusick emphasizes Clare's ecological sensibility and environmental advocacy in his discussion of the "scope and originality" of Clare's poetic achievement.[96] But Clare's rootedness is not meaningful simply in terms of the environmental agenda; it also facilitates his inventive presentation of sound effects and orality within the poems. His compositions teach us that the stuff of poetry—the pleasure and play afforded by sound in a curious relation to visual sense—can be found in more places than we imagine. And as we read and listen along with the rambling poet, we develop a sense of love for these voices and a fear for their extinction.

Literal Sound Notation III: Inanimate Objects, Silence, and Disregarded or Non-Traditional Sources of Sound

Clare's aurality and documentary ethos also prompt him to note the sounds produced by inanimate objects and human artifacts. For instance, the soundmark of the bells of Glinton Church in November always cause him to feel "mellancholy" and yet "it is a pleasure" (*NHP* 197). To punctuate this soundmark, he samples a line from Kirke White: "Im pleased & yet Im

[96] Though the "environmental" movement in its current sense did not exist during Clare's lifetime, McKusick identifies antecedents of it in Clare (as well as Coleridge and Wordsworth). These include his respect for and intense engagement with the local environment; his grasp of the interdependence of all living things; his attitude towards hunting, agricultural improvement, and enclosure; and the "important strategy" in which he "lends his voice" to subjects in nature (McKusick 82, 85).

sad."[97] SLD is at work even here because Clare treats the experience of sound by documenting it and by citing a literary allusion that reproduces the sentiment. In another record, Clare interprets the meaning of a particular sound as a communal relation. He describes hearing the Ufford bells chime for the funeral of John Cue, a man who knew his grandfather and with whom Clare had worked "some seasons at turnip-hoeing" (*NHP* 220). In this instance, the memorial sound triggers reflection about Helpston's past—past inhabitants, past labors, past affairs—and Clare's relation to that past. In these examples, Clare establishes a sense of Helpston by describing sounds and the social and emotive meanings of these sounds.

Clare also records silence and sounds that are unheard by the world at large. If his poetics seeks to establish (or expose) an ongoing conversation between humans and the natural world surrounding them, then describing the unheard creates a degree of mystery and appeal. The secret, subtle sounds that the "heedless passenger" disregards serve as currency in the aesthetic economy set up by Clare's poetics. In "Note A," Peterborough MS B6, Clare muses about the spring song of the ploughboy:

> I thought I was up sooner then usual & before morning was on the stir out of doors but I am pleasantly dissapointed by the whistle of the ploughboy past the window making himself merry & trying to make the dull weather dance to a very pleasant tune which I know well & yet cannot reccolect the song but there are hundreds of these pleasant tunes familiar to the plough & the splashing steam[98] & the little fields of spring that have lain out the brown rest of winter & green into mirth with the sprouting grain the songs of the sky lark & the old songs & ballads that ever accompany field happiness in following the plough—by neither heard known or noticed by all the world beside (*NHP* 308)

In the passage, Clare documents a different kind of living sound of place—the vocational song of the ploughboy. Already astir and making merry, the boy is described as part of some never-ending vernal chorus that implicates various aspects of the environment: the dull weather and the

[97] Glinton's bells may convey sadness because of the church's association with Mary Joyce, the subject of Clare's unfulfilled, lifelong infatuation.
[98] For "team" or possibly "stream," Grainger notes (*NHP* 308).

cyclic passage from winter to spring; the plough and the oxen (by metonymy); the stream; the fields; the skylark; and the human tradition of work song. Clare suggests that the boy is whistling to the season; he tries to "make the dull weather dance." Moreover, there are "hundreds" of such tunes that "have lain out the brown rest of winter & green into mirth with the sprouting grain." Clare assigns transformative power to these folk songs, which are neither "heard known or noticed" by strangers. This simple manuscript note, which is immediately followed by Clare's reworking of the material into the sonnet "Ploughman Singing," suggests that the passage of the seasons is bound up with human musical and agricultural practices, and it subtly establishes aurality as an aesthetic criterion of this community's way of life. Such vocational sounds are unheard "by all the world beside" because they are contextual. Like the stalks of grain that grow upon Helpston's fields, this boy's work song is a product of his interaction with his surrounding environment. There is a sense that he is really plowing songs, which serve as metonyms for Helpston itself. This implied metaphor between song and grain implicates human orality as part of Helpston's ecosystem, and it naturalizes aural and oral exchange as a practice within this ecosystem and others. By recording the ploughboy's whistle, a human and vocational sound connected to the Helpston landscape, Clare enriches the cache of Helpston's sensory markers, documents its existence, and models ecological embeddedness for the reader. The very sound itself stimulates Clare's mental association, thus producing memories of other songs ("there are hundreds") and harvests.

Clare's prose and poetry describe music from settings and sources that are not traditionally treated in poetic description. In "Note D," from Peterborough MS A62, Clare lists a variety of sounds that create pleasure:

> brown & yellow leaves litter the greensward & rustles under the feet the autumn tempest or winds sweeps through the vollying trees like the long mutterings of continued thunder

> or rollings of artillery a long way distant & yet the trees seem in no violent motion but this low muttering thunder seems to be the sylvan voice of autumn in walking through a wood even in what may be called a calm day for the season we may generally hear the same huzzing rumbling noise in the woods which to me is as agreeable as music— (*NHP* 338)

The rustle of foot upon leaves, the thunderous muttering of autumn winds, and the "huzzing rumbling noise in the woods"—all these sounds are like music to Clare. He personifies autumn, by referring to its winds and tempests as "the sylvan voice of autumn." His choice of the adjective "sylvan" to modify autumn's sounds establishes a link between autumn's voice and a specific type of location (i.e., forest). Clare's poetry tends toward such descriptions of the cooperation of place, sound, and time. For sounds are produced by vibrating objects in a given place and time. His poetics applies this insight into the relation between place, sound, and time in order to assert an abstract association between nature and language, and between Helpston and text.

Clare jots down a similar list, somewhat schematic, several years later in 1845, appending the title "Pleasant Sounds":

> The rustling of leaves under the feet in woods and under hedges. The crumping of cat-ice and snow down wood rides, narrow lanes and every street causeways. Rustling through a wood, or rather rushing while the wind hallows in the oak tops like thunder. The rustles of birds wings startled from their nests, or flying unseen into the bushes. The whizzing of larger birds over head in a wood, such as crows, puddocks, buzzards &c. The trample of roburst wood larks on the brown leaves, and the patter of Squirrels of the green moss The fall of an acorn on the ground, the pattering of nuts on the hazel branches, ere they fall from ripeness. The flirt of the ground-larks wing from the stubbles, how sweet such pictures on dewy mornings when the dew flashes from its brown feathers. (*NHP* 341)

The sounds are presented as a complex of cooperating environmental factors, including the agent, its actions, its surroundings, and the natural object upon which it acts (thereby producing sound). The list includes no examples of oral sounds; rather, all the sounds are created by natural motions. Some sounds are accidental and some are not—but each provides pleasure. A

grammatical pattern develops throughout the passage to emphasize a sweeping movement from sound to sight. Each sentence is incomplete, providing only a subject; but these subjects are all verbal nouns or gerunds, a fact which stresses action. Sentences one through five begin with words that stress noise (*rustling*, *crumping*, *whizzing*) and then finish with adverbial details that create visual images (*woods*, *hedges*, *narrow lanes*, *bushes*). These adverbials provide information about time and space, and they include a plethora of prepositions and adverbs which stress proximity and physical relationships. This rhetorical pattern creates a link between effect and cause in which the sound becomes inseparable from its setting and vice versa. Sentences six through eight replace the strong aural gerunds with subject words that are less onomatopoeiac, and more visual: *trample*, *fall*, and *flirt*. The visual and aural cooperation in this passage, as well as the related emphasis upon space and time, convey a vivid sense of the place described. Both aurality and vision allow the subject to pinpoint another subject in the environment.

Clare's portrayal of pleasant sounds relies upon precise verbs like *rustle*, *crump*, *rush*, *hallow*, *whiz*, *trample*, and *patter* and nouns like *wind*, *thunder*, and *fall*. Other words emphasize sight (*unseen*, *pictures* and *flashes*). The visual and aural aspects of the passage cooperate and reinforce each other—in fact, this long list of pleasant sounds concludes with the speaker's appeal to the sense of sight. This mutual reinforcement is appropriate given Clare's belief that all forms of sense experience are capable of bonding a subject to its environment and given Clare's advocacy of physical interaction (e.g., sensory experience, reciprocity, conversation) as a form of ecological engagement.[99]

[99] This mutual reinforcement is also appropriate because of the visual nature of writing and communicative marks. Clare's speakers occasionally evoke visual images of communication between humans and nature. He expresses a desire to "paint" nature in one memorandum. Carrying this aural/visual correspondence a step further, Clare describes nature in terms of writing or marking implements: "nature's pencil," a "pen," and "paint." Clare renders this connection quite literal when he experiments with birch bark as a form of paper. These three examples are taken from: "A Ramble," the Yellow Hammer (or "Writing Lark") entry in the A46 Bird List, and a poetic fragment from Pforzheimer MS 198.

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Clare's literal and figurative approach to aural and visual imagery characterize his unique relation to Helpston. The senses of sight and hearing, as well as orality, facilitate embeddedness and reciprocity. We have seen a broad assortment of sonic applications and descriptions in Clare's natural history prose and poetry. First, Clare employs orality and literary allusion in his letters and prose in order to criticize, correct, and propagate poetic discourse. Secondly, he defines aurality, orality, and locality as central criteria in his poetics. The wood pigeon's soft cooing and rustling feet, for instance, are more beautiful than the turtle dove's because he has direct personal experience of this bird. Thirdly, Clare portrays the power of sound in his boyhood hunts after the land rail and he provides detailed notes about the sounds (both oral and non-oral) and habitats of many birds, often correcting misconceptions. His love of sounds also causes him to speculate about the creation of sounds: he considers an experiment to recreate the butter bump's call and he explains how certain species' names derive from the calls they make. Fourthly, Clare consciously and strategically employs dialect words in order to enhance the local and sonic quality of his poems. In addition, Clare privileges the onomatopoeiac and historical qualities of dialect speech over "unnatural" speech imported from other places.

Fifthly, sound plays a crucial role in Clare's natural history profiles and bird biographies because along with other crucial information (e.g., locus and setting, season, time of day, behavior, direction, and frequency) it sustains a vivid ecological portrait. In his description of a bird's orality, Clare also notes details about when and where a bird sings; he also comments upon several species' ability to learn and repeat human speech as well as engage with other oral subjects. Thus his interest in aurality extends beyond documenting his own aural experiences to speculating about the listening habits of other species. This conceptual leap illustrates Clare's

faith in the faculty of hearing as an interactive tool for environmental subjects. Sixthly, Clare creates records of the oral and non-oral sounds produced by creatures other than birds, such as reptiles, insects, rodents. He also notes the sounds produced by non-human, natural forces (e.g., thunder, the trickle of streams, or the rustling of leaves) and human artifacts (e.g., Glinton Bells). Nor does silence escape his notice or report. Lastly, Clare records the oral and motional sounds of the human realm, including traditionally disregarded or ignored sounds associated with labor (e.g., the harvest) as well as sounds produced by human interaction with the environment (e.g., the stepping on and "crumping" of cat ice).

Sound is a complex of cooperating environment factors that includes an agent, its action, its location and surroundings, any objects upon which it acts, timing, as well as an auditor. These factors have sonic as well as visual qualities. Together, vision and aurality, and the related emphases on space and time, convey a specific sense of place; they also allow one environmental subject to recognize and engage with another.

Clare's poetics presents a range of environmental inhabitants and features—ranging from non-human to human to inanimate—by documenting their sonic and visual traits. Assuming the fundamentally relational quality of sound (acoustic communication), his poetics also portrays aurality and orality as valid and accessible modes of environmental interaction. The individual act of listening locates rich sources for poetic material, it widens the field of participation in poetic composition, and it empowers auditors. Moreover, it implicates the listener as part of an aesthetic community of exchange with which he has direct and free access. As a poetic conceit, listening also models collaboration in composition; for any given poetic transcript requires the cooperation of the original source and the attentive copyist.

The aggregate of these sensory experiences produces a vivid representation of locus (in Clare's case, the village of Helpston), but it also amounts to an ecology in the sense that it presents a philosophy (and program) about human interaction with the environment. Particular sense experiences in space and time, sometimes counteracting and sometimes cooperating, contribute to one's knowledge of, and bond with, place. Clare accepts this fundamental premise and he singles out the familiarizing power of aurality as a primary tenet of his ecology, which prizes reciprocal sensory exchange between fellow dwellers. To know Helpston is to hear its sounds and witness their performance *in situ*. Clare's repeated portrayals of listening and orality (as well as sight) provide an ecological agenda for readers by suggesting a course of action for environmental engagement (i.e., sensory embeddedness). They also document and advocate the village of Helpston, and they provide an alternative criterion of poetic worth. Stephen Feld's understanding of the reciprocal relationship between place and individual sense elucidates Clare's loco-documentary poetics.[100] For our sensory experiences of a particular place bind us to it and make sense of it, which in turn helps us to make sense of ourselves as part of that place.

Locus and Textuality

Just as Clare painstakingly notes where various bird species gather their nesting materials from, so can we note where he collects material for his productions. A Clare poem is like a bird's nest because it is made up from parts locally gathered in Helpston and Northamptonshire. Clare applies this local ethic to aesthetic criticism, praising poets like Charlotte Smith and Thomas Chatterton, and painters like Rippingille and De Wint, for drawing their images directly from nature (rather than from reading). He demonstrates this local ethic throughout his natural history prose by noting the location, make-up, and fate of various birds' nests. He is particularly interested in correcting misconceptions about the materials birds use and when he finds a nest, he

[100] "[A]s place is sensed, senses are placed; as places make sense, senses make place" (Feld qtd. in Ward 18).

often notes down a confirmation of the materials.[101] In the following passage, Clare considers the roles that animal instinct and physical environment play in a bird's selection of materials:

> Many writers write sermons on that peculiar & as they imagine invariable instinct in birds of the same kind using the same materials in building their nests but a closer observation[102] of nature will show that it tis not invariable—in some places it varies for want of those materials which they most prefer & in such cases they use the things nearest to their habitations & make up for the loss of those they want as well as they can—but it is often found that where the things which they use in common are found in greatest plenty that the same kind of birds will use different materials in the construction of their nests & I have observed for years that all the nests of Blackbirds or nearly all that are built first or earliest in the spring use grass both within & without their nests & that those built later in the season are composed of moss without & grass & leaves within wether this be the different tastes of the different species I cannot tell—but when ever I caught a black bird at work earlily in spring when they are built of grass it was always the cock-bird which was building it & when later & composed of moss the hen bird was invariably the builder which I could easily distinguish by her dun coloured bill & rich umber coloured breast (*NHP* 322-3)

Clare pays particular attention to the material composition of blackbirds' nests as well as when they are built, interior and exterior features, the appearance and sex of builders, and the availability of materials in the surrounding ecosystem. Despite this specific and object-oriented focus, the passage relates the relatively limited roles that animal instinct and physical environment play in an individual bird's creative choices. The passage corrects the myth of invariability of instinct and argues three possible factors of variation. The first reason (which only applies sometimes) why birds' nests are not uniform is because the place and its ecosystem challenge the so-called involuntary character of instinctual preference. The second reason for deviation is also only applicable in some scenarios, and it contradicts the first reason: the place and its ecosystem may accommodate a species' preference, yet that species will flout this supposed predilection by caprice. A third factor is time and season. Together these three factors

[101] Nightingales always use oak leaves, for instance.

[102] A recurrent motif throughout Clare's poetry and prose: heedless passers-by and naturalists who depend upon books repeat myths about nature (e.g. that the female nightingale sings, and only at night). All one needs to counteract this misinformation is to observe nature directly.

show that instinct or preference is not as involuntary as we might think, and that it has a complex relationship with locus that cannot be rationalized. Species members make constructive choices in concert with locus, but these choices are not always straightforward nor do they confirm conventional human wisdom.

In this passage, Clare uses the word *tastes* to signify the complex and inscrutable process of nest-building. The "tastes" of blackbirds refers to their preferences as demonstrated by the choices they make, which may or may not be conditioned by the environment. So-called instinct bends to individual whim, as some interceding step of evaluation, adjustment, and choice occurs in the phenomenon of nest-building (a vital and creative process for species survival). In this complex and unpredictable matrix that combines locus, time, and individual whim, the materials and textures used in creation are gathered locally; yet the creator's individual choices also define that environment and give it texture. Clare attacks the thesis of invariable instinctual choice in order to suggest an alternative matrix of creative factors—one which lies closer to his personal experience and taste. This creative matrix comprises locus and the individual behaviors of organisms dwelling within that locus. The discrepancies in blackbird nest-building, Clare speculates, may be attributable to the existence of different sub-species (and therefore instinctual codes); but he refrains from ruling out the possibility of arbitrariness. He will not confirm invariability and predictability of instinctual behavior because to do so is to reduce, automate, and systematize locus and individual choice to ancillary roles in creation. At stake in this debate is our understanding of locus and what it encompasses. Locus, Clare's passage implies, is not some environmental substrate that triggers systematic results. Rather, locus needs to be understood as a vital field (or matrix) of conflicting and contributing factors that involve material and objective values as well as irreducible, individual choices. A local ethic, in creation or

criticism, foregrounds the importance of place and establishes a sense of a specific location by showing how an inhabitant interacts with its environment by collecting and selecting—by choosing and using.

The analogy between a bird's nest and a Clare poem allows us to speculate some more about the role of individual creative whim. According to this analogy, the bird's caprice is a figure for the poet's, whose choices also have the power to construct local artifacts, and thus the physical environment. The above example of how male and female blackbirds differ in their nest-building is a conflicted one: Clare attributes a degree of predictability to blackbirds' deviation (e.g., males build early in the season, females late), but the example primarily illustrates the real differences in the behavior of individual species members. Through this example, the passage's speaker cultivates a sense of unaccountability, which endows these birds with a unique and subjective creative power. Like birds' nests, Clare's poems demonstrate a local ethic of selection; but more importantly, they foreground this taste, which produces a sort of observer effect. In the many references to the sensory instruments of hearing and seeing, the poems illustrate how the poet (as an inhabitant and as an observer) must be considered part of his poem and subject. His instruments of perception display a paradox whereby they both react to, and act upon, a local subject. This irreducible bind, in which the inhabitant cooperates with an environment by reaction and action, is fundamental to Clare's ecological sense, and the trope of conversation fits this paradox well.

Clare's contention that nature is "not invariable" (*NHP* 322) implies that an organism's creative behavior, while predictable to a certain extent, is ultimately erratic and subject to other impulses or directives. Clare reads birds' nests as though they were poems or songs, that is, local cultural artifacts capable of producing pleasure and worthy of examination. Dozens of his poems

are titled specifically after various birds' nests: "The Moorhen's Nest," "The Nightingale's Nest," "The Pettichap's Nest," "The Yellowhammer's Nest," and so forth.[103] The basis of Clare's identification between poetry and nest-building is the primary roles that environment and individual choice play in the act of composition or creation. The sonic, historic, visual and linguistic materials available to Clare within the Helpston landscape work their way into the poems and prose; they provide texture. But like the whimsical blackbird, Clare actively introduces texture from other sources (e.g., poetry from other places and people, personal anecdotes, and idiolectal coinages).

In his valuation of local creative materials, Clare is not unique. This concept serves as the premise for *Lyrical Ballads*, as Wordsworth's preface to the second edition attests. In this preface, Wordsworth employs the "ecological" metaphor of incorporation to describe the connection between rustic human language and natural forms (McKusick 36).[104] Wordsworth's "advocacy" of vernacular language "is predicated on his view that human passion *incorporates* the forms of nature" (McKusick 36). In this sense, Wordsworth's early theory of poetic practice parallels Clare's reciprocity with Helpston—both men work to expose an association (linguistic, cultural, aesthetic, or otherwise) between the human and non-human forms of nature, particularly as this association is experienced in specific location.

Wordsworth's poetry demonstrates several of the features noted in Clare's works. He foregrounds aurality in his poetry as well as a "concrete awareness of geographic location" and a keen sense of "childhood memory" (McKusick 53). Most of all, Wordsworth's poems grow out of his personal experiences in and with geographical locations (France, the Swiss Alps, Alfoxden

[103] This does not include other "nest" titles such as: "The Field-Mouse's Nest," "The Wild Bees' Nest," or "The Wild Duck's Nest."

[104] Wordsworth describes a preference for the language "of low and rustic life . . . because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature" (qtd. in McKusick 36).

and the Quantocks, and Grasmere and the Lake District). Like Clare's poems about Helpston, they attest to his embeddedness in a locale. Sound plays a role in his early experiences of place. For instance, his earliest childhood memories, as recounted in *The Prelude*, "were of the sound of the river Derwent, whose murmurs 'from his alder shades and rocks falls . . . sent a voice / That flowed along my dreams'" (qtd. in McKusick 54). In "The Idiot Boy," the owls cry out to Johnny during his forest journey. And in "Home at Grasmere," William describes his experience of the orality of landscape, though he is careful to choose words that call attention to his perception of this orality:

> The naked Trees,
> The icy brooks, as on we passed, appeared
> To question us. "Whence came ye? To what end?"
> They seemed to say; "What would ye," said the shower,
> "Wild Wanderers, whither through my dark domain?"
> The sunbeam said, "be happy." (165-170, qtd. in McKusick 71)

The variety of speakers and their messages, though only a perception on the speaker's part, establishes the notion of a society of literate and sentient non-humans. The shower addresses William and Dorothy as "Wild Wanderers," imparting a sense of otherness to the human subjects in this scene while laying claim to its "dark domain." In this simple prosopopoeia, the shower demonstrates the principles of difference, ownership, and political rule.

Wordsworth's poem "Expostulation and Reply" emphasizes the orality of "things forever speaking" (26) and develops a theme of conversation between humans and non-humans in nature. Young William sits solitary on an old grey stone "[c]onversing" in a "wise passiveness" that does not seek out knowledge (30, 24). In the companion poem, "The Tables Turned," Wordsworth further considers the possibility of communication between the human mind and objects in the natural world. McKusick notes the "significant interlocutors" in this poem are the "personified presences of the sun . . . and the 'woodland linnet,' whose sweet music conveys

more wisdom than is found in any book" (59-60). Like Clare, Wordsworth is not content to portray orality alone; he extends meaning, purpose, and beauty to the "lore" of nature:

> Sweet is the lore which nature brings;
> Our meddling intellect
> Misshapes the beauteous forms of things;
> —We murder to dissect.
>
> Enough of science and of art;
> Close up those barren leaves;
> Come forth, and bring with you a heart
> That watches and receives. (25-32)

Here, over twenty years before Clare's Natural History Letters, we witness what Clare calls that "bold and inovating genius" with a "real love for nature" who can revitalize the natural images of poetry. Wordsworth's contrast between modes of learning (and thus textuality), coupled with his blunt and succinct phraseology, provide a startling conception of the legibility of nature. The lines also attribute aesthetic value to nature. Nature "brings" a sweet "lore" and it contains "beauteous forms" that convey meaning only when animated. This aesthetic capacity differs from the humanistic and end-driven "meddling intellect."[105] Wordsworth creatively employs a familiar comparison in the submerged metaphor "barren leaves," to suggest that the association between nature and text can have negative value as well. In this deployment, the speaker does not refer to the "leaves" of nature's book, but the "barren leaves" of human books of science and art. For real learning, the speaker proposes the unconventional actions of closing up schoolbooks and venturing out of doors. Like nature, who "brings" a sweet lore, we are to "bring" with us, on this excursion, only a "heart / That watches and receives." Strangely, the speaker does not articulate the eye and ear, though the actions of watching and listening are emphasized in these stanzas. Rather, it is the heart that (rather synaesthetically) receives the textual lessons of nature,

[105] This contrast is conveyed geometrically in Clare's sonnet "Sand Martin"; the rectilinearity of human technological and agricultural progress is contrasted with the circularity of the bird's flight and the seasonal cycle (McKusick 92-3).

translating them to sentiments. This stress upon the emotional, as well as the literary, interaction between humans and non-human nature aligns with Clare's notion, as expressed in his third Natural History letter, of looking on nature "with a poetical feeling"—a feeling for which, he scornfully notes in agreement with Wordsworth's speaker, "naturalists & botanists seem to have no taste" (*NHP* 51). McKusick writes that the poem, in turning the tables upon the Western tradition of scientific knowledge,

> proposes a new role for humankind among the speaking presences of the natural world. The place of poetry, and the task of the poet, is thus inherently dialogical; the poet must seek to engage those inhuman voices in conversation, at some risk to his own sense of identity, self-confidence, and stylistic decorum. (60-1)

If poetry, and the poet, are of necessity "dialogical," as McKusick aptly words it, Wordsworth seems to have negotiated the issue of poetic selfhood quite differently than Clare did. Of course, this negotiation implicates larger political and social forces at work (poverty, income, enclosure, access to education, patronage, and publication). McKusick claims that Wordsworth attends to this risk by presenting detailed descriptions of the natural world—"unmediated experience"—from the grounded perspective of an "engaged participant" (56). The extent to which the presence of an "engaged participant" disqualifies as mediation is unclear in McKusick's argument, though in "Tintern Abbey" the speaker realistically addresses the fact of this mediation and its change over time.

Clare also foregrounds perceiver figures (and the loss of childish perception), going further to suggest actual dialogue between entities, but he also eschews this frame on occasion. In addition, the nostalgia throughout his poems poses a critical difficulty. Other subjects that have guided critical discourse on Clare also vex the question of the integrity of his identity: his received image as an uneducated "peasant poet," his problematic and yet helpful relationship with his handlers, and his mental illness and institutionalization. Recent scholarship (by

McKusick, Jonathan Bate, John Goodridge, and Alan Vardy) has sought to free Clare from the yoke of pity, while addressing these concerns head-on. Though the social differences between these two poets are significant, they need not blind us to the similarities of their visions—particularly, their common focus on the relationships between human communities and their natural environments, and the harm caused by technological and agricultural progress within these habitats. In their shared advocacy of an experiential and interactive "conversation" with local nature, both Clare and Wordsworth foreground the tools of listening and walking, and their poems lean upon these dialogic tools as narrative frames.[106]

Coleridge also prioritized the creative potential of local geography and he systematized this conviction in his poetry and philosophy. He used organicism, an eighteenth century aesthetic doctrine that utilized the scientific concept of the organism as an "autonomous, cyclical, and self-regulating entity," to define the essence of language and poetry (McKusick 37). "Effusion XXXV" and *Biographia Literaria* develop his organic theory of art, and his compilations of local place names during his wanderings in the Lake District demonstrate his conviction that "language . . . is the result of an ongoing conversation between the land and the people who dwell upon it" (McKusick 37). Both Coleridge and Clare value highly the sonic and linguistic artifacts that originate from a given locus, particularly as such artifacts are created by interaction; but they differ on the issue of the vitality of language and poems. McKusick observes that "such a conception of the poem as an organism residing in a local habitat is implicit in Coleridge's poetic practice in *Lyrical Ballads*" (38).[107] Implicit in this notion is Coleridge's fundamental premise that language is alive and not an object or product. Clare, by contrast, presents poems

[106] Chapter Three will address the conversational or dialogic nature of walking.
[107] McKusick selects "Effusion XXXV" as an example; he does not explicitly name "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (or any other of Coleridge's poems in *Lyrical Ballads*) as examples of his abiding conception of the poem as an organism.

and poetic speech as the products of non-human organisms, inanimate natural entities, and the land itself. The poems are nests in the sense that they contain local materials gathered by the careful rambler. Though they are vital, nests are not alive; rather they are the handiwork of living beings.

A subtle but important difference in poetic philosophy exists between these two poets. Coleridge applies the analogy of the organism (and thus the ecosystem) to language. This application emphasizes a living speech as the expression of a universal, divine force.[108] Clare, on the other hand, applies the analogy of language (and text) to his surrounding environment in order to proclaim the existence of various non-human inhabitants and features. His application is perhaps not as radical as Coleridge's, though it participates in (and renovates) the longstanding tradition within English poetry of the metaphoric conflation of land and text.[109] These philosophical differences establish significant differences in poetic practice. Clare's conception allows for a large array of narrative frames. The creative work (of building a nest, voicing a text, composing a poem) can be solitary (e.g., in poems like "The Lament of Swordy Well" where there seems to be one non-human speaker). It can also be collaborative, in the sense that a human speaker broadcasts a natural voice (e.g., "The Lamentations of Round Oak Waters"), a human speaker converses with a non-human inhabitant (e.g., "The Woodman"), or in the sense that a variety of natural voices cooperate (e.g, "Natures Melodys the Music of the Storm"). In every case, however, creative work, for both Coleridge and Clare, utilizes local materials (from the *ὀίκος*, or 'dwelling-place,' the etymological root for *ecology*).[110]

[108] Coleridge extends this organic view to all things: "Throughout his August 1802 walking tour, Coleridge typically regards human dwellings, pathways, and activities as indigenous to the landscape of the Lake District, as if they were self-generated features rather than embodiments of particular historical processes" (McKusick 42).
[109] This western tradition originates in Greek and Roman classical poetry.
[110] McKusick points out this etymology for *ecology* in his introduction to *Green Writing* (29).

In "Sighing for Retirement" Clare pushes this local ethic to its furthest point. His speaker avers "I found the poems in the fields, / And only wrote them down" (15-6). There is an implied metaphor in these lines that suggests such found poems may be alive—as flowers for instance. We recall Clare's third natural history letter, in which he asked Hessey to send him poetic "extracts" or "flowers." However, Clare adopts the metaphor of living, botanical verse not as an earnest support for an organic theory of art; rather, the vehicle imparts a propagative strength to poetry. "Sighing for Retirement" emphasizes the object status of the poems (the speaker finds them, they do not seek him out) as well as the speaker's observer status. Conceptual confusion is caused by the fact that some of the products (or objects) of nature are living, for a period of time anyway. However, to fully endorse the organic view of language and poetry de-emphasizes the authority of speakers and listeners. This is because organicism understands individual agency as an expression of a vast and infinite being. This result is not necessary, perhaps; but Clare's documentary ethic is better served by prioritizing the life of other speakers, rather than the life of spoken language itself. If poems are alive and self-supporting, why publicize them (and their sources)?

Coleridge's mature theory of aesthetic organicism provides a contemporary critical perspective from which to consider Clare's local ethic. The theory develops Coleridge's early views, seen in his notebooks and lists of vernacular, on the "integrity and interrelatedness of the natural world" (McKusick 42). According to this theory, the unity of the natural world applies to the aesthetic object:

> From an ecological perspective, just as the concept of the organism needs to be completed by a consideration of its habitat, so too the inner form of an aesthetic object . . . is less significant than its relation to the linguistic and cultural environment that surrounds and nourishes it. (McKusick 42-3)

Coleridge's insight is to consider human language and culture as parts of a creative habitat for art. According to this approach, language is "the result of an ongoing conversation between the land and the people who dwell upon it" (McKusick 37). Clare also assumes the interrelatedness of art and nature (of language and land), but he tends to represent the opposite end of this analogy: the natural world imbued with aesthetic capacity. His approach does not incorporate all of art under the rubric of nature. Often he points out how unnatural some works of art are.[111] Clare stresses interrelatedness and reciprocity not in order to theorize art, but to account for the unheard subjects of Helpston.

Though both poets affirm a sense of creation that is necessarily contextual, Coleridge's emphasis upon organic unity overshadows those local features and agents that Clare prioritizes. Coleridge and Clare represent opposite sides of the aesthetic organic coin: all art is natural, or all nature is artistic. Coleridge contends that human cultural productions are living organisms, whereas Clare maintains that non-human organisms and geographical features are cultural. Coleridge's poet makes art that is organic, whereas Clare's poet finds art in real organisms. Coleridge's notion of language as a result of conversation between the land and its inhabitants assumes a pre-lingual form of communication between the land and its inhabitants. Using prosopopoeia and personification, Clare chooses to represent a reciprocal exchange between the land and its inhabitants that is oral, linguistic, aesthetic, and affective. What I have been calling Clare's local ethic may also be understood as an aesthetic, and it answers to a documentary, historical impulse. It seeks to represent a specific locus and to do so by recording the oral and aural interactions of its inhabitants.

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[111] Clare writes "how natural" all of Thomson's descriptions are in *Winter*: "nature was consulted in all of them" (*NHP* 201). In the "Essay on Landscape," Clare praises the English landscape painter Peter De Wint; for his works are "the very copys of nature" (*Prose* 211). In this same essay, he criticizes the "trickery" of some nineteenth century landscape artists, who introduce false and unrealistic topographical details into their works: "arts penality is a beautiful vagary a vision of romance" (*Prose* 211).

Clare draws our attention to the landscape and its non-human inhabitants because it draws his attention—it calls out to him. This conceit, which operates visually and aurally, is vital to his project of empowering both the human and non-human subjects of Helpston. Clare's writings, which serve as records of his hearing, accordingly assert a fundamental association of natural subjects and sounds with the world of human language and letters. Locus and textuality overlap as conceptual categories in his poetics, but an important distinction exists. Clare assigns to nature a plethora of verbs of active communication. Nature, according to his portrayals, also teaches and sermonizes—two activities that contribute to his notion of taste. One formulation of his association between nature and text is the "book of nature," a phrase that appears in Clare's sixth natural history letter. This phrase's ambiguity (is nature a book itself? is there a book written by nature?) underscores his conceptual approach to poetry, which prioritizes the non-human world and seeks to access and understand it in terms of human language. The nest-poem analogy cited earlier illustrates Clare's local ethic of composition; it also emphasizes the distinctly Clarean notion that non-human inhabitants create cultural artifacts worthy of attention and the corollary notion that fellow human inhabitants notice and evaluate those works of art. Clare empowers his own poetic persona and voice by assigning to it the very specific roles of witness, amanuensis, and sponsor. His portrayal of the literate and aesthetic motives and powers of the natural world authorize diverse subjects, including the voiceless birds, animals, plants, and places of Helpston as well as the peasant poet (or any other man of taste).

Nature's visual appearances, sounds, and other phenomena captivate Clare, popping up into his field of sensory experience and demanding notice. In a prose passage transcribed by William Knight sometime in the mid to late 1840s, Clare writes: "The dewdrops on every blade of grass are so much like silver drops that I am obliged to stoop down as I walk to see if they are

pearls" (*NHP* 342). One gains the sense that the speaker rather wants to be tricked by nature's spells. Clare heeds nature in the sense that meaningful and valuable signs (imagined as non-verbal sounds or verbal utterances) in the landscape routinely catch his attention and prompt him to jot down a prose memorandum, which he then versifies. This compositional sequence repeats throughout his 1824-5 journal notes and the many fragments in his later prose manuscripts. Grainger draws attention to this pattern, frequently highlighting prose passages that serve as a basis for poetic fragments and drafts.

The rapt speaker of the "Dewdrops" passage above continues the jewel metaphor[112] and even performs a small experiment: "and those [dewdrops] sprinkled on the Ivy woven beds of Primroses underneath the hazels, white thorns and maples are so like gold beads that I stooped down to feel if they were hard but they melted from my finger" (*NHP* 342). Clare's response to this image or sign is interactive and interpretive. In this passage, the man of taste models curiosity and contact. Both render Clare's bottom-up aesthetic, in which value is discovered, mystified or clarified, and documented in trifles of nature.[113]

This rapt character—the man of taste—appears in Clare's earliest writing. In a poem entitled "A Ramble," written when he was only 12 or 13 years old, Clare portrays the exchange of meanings that occur between a morning landscape and a person walking in it. This exchange

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[112] Clare occasionally describes colors and appearances in nature (flowers, sunlight, etc.) in terms of gold, silver, or other precious metals or minerals. "And where the dew lies on the Primroses the violets and white thorn leaves they are emerald and berryl yet nothing more than the dews of the morning on the budding leaves nay the road grasses are cover'd with gold and silver beads and the further we go the brighter they seem to shine like solid gold and silver—It is nothing more than the suns light and shade upon them in the dewy morning—every thorn point and every bramble spear has its trembling ornament till the wind gets a little brisker and then all is shaken off and all the shining jewelry passes away into a common spring morning full of budding leaves Primroses Violets Vernal Speedwell Blue Bell and Orchis—and common place objects—" ("Dewdrops," *NHP* 342). The jewel image is rather conventional, though in one poem, he speaks of "earth's diadems" ("Spring," Oxford Major Works, p. 357, line 21). This portrayal of nature as precious and royal elevates it and subverts the subject-object hierarchy between man and nature. Note, though, how Clare is careful to point out throughout this passage how the jewelry effect is "nothing more than the suns light and shade upon them in the dewy morning." He pays tribute to the optical effect while explaining its construction in pragmatic terms.

[113] "Trifles may illustrate great mysterys without derogating any thing from their grandeur. . . . Little things lead to great discoverys" (Peterborough MS 7, qtd. in Grainger, *John Clare Collector of Ballads* 1).

represents an abstract form of conversation, in which vision is particularly privileged as a means of contact. The speaker asks:

> O who that lives as free to mark the charms
> Of nature's earliest dress, far from the smoke
> And cheerless bustle of the city's strife,
> To breathe the cool sweet air, mark the blue sky
> And all the nameless beauties limning morn
> So beautifully touches, who when free
> By drowsy slumbers e'er would be detained,
> Snoring supinely o'er their idle dreams,
> Would lie to lose a charm so charming now
> As is the early morn— (11-20)

Certain watchwords throughout the poem emphasize the vision and interpretation involved in nature observation: *mark*, *trace*, *muse*, *ramble*, *tread*, *peep*, *hie*, and *witness*. The dress and charms of nature act as a sort of text subject to the rambler's interpretation; his active encounter with this beautiful morning scene is contrasted with the supine ignorance (or non-reading) of the slumberer. This early poem lays down the groundwork for a lifelong distinction in Clare's poetics between the man of taste who loves wild nature and the churlish rustic who prefers expedience (or the tyrant who implements enclosures and gravel-lined garden paths). Both stances presuppose a notion of nature as a text, susceptible to control and analysis. "Tracing the dewy plains," the rambler and his dog inscribe a "nooked track wild wound" onto the landscape. Their morning ramble marks onto the land a visual record or text of their activity, as the morning impresses beauty upon them. In this detail, Clare repeats the motif of a reciprocal conversation between subjects in nature. Though this specific instance is not an oral exchange, a mutual cross-inscription does occur, exposing the underlying conditions of communication between subjects in nature.

The speaker's primary message is one of wonder and captivation; he temporarily stops to consider these impressions and register his curiosity:

> I cannot think it how the reason is
> That every trifle nature's bosom wears
> Should seem so lovely and appear so sweet
> And charm so much my soul while heedless passenger
> Soodles me by, an animated post,
> And ne'er so much as turns his head to look
> But stalks along as though his eyes were blinded
> And as if the witching face of nature
> Held but now a dark unmeaning blank. (33-41)

The primary distinction between this "animated post" and the "heedless passenger" lies in the degree to which each perceives meaning (visual, legible) in nature. The speaker's reference to the witchcraft of nature establishes a sense of mystery. He is, in a sense, illiterate in nature's forms yet captivated by them all the same. The passenger, however, does not sense the mystery; his visual perception is blocked. The scene presents a sequence similar to that of SLD: the speaker's physical perception of a specific place stimulates other cognitive modes that relate to language and communication (in this case, feeling, thought, memory, and interrogation). Though the speaker does not mimic a specific sound from this scene, he does utilize repetition as a means of recreating the presence of nature. Thus, he turns back to that open signifier—nature's "charm"—in the final stanza, and he loads this stanza with ear-catching elisions, alliterations, rhythmic repetitions, and sibilance to convey the effects of this charm.

The speaker changes tone and direction in this final stanza with an apostrophe. He addresses "Taste," the abstract collaborative force responsible for this captivation:

> O Taste, thou charm
> That so endears and nature makes so lovely,
> Nameless enthusiastic ardour thine,
> That 'wildered 'witching rapture 'quisitive,
> Stooping bent, genius o'er each object—thine
> That longing pausing wishing that cannot pass
> Uncomprehended things without a sigh
> For wisdom to unseal the hidden cause—
> That 'ankering gaze is thine that fainly would
> Turn the blue blinders of the heavens aside

To see what gods are doing. (42-52)

Nature and taste cooperate in captivating the speaker. Or, more specifically, nature makes the charm of taste lovely. It is hard to say which is prior—the charm of taste or nature. Clare's chiastic formation is peculiar and calls this relation into question. The poem's speaker is keen to point out the namelessness of things: the "nameless beauties limning morn" of line 15 and the "[n]ameless enthusiastic ardour" which belongs to taste yet also happens to the young rambler. Nature challenges him to a naming game. As he stoops "bent, genius o'er each object," he reads and interprets. The call to gaze is explained as a matter of mystery—though Clare elsewhere reads the landscape with no particular zeal to uncover mysteries. But in this poem, nature is portrayed as an illusory performance staged by gods; perhaps if the speaker watches nature closely enough, he can discover "the hidden cause." The fact that taste (not the intellect, or scientific or logical inquiry) instigates his wonder and exploration is noteworthy. Although the passage mimics a mental frenzy, the speaker carefully attributes the possessive pronoun "thine" to taste, the operative force in this morning ramble. The confusion established earlier by the chiasmus—"O Taste, thou charm / That so endears and nature makes so lovely"—is augmented by the speaker's insistence upon the namelessness and mystery of natural beauty. The speaker's minute examination of specific objects and simultaneous rapture and bewilderment suggests an emotional and pleasurable basis for inquiry and knowledge.

In "A Ramble," nature is figured as a visual text, a puzzle to be solved.[114] It presents one particular version of the "book of nature" trope: nature as a game or puzzle. Clare presents other versions of this trope, in which nature functions as: a phatic or social text, an educational text, a

[114] The representation of nature as a puzzle, whose physical features represent clues, signals an older cosmology according to which the "music of the spheres" demonstrates ontological truth. According to this cosmology, earthly nature partakes of this celestial divinity. Clare wrote this poem before the enclosure of Helpston and his consequent conceptualization of Helpston as a fallen Eden.

religious or theological text, an aesthetic text, a visual text, or a song or rhyme. This trope, and its regular appearance throughout Clare's work, illustrates the cooperation and interchangeability of sight and hearing as modes of communication. It also helps to portray Clare's conceit of the poet-rambler, who reads or listens to the voice of nature and assiduously documents it.

Clare demonstrates a strong identification with Helpston and its surroundings, even a defensive and territorial one, in his 1824 journal note about a "New vol of provincial poems by a neighboring poet." He is not impressed with "Bantum's 'Excursions of Fancy,'" which fails to exhibit his poetic taste:

> & poor fancys I find them there is not a new thought in them four years ago a poet was not to be heard of within [del. fifty miles] a century of Helpstone & now there is a swarm—'Roses Early Muse' 'Wilkinsons Percy' both of Peterboro—'Messings Rural Walks' of Exton—'Adcocks Cottage Poems' of Oakham—'Bantums Exercursions of fancy' of Teigh 'Strattons Poems'—of Abbots Ripton &c &c &c all of a kin wanting in natural images &c (*NHP* 192-3)

Besides a premium upon original imagery and phrasing, Clare applies his ultimate criterion: the quality of natural images. These poets misrepresent their locales because they fail to include accurate images of visual and aural sense experience. They do not display local embeddedness, nor do their poems include sonic or visual evidence of dwelling. Clare groups the lot of poetasters together as a "swarm" of pests—thus he identifies their role within the linguistic ecosystem of Northampstonshire and Cambridgeshire. Though their poetry fails, they are nonetheless assimilated into the ongoing relation between land and language. The fact that Clare lists the volumes' titles (and authors' surnames) alongside the village of origin underscores his sense that a poet and his work are products of the place they come from.

Just as a variety of organisms and plants carry special significance in Clare's poetic vision, so do the specific locations in which these dwell. The two are inseparable according to his experience. Clare carefully observes human inhabitants and their dwellings, including their

sounds (stories, songs, rumors) and their activities. Upon leaving Helpston, Clare highlights the connections between the place and its yearly events:

> There are some things that I shall regret leaving & some journeys that I shall make yearly—to see the flood at Lolham Briggs—to gather primroses in hilly wood & hunt the nightingales nest in royce wood & go to see the furze in flower on Emmonsails heath (*NHP* 318)

These human activities are so meaningful and regular that Clare writes several poems about them.[115] Beyond memorializing them in verse, he commits here to continue observing these customs despite his removal in 1832 to Northborough—to partake of, and maintain, the connection between Helpston and its inhabitants. Once an organism is removed from its [original] environment and placed in a new one, its habits can change. Clare's writings during the period of his "flitting" demonstrate his awareness of this reality and his conscious refusal of the effects of this change. His sense of alienation and emptiness upon moving three miles away from home is assuaged by his willful commitment to continue observing his Helpston habits. He has inherited the idea of Helpston, though he has lost its presence.

Clare's Dislocation from Helpston: Figurative Sounds and One Stark Literal Example

In the spring of 1832, Clare moved his family out of his lifelong home of Helpstone to Northborough, a village a few miles northeast. Grainger calls this period one of "dislocated sensibility" (*NHP* 310). In a letter to Taylor, Clare leans especially on personification to express the rupture:

> the very molehills on the heath & the old trees in the hedges seem bidding me farewell . . . although my flitting is not above three miles off—there is neither wood nor heath furze bush molehill or oak tree about it & a Nightingale never reaches as far in her summer excursions (*NHP* 310)

[115] "The Last of March Written at Lolham Brigs," "The Flood," "In Hilly Wood," "The Primrose Bank," "Emmonsails Heath in Winter" and "The Greenwood Side."

Going beyond the simple notation of actual perceived sound, Clare ascribes locution to the molehills and trees of Helpston, which are his lifelong companions. Clare personifies these subjects in the act of communication, though he qualifies this prosopopoeic figure ("seem").

Clare's figurative emphasis upon a speaking nature indicates several elements of his poetics. In a poetics of documentation, which seeks to produce a record, voice and speech are useful tools. The figure of prosopopoeia enables several kinds of record to exist. First, it imbues the non-human subject with intention, affect, and agency. It introduces the existence of another voice and subjectivity. Thus, it records, by synecdoche, the life of another subject. Secondly, Clare's figure of a speaking nature provides a linguistic record that is also poetic. Thirdly, Clare's use of prosopopoeia creates a record of conversation between local subjects. And lastly, this figure records the aurality of the poet (as well as his orality, as mouthpiece).

Many subjects are made to speak via metaphor—but Clare is also invested in establishing the effect or impression of an ongoing conversation with these subjects, whom he portrays as individual entities. The figure of prosopopoeia, as Paul de Man describes it, extends beyond the personification of imaginary, dead, or absent entities to present the fiction of linguistic dialogue. This dialogue includes "the fiction of an apostrophe to an absent, deceased, or voiceless entity" and it "posits the possibility of the latter's reply and confers upon it the power of speech" (de Man 926). Apostrophe need not address an imaginary, dead, or absent entity, as modern use has handled it. Birds, animals, and plants can hardly be described as abstract, dead or absent—but de Man's use of the word "voiceless" does describe the traditional notion of a human/non-human split and the role that linguistic voice plays in this split. Unpacking the etymon *prosopon* ('mask or face'), de Man aligns the speaking voice with the face: "Voice assumes mouth, eye and finally face, a chain that is manifest in the etymology of the trope's name, *prosopon poien*, to confer a

mask or a face (*prosopon*)" (926). De Man reads Wordsworth's (and Milton's) use of prosopopoeia as a trope of autobiography by which one's name is made intelligible and memorable as a face; the speaker who addresses the abstract entity is thus made more concrete. In conferring voice and subjectivity to the "living objects" (NHP 47) that surround him, Clare implies his own addresses as well as the possibility of a sort of conversation with these objects. The potential for mutual linguistic exchange in prosopopoeia, and more importantly in Clare's notion of a reciprocal exchange with the "living objects" of Helpston, enhances his voice and the presence of his poetic self and it enhances the voices of the voiceless in nature. The figure, and its use by Clare, suggests the mutually reflexive power of language and voice. Though his human speakers experience one aspect of this relationship, they often attempt to demonstrate the other end of this bond and speculate about nature's audition of human voices. Indeed, Clare's richly onomatopoeic poem "The Progress of Rhyme" showcases the speaker's attempts to "str[i]ng the lyre," sing to nature, and his eager hope that "beauty's self might turn its eye / Of praise" upon him (71).

Richard A. Lanham extends the figure of prosopopoiea to animals, and accounts for the mutual linguistic exchange it entails: "An animal or an inanimate object is represented as having human attributes and addressed or made to speak as if it were human" (83). There is a strong sense throughout literary definitions that prosopopoeia is simply a version of personification, though Clare's attribution of voice and language to Helpston's plants, animals, birds, and lands cannot be patly categorized as anthropomorphosis. He employs this device in some poems (e.g., "The Sand Martin" refers to the bird as a "hermit"), but he often limits full personification with words like *seem* (e.g., the Northborough nightingale in "The Flitting" seems as lost as the speaker feels). In suggesting anthropomorphosis and then calling it into question, Clare

demonstrates awareness of his own subjective capacity and he pushes against the illusion of personification while he demonstrates its allure. In other poems and prose notes, Clare is content to represent the sounds of nature without attributing human characteristics. Clare's ambivalent approach to personification is savvy. By calling attention to its allure, he demonstrates the human urge for mutual communication and understanding. Using it in his poems, he portrays how aural and oral exchange can empower subjects and give proof of their existence. However, his acceptance of its fictionality also serves him well. The fiction of anthropomorphosis is more useful to him because he has more control over its operation; as a fiction, personification need not adhere to any rules.

At issue here is the question whether language and communication are exclusively human attributes. Clare challenges this assumption. Thus, some of the instances of prosopopoeia cannot be called personification, properly. Clare does not always personify organisms; some of his instances of prosopopoeia refrain from humanizing natural objects and projecting particular emotions onto them. According to Jonathan Culler, apostrophe (and we can infer by extension, prosopopoeia) implies "animicity" (62). In "The Lament of Swordy Well," perhaps the strongest instance of prosopopoeia in Clare's corpus, an enclosed village common once known for its grassy sward repeats the fact that it is not a man. Before this disavowal, it claims its name and identity otherwise: "I'm Swordy Well, a piece of land." This poem demonstrates how Clare neutralizes the attribution of voice so that it need not convey human traits. Swordy Well's other statements assign it subjectivity and animicity, though enclosure seems to have compromised its agency (e.g., it vociferously rejects parish relief). But more importantly, Swordy Well's "petition," its "song," asserts its name as well as its sense of its natural rights[116] and its "room to

[116] Particularly its right of ownership. Judith Abrams Plotz, in a paper she gave for the John Clare Society panel at the 2013 MLA Convention in Boston, MA, mentioned how Swordy Well repeats the word *own* nine times, claiming

speak" (163, 43, 44). In these special instances of prosopopoeia, Clare figures organisms with voice and a shared understanding that operates mutually between humans, animals, insects, plants, etc. This volley of communicative exchange, which is rendered concretely in some poems (e.g., Lubin's exchange with the birds in "The Village Minstrel") and figuratively in many others, is a common platform between the subjects of nature in Clare's poetic vision. His emphasis is not so much upon the humanness of speech, but the trans-subjective power of aurality and orality.

Clare's figurative treatment of natural entities allows him to convey a sense of the conversation and reciprocity he experiences with Helpston. Personification, prosopopoeia, apostrophe, onomatopoeia, and aurality also serve a cognitive function for Clare, who perceives his dislocation from Helpston in terms of confusion and loss. His writings during this period indicate the extent to which his figurative habit of personifying or animating familiar organisms and inanimate objects serves his personal experience, sense of familiarity, and knowledge of a place. Personification is part of his interpretive and hermeneutic schema. When his physical connection to Helpston was disrupted by the family move, Clare applied an anthropomorphic schema to his new environment at Northborough. In "The Flitting," a poem written around the same time of his removal to Northborough, Clare projects his emotional state onto a [fictionalized] nightingale: "But like to me she seems at loss / For royce wood & its shielding bough" (27-8). The tool of personification enables Clare to identify and express his own emotional state, which is relative to his perception of the bird. As his note to Taylor attests, Clare is surprised to see a nightingale in Northborough, and he attaches his surprise and confusion to

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a Lockeian right of property (of itself). David Simpson argues similarly in his 2003 essay "A Speaking Place: The Matter of Genre in *The Lament of Swordy Well*." Plotz also spoke of Christopher Stone's notion of a "rights creep" by which one right's acknowledgment leads to others'. Plotz argued that Swordy Well "edges toward personhood" as a "morally considerable" subject, though she distinguished personhood from humanness.

the bird. The speaker displays his personificational way of understanding things in stanza 12, when he states: "Strange scenes mere shadows are to me / Vague unpersonifying things."

"The Flitting," because it deals with deracination, offers useful examples of the reciprocal and mutually affecting relation between humans and nature. It mourns the loss (or change) of several modes of contact, including locus, hearing, walking, emotion, and [poetic] reproduction. The speaker feels estranged from summer ("I pause and hardly know her face"); the heath with its yellow furze, molehills and rabbit tracks; and the "spots" which his "heart esteems." Even his chair "seems to feel itself from home." First, then, the loss is spatial; it is a dislocation from a native spot and its features. John Barrell, in his discussion of Clare's local writing notes the complexity of place attachment (*Idea of Landscape* 166). In "Emmonsails Heath in Winter," for instance, each place

> exists as a manifold of things seen, heard, smelled, and for Clare each thing exists only as foreground; he does not detach himself from the landscape as Cowper does, or post himself on a 'commanding height', but describes only what is immediately around him. The attempt, then, is not so much to describe a landscape, or even to *describe* each place, as to suggest what it is like to be in each place. (Barrell, *Idea of Landscape* 166)

Weiner argues that Clare's effort to represent what it is like to be in a place conforms to a Romantic aesthetics of representation, which according to Carol Christ, uses imagery to emphasize experience over ideas (375). Clare's uprooting from Helpston is a manifold uprooting. There is an aural aspect of this uprooting. He misses "the very crow" that "croaked music in" his "native fields." He does hear other birds, however:

> I hear bird music here and there
> From awthorn hedge and orchard come
> I hear but all is strange and new
> —I sat on my old bench in June
> The sailing puddocks shrill 'peelew'
> Oer royce wood seemd a sweeter tune

I walk adown the narrow lane
The nightingale is singing now
But like to me she seems at loss
For royce wood and its shielding bough
I lean upon the window sill
The trees and summer happy seem
Green sunny green they shine—but still
My heart goes far away to dream (19-32)

The passage includes six references to hearing or sound, including one homonym (*here*). Like personification, hearing is a perceptual and poetic tool that Clare uses to orient himself to an environment.[117] The speaker both hears this new bird music and identifies where it comes from, but this knowledge does not provide pleasure because it is "strange and new."[118] The puddock's "peelew" is sweeter because it comes from Royce wood and perhaps because the speaker has heard that same bird before. There is a sense here that the speaker has formed relationships with individual birds.[119] The speaker encounters nightingale song on his walk "adown the narrow lane" though the bird seems disoriented, as he is. The man projects his personal emotion and topographic sense onto the bird. She longs for Royce wood—a prime nightingale spot near Helpston—as well. The word *seem* appears three times in this excerpt, foregrounding the speaker's perception of the events. The movement of the speaker's heart, which "goes far away to dream," calls the reader's attention to his distance from Helpston and his perambulation in this

[117] Stephanie Kuduk Weiner comments that Clare's poems, whether they feature speakers who can both see and hear an object in nature or speakers who can only hear a bird that is hidden from sight, "celebrate listening as a means of making sense of the world" (382).

[118] Weiner explains that while literary critics tend to attribute Clare's sense of the differences between the Helpston and Northborough nightingales to the psychological dislocation of his move to Northborough, it should also be noted that "natural history writers define expert listening in terms of the capacity to discern differences between particular birds' songs" (387). In 1839, James Rennie accounted for the discernible different "dialects" of birds dwelling even a few miles distant (*Natural History of Birds*). Don Stap has corroborated Rennie's observation, noting that these dialect differences can exist between populations "only a few hundred yards apart" (qtd. in Weiner 387). It is possible, then, that the nightingale which Clare describes in "The Flitting" is based upon a real bird Clare encountered away from Helpston, though Northborough is scarcely wooded, providing little habitat for nightingales.

[119] This is the case for Clare, who writes poems about particular trees, closes, woods, and bridges.

new setting. Like listening and personification, walking is presented as a tool for orientation and understanding.

The speaker of "The Flitting" also experiences a rupture of feeling:

> I dwell on trifles like a child
> I feel as ill becomes a man
> And still my thoughts like weedlings wild
> Grow up to blossom where they can
> They turn to places known so long
> And feel that joy was dwelling there
> So homebred pleasure fills the song
> That has no present joys to heir (57-64)

The dislocation affects the speaker's sense of age and time, as well as his temperament. Despite this fact, his fecund mind produces "thoughts like weedlings wild" that take root "where they can." These plant-thoughts refer back to previous experiences (expressed as locations) by three actions—they *grow*, *turn*, and *feel*. The speaker uses spatial words (*place*, *dwelling*, and *homebred*) to describe their movement. Still, the native "homebred" pleasure previously experienced is not fertile enough to produce offspring (*heirs*) or act in perpetuity. The homonyms "hear" and "here" in line 19 visually correlate with "heir" in line 64 to evoke the reproductive capacity of sound, which is challenged by the speaker's "flitting." The repetition of intergenerational images (*child*, *man*, *grow up*, *heir*) emphasizes the notion of a temporal progression and succession that is spatially bound. In this sense, the move also signals a break in vitality and reproduction. Clare's poetics does not rely upon images of literal procreation. Rather, there is an abstract vitality that manifests between his speakers and their landscapes. Thoughts, feelings, words, stories, and traditions repeat as the result of the speaker's observation of, and participation with, the surrounding environment. Just as the woodman sees mistletoe and recalls an ancient belief in "The Woodman," so the speaker in "The Flitting" encounters a nightingale and recalls Royce Wood.

The robust communicative volley between subjects in Clare's landscapes reproduces language. In "The Flitting," the speaker goes to lengths to preserve the chitchat amongst local friends. In spite of the speaker's dislocation and loss, Clare preserves the conceit that matches nature with text ("my thoughts like weedlings wild"). The speaker demonstrates this conceit again in stanza 16, when molehills, sheep, and "every weed and blossom" speak:

> pasture molehills used to lie
> And talk to me of sunny days
> And then the glad sheep listing bye
> And still in ruminating praise
> Of summer and the pleasant place
> And every weed and blossom too
> Was looking upward in my face
> With friendships welcome 'how do ye do' (121-8)

In addition to aurality and orality, Clare attributes sentiment and cogitation to these natural "friend[s]." His skillful exploitation of verbs (*dwell* and *ruminate*) that signify both action and thought fix the personification. In the above stanza, the five modes of contact between subjects in nature (locus, hearing, walking, feeling, reproducing) can be marked out.[120] "There," where the speaker once lived, is the dominant subject throughout stanza 16.[121] The grammatical subject is a place; the speaker names specific spots ("pasture molehills," "pleasant place") to underscore Helpston as a general locale. The speaker portrays the orality of various natural subjects (molehills, sheep[122], and every weed and blossom) and his own hearing and notation of their communiqués. Walking is not an explicit force in the stanza, though the ambiguous phrase "listing bye" illogically suggests stepping, among other actions. We can infer that the speaker is

[120] These five modes are named on the top of page 129.
[121] The antecedent appears in the beginning of stanza 15.
[122] Clare deftly plays on double meanings throughout this passage, particularly in his choice of the verbs *ruminating* and *listing*. The sheep's ruminating praise is less a literal example of sound. Rumination is generally a silent activity, though the speaker's use of the word *praise* does attribute some illocutionary purpose to the sheep. However, sheep are also ruminants; Clare connects their digestive process of recirculation to their projected affect. The sheep are thus imbued with desire, choice, and aurality, as Clare plays on the multiple meanings of the verb *list*: to desire (v.[1]) and to listen (v.[2], for which Clare is cited in the OED). Interestingly enough, "list v.[3]," now obscure, refers to listing as an enclosing or edging activity. "List, *v.*[1], *v.*[2], *v.*[3]" *OED Online*. June 2013. Oxford UP. 26 July 2013.

walking because he visits with old friends, "every weed and blossom." The speaker mentions and reinforces feeling and sentiment with such words as *sunny*, *glad*, *pleasant*, and *welcome*. Lastly, the chitchat ('how do ye do') between the subjects exemplifies verbal reproduction. Though their talk is primarily phatic, it is consistent. The summery setting also suggests fecundity.

Recording the habitat and sound of particular species is another tool for connecting with a landscape. The period of dislocation in the spring and summer of 1832 illustrates this fact. In one note Clare describes how his boys find birds' nests: "a yellow hammers nest with 5 eggs in it in a goos berry bush" and "a Nightingales nest in the bottom of the orchard hedge with 4 eggs in it" (*NHP* 311). It is as though the Clares cannot settle into their new home until they go bird-nesting. He is pleased to note that though there is only one oak tree in Northborough, this nightingale too has used oak leaves to build her nest.

The same manuscript also includes Clare's account of his attempt to copy out the song of a Northborough nightingale:

> I can sit at my window here & hear the nightingale singing in the orchard & I attempted to take down her notes but they are so varied that every time she starts again after the pauses seems to be something different to what she uttered before & many of her notes are sounds that cannot be written the alphabet having no letters that can syllable the sounds ("Note C," *NHP* 311-2)

Hearing the bird's song must have had a reassuring effect upon Clare amidst his family's upheaval. A familiar sense of bewitching and intractable nature surfaces here; not only is the song difficult to follow, but it is impossible to "syllable the sounds" with human letters.[123] Clare has found another puzzle to work at. Though he has recorded hundreds of other incidents in which he hears bird sounds, nowhere does he attempt to transcribe bird sound—other than a few single or double word notations—as fully as he does in the following manuscript note, "Note D."

[123] Throughout his poetry, Clare stages the difficulty, or inefficacy, of representing experience through human language. This difficulty comprises more than poetic anxiety and aspiration, though Clare certainly reveals his desire for, and frustration with, fame.

It is peculiar that Clare makes a concerted effort (in a series of jotted and disparate notes) to transcribe a nightingale's song only after he leaves Helpston. Documenting this bird's voice provides a way for him to connect to his new setting, by a sort of echolocation. His transcription of the Northborough nightingale's voice also fulfills some of the steps of SLD.[124] Clare first hears this aural incident and then documents the fact of its occurence in "Note C" (cited above). In "Note D," he attempts to transcribe the sound using the Roman alphabet and onomatopoeia. The exact order of these two entries or their relation is uncertain, especially as A58 is not bound. Another possible step in the process of SLD is the personal imitation of the sound—something which can happen vocally or by some other physical means; but there is no evidence in notes C or D that Clare orally echoed the bird's calls or attempted to perform them, except by his prose notation. Another possible step in SLD is the copying of all of, or part of, a sound in the composition of a fresh poetic draft. This does happen. In "The Progress of Rhyme," which is dated anywhere between 1824 and 1832, Clare cites lines of nightingale song, which seem to be taken verbatim from Peterborough manuscript A58.[125] Here is Clare's entire transcription of the Northborough nightingale's song in "Note D":

> Chee chew chee chew chee
> chew—cheer cheer cheer
> chew chew chew chee
> —up cheer up cheer up
> tweet tweet tweet jug jug jug

[124] Cuddy-Keane describes the complexity of identifying distinct sounds from an acoustic waveform: "One of the remarkable complexities of hearing is that, before we can consider the relations among different sound events, we first need to distinguish individual sounds. For although sound can be, and generally is, emitted simultaneously from numerous sound sources in a single environment, the input to the ear is one continuous (though complex) acoustic waveform, which the brain must then decode to *interpret* as separate sounds. Even the perception of a single sound requires us to disentangle the various frequencies in the input wave and to decide which, for example, are harmonics and reverberations of that sound and which are components of other sounds. And this process is increasingly recognized as a complex interdependent blend of passive physiological response and active perception and cognition. . . . The activity of *creating* "percepts" of distinct and separate sounds, as it were to reconstitute the original sound sources, has been variously termed auditory streaming, auditory scene analysis, parsing, and perceptual or auditory grouping" (Cuddy-Keane 388-9).

[125] Weiner takes this for granted, noting that the "passage in 'The Progress of Rhyme' clearly draws on these jottings" (386).

wew wew wew—chur chur
woo it woo it tweet tweet
tweet jug jug jug

tee rew tee rew tee rew—gur
gur—chew rit chew rit—chur-chur chur
chur will-will will-will tweet-em
tweet em jug jug jug jug

grig grig grig chew chew

wevy wit wevy wit
wevy wit—chee-chit
chee-chit chee chit
weewit weewit wee
wit cheer cheer
cheer—pelew
pelew pelew—
bring a jug bring a
jug bring a jug (*NHP* 312)

This compressed transcription reads, looks, and sounds like a poem or song. The effort to represent particular bird sounds in the form of onomatopoeic words—some conventional (*tweet*, *jug*) and some original (*wew*, *chur*)—transforms "Note D" into a literary text and a local, dialect text. Clare's use of short and long dashes, lineation, enjambment, and versification demonstrate his faithful attempt to copy down the bird's warbling. Weiner notes how Clare integrates these jottings into rhymed iambic tetrameter couplets in "The Progress of Rhyme," a fact which causes her to speculate that Clare heard the bird's song in iambs. Though Clare admits in "Note C" that "many of her notes are sounds that cannot be written," he proceeds to form linguistic approximations for her sounds anyway. In so doing, he fulfills what Hugh Bredin describes as the "instinctive desire to fit sounds with things" (558-9). However inadequate this transcription may be in comparison to the tune of the bird (or Clare's audition), this text survives as a human

transcript of a nightingale song. David Rothenberg calls it "the most accurate rendering in words of any bird's voice for nearly a century" (25).

Adam Potkay approaches "The Progress of Rhyme" as a "self-dramatizing" poem that models Clare's "pausing boy" figure (191).[126] In Theocritean fashion, the pausing boy learns rhythm and melody from the birds. Although some of the words and phrases in "Note D" and "The Progress of Rhyme" are suspicious ("Cheer up"? "Bring a jug"? Can the bird really be singing such things one wonders), it does not matter. Human listeners often translate strange information into the familiar. Robert Mugerauer observes this propensity: "if we gain our knowledge of the environment through sensory experience, it is already interpreted and understood by way of language" (paraphrased by Ward 18-9). Clare's speaker in "The Progress of Rhyme" acknowledges his translational role ("I hummed the words again"). Potkay takes this translation as a sign of Clare's cognizance of the interdependence of nature and culture:

> Clare brilliantly suggests the interdependence of nature and culture in human responses to nature and particularly natural music, which is heard first as words or indeed messages—"cheer up!"—and then as radically Other ("stranger witching notes"), meaningless in any conventional sense, but pointing toward a different sense of what meaning is. Clare's lines connect music to the idea, as Andrew Bowie formulates it, "that meaning has to do with pre-conceptual engagements with things, with embodied 'being in a world,' where one acts, feels, etc." (2007: 378). "Music," Bowie continues, "has precisely to do with connections to the world which often cannot be characterised in terms of what we know or in representational terms" (2007: 385-6). (192)

"The Progress of Rhyme" translates the bird's sound signal by distinguishing and overlapping its semantic and phonetic qualities. The fluctuation between conventionally recognizable words and "radically Other" content indicates "a different sense of what meaning is" (Potkay 192). The richness and diversity of meaning conveyed by the phonetic play of the speaker's self-conscious narrative, corresponds with the conversational conceit of Clare's poetics. For Weiner, the

[126] This rapt figure demonstrates the steps of SLD in a brief passage: "While on the meadow bridge the pausing boy / Listens the mellow sounds / And hums in vacant joy" ("Summer Images," 166-8, qtd. in Potkay 191).

transcription in “The Progress of Rhyme” is not merely an instance of accurate imitation, but it reveals the subtle integration of both descriptive and linguistic sounds into a consonant and moving piece of poetic music (388-9). She draws attention to the extensive sound patterning of the poem and its treatment of the bird’s song and its glaring absence from “Note D” (387), a fact which strengthens the argument that SLD is both a documentary and compositional process.

Clare’s record is certainly subjective and mediated through language. Still, he has demonstrated a high degree of objectivity throughout the natural history prose as well as a willingness to refute common wisdom in order to observe phenomena with his own eyes and ears. Though Jonathan Bate praises the nightingale song sequence in “The Progress of Rhyme” as “poetry of the highest order of invention,” he goes on to call it “nonsense that reveals the insufficiency of language to convey the ‘poesy’ that Clare found in the fields” (384-5). Richard Cronin refers to the poem’s failure to “fully assimilate language to birdsong” (139). The concern should not be Clare’s accuracy of recording though, as critics have tended to show, but rather his interest in the bird’s orality in the first place. Onomatopoeia need not have a “straightforward intersection of sound and meaning” (Weiner 384). Eric Robinson and David Fitter, in their edition *John Clare’s Birds*, rightly praise this attempt to capture bird song. His emphasis upon the material value of the orality of other creatures provides balance for the figurative treatment of sound.

For Weiner, these jottings and their presence in “The Progress of Rhyme” exemplify Clare’s appreciation of, and savvy approach to, the “complex transpositions involved in rendering his experience of nature into poetic language” (374). Clare’s poetry, in Weiner’s analysis, extends beyond audition and reportage to include his artful recapitulation of worldly sounds into wordy sounds. In arguing that Clare intentionally alters sounds and introduces new

ones (particularly patterns of consonance), Weiner provides another basis for Clare's poetic agency. Clare's interest in sound, she argues, "pertains to the sound *of* his poems as well as to the sounds he describes *in* them. He recognizes that the relation between these two layers of poetic sound may be oblique, but he would like it to be direct and intimate" (371). She continues: "Clare forges a super-referential idiom that emphasizes the mimetic fidelity of his descriptions even as it foregrounds the 'sound shape of language,' in Roman Jakobson's famous phrase. In doing so, Clare follows a tradition of eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century intellectuals and writers who 'conceived' of poetry as 'able to restore [the] primitive identity of word and world.'"[127] Weiner interprets Clare's attempts to bridge the word-world gap as a positive intensification of this disjunction.

> Onomatopoeia becomes for Clare a model for the power of sound in poetry, generating techniques for blending the sounds of the natural world and those of his own words into a single utterance whose direct appeal to the reader's sense of hearing will partake of the force of the original. Perhaps paradoxically, in seeking to locate and expand the overlap between description and evocation, between imagined sound and the sound of language, Clare discovers a way of handling his own medium that intensifies its particular sensuous appeal. The reward reaped from a process Clare tells us began in imitation is thus a poetics that not only estranges words in the service of capturing non-linguistic sounds but also remakes nature's music according to the musicality not of the nightingale or the thrush but of the poet. (384)

The tradition of identity between word and world correlates with the trope that unites land and textuality. This identity is never stable, though it is endlessly implied and staged. Clare uses both phonetic and semantic properties of words to embody it in "The Progress of Rhyme." The relation seems to exist as much for its intractability as its allure to the "instinctive desire to fit sounds with things" (Bredin 558-9). In her observation that Clare's mature poetics estranges existing human words (in order to capture "non-linguistic" sounds) and remakes "nature's music according to the musicality . . . of the poet," Weiner delineates a chiastic movement between

[127] (Weiner 374-5; Bruns qtd. in Weiner 375).

nature and humans. This chiastic structure partakes of the fundamental notion of reciprocity between subjects in nature. David Attridge attests to the reciprocal effect of onomatopoeia, asserting that what is "important—and pleasurable . . . is the momentary and surprising reciprocal relationship established between phonetic and semantic properties, a mutual reinforcement which intensifies both aspects of language" (1131-2). Onomatopoiea's combination of "intensified referentiality" and aural awareness is a characteristic response associated with the reading of poetry (Attridge 1119).

"The Woodman": Reciprocal Response in the Community of Helpston

In the early natural history prose piece "The Woodman or the Beauties of a Winter Forest," Clare portrays a fictional call and response sequence between a solitary woodman on his early morning forest walk and the "rhymy-feather'd thickets" which "resond in rural melody" (*NHP* 5). Clare then transposes the figure: "On every side the feather'd rhyme lodges on the smallest twig." It is a peculiar description: he never mentions a specific bird. Instead, using synecdoche (*feather*) and metonymy (*rhyme* and *thicket*), Clare indicates the bird's presence by its physical features, sound, and location. He collapses bird, rhyme, and thicket all into one form that echoes the woodman's cheer. Though this early passage is somewhat hackneyed and it summons the picturesque, the call and response between the woodman and the bird is original and fresh. It establishes a special condition about this woodman who "glories in the weather!" (5). He is Clare's "man of taste," a recurring and ambivalent character throughout the prose and poetry. The man of taste differs from other human individuals[128] who fail to notice the pleasures of the outdoors ("in hasty claumping tread finding nothing"). In this passage, Clare points out the shepherd and milk-boy, who both rush through their winter occupations outdoors in order to

[128] The "heedless passenger," "thoughtless clown," or "worldly churl." Sometimes, however, the man of taste represents those organizing, improving forces that Clare comes to loathe, especially after enclosure.

reenter the "sheltering warm confines of the farmyard and Stables." Not so the woodman: "He and he only knows and sees the beauties and horrors of winter mingled together through the short day" (3-4). In his winter rambles, the milk-boy "no longer saunters to the pasture as he had used to do in summer"; he now "shuffl[es] along he makes the frosty plain reecho with his hasty bruzzing[129] foot steps" (4). The sound he creates is perfunctory, unintentional—though it echoes. "But 'tis not so with the woodman no he glories in the weather" (5). Rising early in the dark, he walks over new snow drifts with "'heart felt glee' cheering the rugged way with the oft-repeated scrap of an harmless old song making the rhymy-feathered thickets resond in rural melody" (5). Unlike the milk-boy's, the woodman's creation of sound is intentional and joyful. Clare continues:

> Thus he cheerfully salutes the winter morning till at length he enters the wild forest—Here he brushes along his well known winding pad, and the many intricating turns that lead to its deepest recesses—And then the beauties of wither'd nature 'surround him on every side'
>
> 'Snatch'd in short eddies plays the wither'd leaf'[130]
>
> O'er his head the hugh[131] rugged oaks stretch forth their spreading grains crouching closely together in romantic arches—On every side the feather'd rhyme lodges on the smallest twig and shines in all the variety of forms which Imagination can suggest or the fairy visions of playful fancy picture to his view—the green moss spreads on every stovin[132] nay it flourishes to adorn the bank and decorate the ground—Taught by the Legends of his native village and the ancient tales of his forefeathers, his simple soul is warmly and venerably inspired when he views the beautiful clumps of mizzletoe growing on the leafless branches of the aged thorn—He 'musing on ancient days' is absorb'd in reflexion to think in what fond venerable superstition the rural druids held this natural relic of magic antiquity—And if his rustic soul is naturally bred to create and relish a tasteful fondness for such like beauties—O' then his curious mind imbibes a fondness for every thing around him—(*NHP* 5-6)

In the description of the woodman, Clare introduces literary allusions; some of which are unknown. The Thomson reference demonstrates that Clare is attempting to write within a

[129] bruising or battering (*NHP* 367).
[130] Thomson, *The Seasons*, Winter l. 130
[131] huge
[132] tree stump (*NHP* 372).

poetic/pastoral tradition. Clare personifies the oak trees, which arch around the man. Moving downward, the speaker re-introduces the birds, which also frame the woodman. In the phrase "feather'd rhyme lodges on the smallest twig" Clare pays particular attention to the bird's physical location, where it "shines" for the woodman's observation and fancies. What begins as a physical interchange between the woodman and his environment becomes abstract; the bird now triggers the woodman's imagination or "fairy visions of playful fancy" (5). The speaker continues to describe the adjacent scenery, which includes green moss, a tree stump, and a riverbank. In assembling this portrait of rural simplicity and taste, Clare cannot resist inserting some history. He refers to the oral history of the woodman's village and to ancient tales, as well as a druid folk belief about mistletoe. The woodman's mind and habits are formed by (and suited for) his environment, which has not changed. His cultural habits—transmitted by native "Legends," "ancient tales," and "venerable superstitions"—seem to be an outgrowth of the very place. The speaker states that the woodman's "rustic soul is naturally bred to create and relish a tasteful fondness for such like beauties" (6). This piece depicts how the woodman's activity and orality in this familiar and storied place triggers a chain of associations that reveal his historical and organic connection to the landscape.

The speaker refines this portrait of rural taste when the woodman lunches:

> [H]e lays down his mittens to seek for the old harden-wallets which contain his scanty score lying against the moss-clad bottom of some sheltering tree—There he no sooner sits him down But the little robin his daily companion and welcome visitor comes fluttering from among the loose leaves and perching close by his side seems earnestly to watch the falling crumbs which his feeling heart never fails to bestow—Well done! honest woodman—thy charity towards this innocent little creature shall be rewarded—thy fellow-workmen shall applaud the worthy deed—and every heart rejoice (*NHP* 8)

The speaker highlights a sense of community and charity between the bird and the woodman, mentioning the word *heart* twice. Words and phrases like *scanty*, *sheltering*, *earnestly*, *feeling*,

honest, *innocent*, *rewarded*, *worthy deed*, and *rejoice* add a moral tone to the passage. The relationship between the man and the landscape is rendered in terms of beauty; and the relation between the man and the robin is rendered in moral terms. Both of these binding principles (beauty and morality) serve to uphold Clare's notion of taste, which radiates throughout this scene. In a later poem, "The Lament of Swordy Well," Clare sardonically invokes the notion of parish charity. But in this early piece, the sense of a reciprocating community of subjects is earnest. Whereas Swordy Well is entirely isolated, without contacts or friends ("Save one and he's away"), the robin eats, the woodman's charity is rewarded, the workmen applaud, and every heart rejoices.

After portraying this shared repast and praising this tiny act of communal charity, the narrator quotes some verses of poetry from an unknown source.[133] This technique appeared earlier in the "The Woodman" when the narrator incorporated a line from Thomson's *Winter* to describe the fluttering leaves over the woodman's head. In both instances, when sentiment overflows, the speaker launches into allusion. These poetical interpolations situate Clare within a literary tradition and demonstrate his acumen. The admixture of prose and verse demonstrate a readiness to move between modes of description. This flexibility of form demonstrates Clare's dedication to transcribing nature's messages and to calibrating his tools of notation. But more importantly, this interpolative technique—demonstrated, in one form or another, by the woodman's song, the "resonding" bird in the thicket, the speaker's quotations, and even the milk-boy's bruzzing footsteps—enables Clare to depict the variety of voices and sounds within a physical community, the sounds in the speaker's head, and those literary passages of sound which are conceptually related to that community.

[133] The unsourced passages may very well be Clare's own.

The interpolated passage continues the piece's underlying contrast between sentience and crude ignorance. Every heart rejoices—

> 'All but his ruthless soul whose gun destroys
> 'For these rough clowns long pains shall on them wait
> 'And freezing want avenge its hapless fate
> 'For these fell murders may they change their kind
> 'In outward form as savage as in mind
> 'To be a bear of pythagorian name
> 'From man distinguish'd by the hideous frame! (*NHP* 8)

I spoke earlier of a reciprocal community of subjects that actively cooperates and communicates. To launch invective against a criminal element of this community, Clare utilizes the above verses. Their lineation, rhymed couplets, and appearance support this attack. They offer speed, rhythm, sound repetition, a sense of momentum, as well as the weight (if feigned) of perceived literary tradition and authority. In describing huntsmen as murderers with ruthless souls and savage minds, Clare launches an ideological attack on hunting for sport. But more importantly, he asserts the rights of animals. Just as the "fellow-workmen" applaud their mate's charity, so shall the public acknowledge the clown's destructive behaviors. For punishment, Clare sentences this crude peasant to isolation from the community. He describes this isolation in terms of physical difference: "may they change their kind."

In fact, Clare demarcates the moral boundary of this community in terms of physical appearance. He utilizes a rhetoric of outward versus inward (or mental) form; the clown suffers from a mismatch of the two. He invokes the notions of savagery and similarity in his effort to bolster this community's moralizing standard of taste; when the clown's outward form is as savage as his mind, justice will prevail. The line "All but his ruthless soul whose gun destroys" adds a spiritual aspect to this moral outrage and it uses synecdoche ("soul") to attribute explosive violence to the clown. The form of punishment he suggests is peculiarly corporeal: these

murderers of birds and beasts will be "[f]rom man distinguish'd by the hideous frame!" In this seemingly innocent pastoral piece, Clare politicizes the rights of hunted animals and aligns this view with a communal moral majority. Though the passage does not name specific standards of taste, the woodman's "feeling heart" which "is naturally bred" for fondness of nature (and aversion to violence) plays a part in this communal taste.

After this verse invective, the speaker returns to his former sentimental tone and even inserts himself into the passage at line 110:

> But to thee!—honest woodman—may health shed her soothing balm in abundance round thy feeling heart! and enable thee to perform thy daily labour with cheerfulness and Joy.—I as a brother rustic always had a fondness for they occupation
>
> 'For from my earliest life I lov'd the shades'
>
> And I would gladly assemble to thy dwelling in the winters evening as a companion to hear the account of thy days Journal minutely repeated—I (tho nothing but a labouring clown) can relish a taste for nature to me the pebly stream in summer flows delightful and the winter with her feather'd rhyme spangles beautifully transparent (*NHP* 8-9)

In calling himself a "brother rustic," the speaker further binds the sense of community established earlier.[134] As testimony to this affiliation, he draws an example from his childhood ("For from my earliest life I lov'd the shades"[135]) and states his readiness to accompany the woodman to his dwelling and "hear" the minute account of his day. He asserts his "taste for nature" in spite of his status as a "labouring clown," and his belief that he can satisfy this taste by listening to the woodman's "Journal." By this suggestion, the speaker's listening becomes a substitute for the woodman's experience outdoors. Here Clare exemplifies a basic tenet of his

[134] In "The Wood-Cutters Night Song," another early composition, Clare presents a community linked by its sounds. The wood-cutter voices pain at having to leave the "pretty song" of the "Little Birds" that accompany his toil. He enjoins the birds to voluntary silence on the basis of communal charity and reciprocity: "So fare-ye-well and hold your tongues / Sing no more until I come / They're not worthy of your songs / That never cares to drop a crumb" (17-20) (*The Early Poems of John Clare* II.19). This implied silence contrasts with the noise of the wood-cutter's children, which begets further sound: "Little prattlers they begin / Teazing me to talk and Sing" (31-2). This wood-cutter's diurnal activities, whether in the forest or cottage, are characterized by oral exchanges and the personal relations underlying these exchanges.

[135] The childhood anecdote or testimonial is very characteristic of Clare's style.

poetics: linguistic or sonic accounts of nature can serve as proxies for, or representations of, nature. Language (and acoustic communication), according to Clare's poetics, does not alienate humans from nature; on the contrary, it circulates between humans and other subjects in nature.

In his enthusiasm to join the woodman, Clare's speaker proffers historical examples of his ability to "relish a taste for nature." Clare frequently runs down such illustrations, especially in the seasonal order presented here: the "pebly stream in summer" and the "feather'd rhyme" which "spangles" across the winter forest. The repetition of the latter figure of speech ("rhymy-feathered thickets," "feather'd rhyme") unifies the piece, though in this instance the two vehicles which stand for the bird's presence (feathers, sound) are also metonymically substituted for a larger scene: the sparkling winter forest. The repetition of seasonal references, figures of speech, the woodman's "oft-repeated scrap[s] of an harmless old song," and the bird's sounds, along with this metonymic transference from subject to environment, portray a community that is based on a cyclical exchange of sound and listening.

Clare concludes "The Woodman" with another characteristic move: a meditation upon his own effort to make sound and rhyme. He describes a potential compositional sequence that is somehow thwarted:

> And oft while gazing wistfully on its beauties
>
> > 'Strong gusts of thought would rise . . .
> > '…and rude ideas strove
> > 'Awhile for vent but found it not and died (*NHP* 9)

What might become song originates during the habitual activity of relishing nature's beauties. As with the woodman's, the speaker's impetus for verbal expression is external and it comes as the result of activity outdoors. The discontinuation of composition is also externalized. The fire fails to light; the conditions for writing are not present and the gust of inspiration dissipates. The

choice of fire and wind as images for poetry is conventional.[136] The trope imparts a sense of volatility to the speaker's own ability to communicate, which contrasts with the robust, cyclical exchange of sound and listening in this community. It also endows his expression with a fiery violence that can potentially (if figuratively) destroy this wintry scene. The sense of failure conveyed by these images establishes a certain irony in connection with the woody scene. The speaker's professed failure to combust figuratively protects this woodland, and yet he has produced a linguistic record of this scene and its beauties (i.e., "The Woodman"). Overlooking this record of his orality, the speaker calls his own voice into question in a meditation upon poetic composition. This detail illustrates a comfort with aurality and observation, as poetic frames, and a sense of unease with personal orality. Another prose passage examined earlier ("Note A," Peterborough MS 6) established aurality as an aesthetic criterion of a community's way of life. "The Woodman" compliments that vocational village portrait (of the singing ploughboy) by dramatizing and celebrating orality as a basis of communal exchange.

Human Orality and Three Strategies for Reciprocity

Because there are so many instances of listening and the recorded sounds of nature throughout Clare's prose and poetry, the occasional moments that portray human orality are remarkable. The shy and respectful listener finally emits a playful rejoinder. These moments attest to the reciprocal relationship between the poet and other subjects in nature. There are a few literal examples in which Clare talks [back] to nature; and there are figurative examples in many of his poems.

A literal example of human orality can be found in a manuscript note on "Batts," in which Clare narrates: "we usd to pull off our hats when boys & keep bawling out 'Bat bat come

[136] Clare utilizes these tropes in another early poem about poetic inspiration and composition, "Dawnings of Genius," which I analyze in Chapter Four.

under my hat & I give you a slice of bacon'" (*NHP* 97). This note demonstrates the youthful fancy of the boys' speech, which is valorized as part of Clare's aesthetic.

In one journal entry Clare describes how he uses his voice to protect himself from an angry vixen:

> Met with an extrodinary incident to day while Walking in Open wood to hunt a Nightingales nest—I popt unawares on an old Fox & her four young Cubs that were playing about she saw me & instantly approached towards me growling like an angry dog I had no stick & tryd all I could to fright her by imitating the bark of a fox hound which only irritated her more & if I had not retreated a few paces back she woud have seized me when I set up an haloo she started (*NHP* 239)

The passage describes two different effects produced by Clare's orality. His imitation of a foxhound's bark provokes the vixen, but when he vocalizes the human word *haloo* he shocks her. Versions of this scene find their way into other prose notes, "March" from *The Shepherd's Calendar*, and the sonnet "The Vixen." This instance of oral exchange shows the dangerous side of reciprocal relations in a given environment.

In a draft poem from Peterborough MS B9, Clare provides another example of human orality. Passers-by talk to herons, which build their nests in "rookerys like crows" (*NHP* 154):

> The passer bye oft stops his horse to look
> To see strange birds sit building like the rook
> & every stranger ere he passes bye
> Will stop & hollow *shoo* to see them flye
> They swee about the trees a flopping bird
> They bring their sticks nor fear the noisey clown
> & load the trees till nearly broken down (emphasis added, *NHP* 154)

Clare's repetition of the words *pass*, *stop*, and *strange* apply to the multiple human and non-human parties in this scene, unifying the horseman, his horse, the strange herons, and the human strangers in an anonymous exchange of recognition, activity, and response. Vision and [halted] motion are emphasized alongside the strangers' ineffectual "shoo[s]." The temporary flurry

provoked by their utterances[137] creates a sense of perspective about the [limited] impact of human orality in the external environment.

In the long poem "Childhood," there are several examples in which human subjects talk and sing to subjects in nature. "Childhood" reminisces about the various activities and memories of the speaker's youth, including singing to snails, ladybugs, and beetles. Such childhood sport plays a role in Clare's developing poetics. It provides a shared history between the boy and his village, neighboring inhabitants, and surrounding environment. Clare frequently represents childhood as an Eden of sorts and he laments the passage of time and its consequent evils. As a remedy for loss, the poem suggests eternity, names, words, poetic language, song, and nature's endless processes.

The point of the boys' game is to provoke a reaction from a creature:

> We often tried to force the snail
> To leave his harvest horn
> By singing that the beggar-man
> Was coming for his corn;
> We thought we forced the ladycow
> To tell the time of day:
> 'Twas one o'clock and two o'clock
> And then she flew away.
>
> We bawled to beetles as they ran
> That their children were all gone,
> Their houses down and door key hid
> Beneath the golden stone;
> They seemed to haste as fast again
> While we shouted as they past
> With mirth half-mad to think our tale
> Had urged their speed so fast. (169-184)[138]

[137] Even the verb (*hollow*) connotes orality, suggesting other vocal verbs like *haloo* and *holler* and exclamations like *haloo* and *hello*.

[138] The nursery rhyme "Ladybird, Ladybird," though it has many variants, includes verses that sound similar to the boys' taunts: "Ladybird, Ladybird flye away home, / Your house is on fire and your children are gone, / All except one, / And her name is Ann, / And she hid under the baking pan." Charles Dack, in *Weather and Folk Lore of Peterborough and District* (1911), observes that: "Children, even now, when they find a Ladybird or cow lady say: [']Click, Clock, Clay. What time o'day. / One o'clock, two o'clock, three o'clock, Click, clock, clay.['] Another custom is to get a ladybird and put it on the back of the hand and say: [']Ladybird, ladybird, fly away home, / Your

In order to provoke response from the snail, ladybug, or beetle, the boys sing nursery rhymes. The examples use ambiguous verbiage that is both aggressive and evasive. This tension emphasizes the physical and imaginary character of their game. The boys try to force the snail to leave its shell and they think that they have forced the ladycow to tell the time—but they are in fact only singing rhymes. In the next stanza, their singing becomes more robust: they "bawled to beetles" and "shouted as they past." The speaker balances this aggression by stressing its uncertain result in line 181: "They seemed to haste." The boys are worked up to such frenzy—"with mirth half-mad"—to think their tale actually "urged" the beetles to run. Though the adult speaker scatters a few qualifying verbs like *seem* and *think*, the children's recreation is not trivialized. Their make-believe sounds like fun. Clare cannily weaves familiar nursery rhymes into the verses' strong rhythmic flow, and consistently alternates between iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter lines. The boys' oral play does not prompt personification by the speaker. Though the boys initiate contact via human language, the subjects' reactions are straightforward and physical: the snail emerges from its shell, the ladybug flies away, and the beetle scurries. Alliteration, anaphora, and kenning provide the reader with aural stimulation and thus create the imaginary experience of the snail, ladybug, and beetle. Perhaps the boys' loud vociferations cause the creatures to react, or perhaps it is their physical presence or gestures. It is hard to say the ladybug recognizes and reacts to a specific folk song. But again, the reciprocity between organisms in the environment—in this case a proposed correspondence—need not function predictably or literally. Something happens between the boys and the snail, the ladybug, and the beetles—that is what Clare's speaker shows. These interactions combine youth, play, oral

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horse is on foot, your children are gone; / All but one, and that's little John, / And he lies under the grindle stone.[']
If it does not fly away then it is thrown up into the air." "Grindle stone" may help explain Clare's use of "golden stone."

tradition, music, locution, listening, reactivity, physical movement, and species observation and identification. The speaker's repetition of the plural pronoun *we* throughout "Childhood" legitimizes these scenes. This is what children do. Such play serves a historical and communal purpose for Clare's work.[139]

The children's fantasy that there exists some sort of communicative correspondence between humans and nature repeats throughout the poem's many stanzas—in so many iterations of play. Their fantasy indirectly produces this correspondence, for it cooperates with their playful oral gambits that provoke the insects. In stanzas 29-30, the boys "bawled the bat to spy / Who in the 'I spy' dusky light / Shrieked loud and flickered by" and they "listened to the laughing brook / And mocked the singing wind" (226-8, 235-6). In stanza 31, the speaker draws a parallel between spelling and outdoor play. The boys creep to school in the morning: "Yet there by pleasure unforsook / In nature's happy moods / The cuts in Fenning's Spelling Book / Made up for fields and woods" (245-8). Nature's happy moods operate within the schoolroom too, as spelling is made to substitute for the outdoor play of fields and woods. Clare develops the parallel between spelling, letters, and nature in "Schoolboys in Winter," when the truant boys watch droves of geese make letters in the sky, and in "Helpstone," which he calls an "unlettered spot."

In the following stanza, these children regard "each noise" as music—another playful gambit:

> Each noise that breathed around us then
> Was magic all and song,
> Wherever pastime found us then
> Joy never led us wrong.

[139] Also, the boys' recitation of the nursery rhyme in accordance with the custom demonstrates their own active participation with a historical text; their very singing (orality) stimulates the imaginary, though it is also caused by it to an extent. Clare's poetics often employs SLD, orality, aurality, prosopopoeia, and other figurative treatments of sound and correspondence to demonstrate the playful potential in listening to and making sound.

> The wild bee in the blossom hung,
> The coy bird's startled call
> To find its home in danger—there
> Was music in them all. (249-256)

The speaker's description of these childhood wonders is nostalgic, sentimental, and endearing. But it is strategic as well. The lines show the aural and spatial nature of play, and they attest to the reciprocity between humans and nature which is so central to Clare's poetry. The magical musical noises are said to breathe; pastime or sport operates spatially; and Joy is personified. Furthermore, the boys' perception of music (in the bee's humming and the bird's cry) ascribes aesthetic value to these natural occurrences, broadening the scope of beauty and pleasure.

The first strategy Clare deploys in order to bolster the reciprocal interaction between environmental subjects is to personify, or rather animate, noise. In this case, each noise breathes. The image of breath or wind is familiar, especially in relation to song or poetry; but Clare does not use breath as a subject. Rather, the verb "to breathe" operates as part of a verbal phrase that modifies "each noise." Clare adds two metaphors ("each noise . . . was magic all and song") to enhance the conceit that noises are alive and breathing.

The second strategy to present reciprocity highlights the connections between human activity and locus. In this case, certain sports require the boys to be somewhere specific. The speaker's personification of pastime—"Wherever pastime found us then"—complicates this somewhat because the verb *to find* operates ambiguously. Either pastime searches the boys out, or it directs them/leads them [to a place]. Both readings underscore a link between sport, locus, and movement.[140] The following line ("Joy never led us wrong") supports the latter reading: joy, a metonym for pastime, leads/directs the boys.

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[140] In "Childhood," spatial words underscore the link between sport and locus: *around*, *wherever*, *found*, *led*, *in*, *find*, *home,* and *there*.

The third strategy to establish man's reciprocal relationship with nature is a re-evaluation of aesthetic standards (experienced as a toppling or reversal). The re-evaluation collaborates with the first two strategies. Under this new banner, sound is alive, sport is a matter of locus, and human activities and states are personified. When one subject interacts with another subject in a specific location, and perceives that other subject as animate, the experience of pleasure and beauty becomes possible. In play, the boys hear music in the sound produced by any living, locatable thing.

In "Poesy," published in *The Shepherd's Calendar*, the speaker portrays his own orality as well as that of flowers and other things. All these voices are inspired by the abstract, yet powerful force of poesy, which distributes equally among all subjects in nature and which partakes of Clarean reciprocity:

> I have been thy lover long
> Soul soothing poesy
> & sung to thee each simple song
> With witching extacy
> Of flowers & things that claimd from thee
> Of life an equal share
> & whispered soft ther tales to me
> Of pleasure & of care (33-40)

In stanzas 1, 3, and 10, the speaker portrays poesy's favorable response to his "weed" of a poem—to his orality. "Twas thou & nature," he writes, "[that] bound & smild / Rude garlands round my brow" (17-8). As he receives praise and consideration from poesy (via Clare's familiar image of a floral bouquet), so he bestows its "sympathising power" upon nature's other subjects, including "the blade of grass the flower the leaf." Just as the speaker sings out loud to his patron poesy, so the non-human subjects talk to him—they who "Companions seem to be / That tell their tales of joy & grief / & think & feel as me" (45-8). Orality travels with the wind in stanza 7 ("A spirit speaks in every wind") and in touching upon all entities, it establishes a mood of

equality. The speaker portrays an egalitarian quality of poesy by personifying her as a fair lover ("O I have been thy lover long / . . . / & sung to thee each simple song / . . . / Of flowers & things that claimd from thee / Of life an equal share"), by using the trope of family ("The simplest weed . . . Smiles on her as a mother" and "Owns sister friends or brother"), and by inserting politically charged language ("To all a beauty gives / While thy impassioned warmth esteems / The meanest thing that lives"). In addition to giving orality and illocutionary content, poesy imbues natural subjects (some inanimate) with emotion, thought, beauty, society, and value. Poesy operates sonically, but it also transforms and invigorates all it touches: "All nature in thy presence lives / With their creative claims / & life to all thy fancy gives / That were but shades & names" (69-72). The speaker is careful to connect this rampant orality to a broader and more inclusive taste. Clare's poem "Poesy," in its insistence upon the creative value of nature's meanest things, utilizes orality to showcase Clare's trifling aesthetic and to empower voiceless subjects. Personification, prosopopoeia, and projection become essential tools in widening the poetic franchise for all subjects.

Clare's Orality

Though several examples exist of ways in which Clare's speakers converse with nature, his personal orality is a complex subject. Aside from his personal journal entries and letters in which he focuses on writing, publication, literary success, and communication (with editors, publishers, patrons, friends, and the public), Clare raises themes throughout his poetry that complicate the way we hear his voice, particularly after 1820. These themes include fame, immortality, eternity, names and naming, poesy, taste, rights, and grammar. Because Clare's poetics documents and gives voice to traditionally voiceless subjects in nature, and because he revisions the topographic and pastoral modes to fit his personal experiences of Helpston and

Northamptonshire, his authorial voice is transferred and delimited. This power-sharing requires the devaluation, to some extent, of the bardic persona. The Clare rhymester dwells and participates within a natural aesthetic and linguistic economy in which sentiments, thoughts, utterances, lessons, and devotions circulate. His poetics depends upon the elision of his own subjectivity in order to broadcast the voices of subjects in nature. This strategy and its attendant problems call for further study. One question to consider is whether power-sharing impairs a poet's voice. Another aspect of this complexity lies in the ironic tension between Clare's intentional disregard for grammar, punctuation, and capitalization and his meticulous notation of nature sounds.

To what extent does Clare project onto nature? Does his poetics load her up with human processes and experiences? How can nature communicate? The response to these concerns is complex because Clare's poetics asserts a fundamental association between nature and textuality, and textuality is subject to human interpretation and control. The prosopopoeias are a feature of his collaborative and cooperative vision of humans and nature; and he portrays such projections as occurring in both directions (from humans to non-humans, and from non-humans to humans). Sometimes the attribution fits, for instance in cases when Clare hears and transcribes specific bird songs or recounts local folktales and lingo. On the other hand, when Clare culls from his favored poets, he seems to be groping towards some ideal union between poetic representation and subjects in nature. Underlying this is his cooperative conviction, expressed in natural history letter three, that the "poetic eye magnifys the pleasure [of nature]" (*NHP* 41). In nostalgic poems particularly, Clare's speakers take poetic license with the "book of nature." His fancy creates and transfers simple sensory experiences to broader poetic subjects. Chapter Four, which addresses the abstract forces of poesy and taste in the Clare canon, will explore how and why Clare aligns

poetry with nature. Again, accuracy is not important. Whether Clare commits affective or pathetic fallacies does not detract from the fact that he models a strong ecological sensibility based on sensory contact. The price or product of his embeddedness is prolixity. His documentary poetics memorializes the orality of natural subjects and presents an intangible yet genuine sort of conversation between human and non-human subjects. It cuts across the nature-culture binary to suggest that non-humans are capable of semiotic exchange, a fact which has since been demonstrated by modern science.

In recounting his aural experiences in nature, Clare's poems demonstrate his collaborative compositional process and his poetic principles. Clare's aesthetic vision is the byproduct of his ongoing participation with his local environment via listening, speaking, seeing, walking, and composing. The exercise and development of his aesthetic vision require that it be staged and contextualized. Clare repeats the scenes of his poetic musing in order to honor those scenes and because they model reciprocal engagement. Their emphasis upon the discovery and documentation of a poetry within nature fortifies Clare's baseline analogy between land and text.

Chapter Three: Walking

> "I found the poems in the fields, / And only wrote them down."
> John Clare, "Sighing for Retirement"

This chapter addresses how Clare relates to his surrounding environment by walking and considers walking's influence on his poetry. So far, I have attempted to demonstrate the vital role that sound plays in Clare's poetics—as a formal device, as a sensory platform for the documentation of non-human subjects, and as a symbol for reciprocity and poetic appreciation. The trope of conversation—the aural/oral economy within Helpston and Clare's poetics—structures meaningful participation between subjects in nature because it admits difference and it unifies. I propose that Clare's walks, and his representation of walking in certain poems and prose accounts, enact a similar participation between Helpston's subjects.[141]

Clare's poetics, and his habit of attributing voice to traditionally voiceless subjects, is a logical outgrowth of his recognition of a community within Helpston. This poetics also models walking as a valid sensory platform for the poet's productive and documentary relationship with Helpston. Walking and movement outdoors serve as physical points of contact between Clare and Helpston. Like listening and talking, they symbolically develop the notion within Clare's poetics of a productive and meaningful reciprocity between humans and their surrounding environments. Much of his poetry is built from his daily experience of footpath walking (Jarvis 160); and mentions of his walks "to both of his kinds of work, on the farms and on the page, are myriad" in his poetry (Blythe, "*Solvitur*" 25). Furthermore, walking (like listening and talking) operates both literally and figuratively in Clare's poetry. The yoking of the physical, concrete,

[141] Scholars have addressed the significance of walking to Clare's poetry, including Jeffrey Robinson, Anne D. Wallace, Donna Landry, John Goodridge, Kelsey Thornton, Robin Jarvis, and Ronald Blythe. I would like to contribute to this critical record by arguing that Clare's walks and the poetic frame of walking facilitate Clare's portrayal of non-human subjects as sentient and vocal. It is through the ambivalent activity of *rambling*—which suggests walking and talking—that Clare portrays an aesthetic economy at work in Helpston.

and sensate with the metaphysical, abstract, affective, aesthetic, and moral is characteristic of Clare's poetics. Exchanges between subjects within the community of Helpston occur along both of these lines.[142]

My goal in this chapter is to show that the activity of walking is similar to aurality and orality in two major ways. First, walking provides a mode of environmental engagement, or a sensory basis for reciprocal interaction between the inhabitants of a specific environment. Secondly, walking provides an effective poetic trope for the documentation of Helpston's subjects. Like aurality and orality, walking constitutes both an ecological mode and a poetic mode. Together, these modes assist communal interaction, knowledge and creation.[143]

As proof of this similarity, it can be noted that Clare's walks are woven into the plots of poems and prose pieces just as his listening experiences are. As listening instigates SLD, so too does walking stimulate composition. In both activities, we have a primary mode of environmental engagement which sets off a secondary mode of creative labor. Both sets of activities facilitate communal interaction and historical documentation, and these results have ecological as well as poetical use and value.

In framing or delineating locations by physical walking, and by representing such walks in what I call walking or rambling poems, Clare demonstrates another aspect of the analogy

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[142] Clare's autobiographical poem "The Village Minstrel" reveals the importance of walking to his poetic sensibility. The early stanzas list numerous examples of the natural discoveries made possible by walking and the subsequent inspiration and musing which occurs. In line 53 the speaker tells us that "Truth breathes the song in Lubin's steps," which open up to him "rural charms," "wild views," and "joyful list'ning." Stanza 14 adapts walking to artistic ends, as "Sequestered nature . . . lead[s]" Lubin "through wood and lonely plain" so that he can mock the thrush's strain and attempt a "rude sonnet" in praise of the primrose. With "Each journey sweeter," Lubin muses "to and fro" as enthusiasm makes "his soul . . . glow."

[143] Walking is a movement, but it is also an experience in which sights and other sensory stimuli go by. Rebecca Solnit observes that these two conditions make things happen in the mind of the walker, but that they also make walking paradoxical—for it is both a means and an end (5-6). My discussion of walking as a mode of environmental and poetic engagement accepts this paradox by stressing the sensory value of walking as well as the documentary record that walks produce.

between land and text.[144] Thus, a physical walk is a text; it is a footed inscription onto the landscape which generates meaning and which can be interpreted. Furthermore, like the sonic texts explored in chapters one and two, Clare's walks are textual because they comprise sequence, variation, structure, and linear and temporal progression. However crooked or round a track may be, it is like a story (or a text) because it has a beginning, middle, and end, and because it introduces new and complicating experience. Walking, listening, and speaking are textual activities in the additional sense that they are propagative; their performance tends to spur further action.

A textual walk—that is, a walk in a poem or prose passage—also demonstrates the metaphoric conflation of land and text by framing, expressing, and representing a particular landscape in terms of a codified walk. Clare's rambling poems, his sonnets about walks, and his prose accounts of his perambulations are written inscriptions onto the landscape.[145] These textual walks are also propagative in the sense that they attract critical attention and appreciation, and because they encourage others to undertake the same physical walks.

In addressing the ecological aspect of walking, I assert its connective capacity—both of leisurely and pragmatic walking. Compulsory walking, undertaken due to strained external circumstances, may have an alienating effect; though the basis for this conclusion is tenuous, as the only textual document for Clare's compulsory walking ("Journey out of Essex") was written

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[144] Chapters one and two explored the sonic aspect of this link, which the poet renders legible via SLD. Other aspects of the relation between land and text include the aesthetic, the visual, and the educational. In "A Ramble," for instance, the speaker describes a morning sky ekphrastically, drawing attention to the visual artwork of nature. The educational text of nature can be seen in both Wordsworth and Clare's poems.

The metaphoric conflation of land and text is united by experience. For experience—sensuous, cognitive, emotive, linguistic, etc.—occurs in spatial and textual contexts. A true test of this analogy would perhaps be served by a thought experiment in which we suppose Clare's native "enthralment" to a different landscape (Blythe, *Talking* 12). Such a test might at least highlight the irrelevance of Clare's admiration for the topography of Helpston and Northamptonshire to this fundamental analogy. Though how differently do writers approach this analogy based upon their affective relation to landscapes!

[145] Forgive this redundancy of phrasing, but I use it in order to make a prominent contrast with footed inscriptions.

after his certification of insanity in 1837, and so introduces additional factors of alienation. Interestingly, though, my analysis of "Journey out of Essex" shows Clare's abiding emotional association with land and nature in all of its forms. As with the prose account of his childhood ramble in search of the horizon on Emmonsales Heath[146], Clare's spatial disorientation in "Journey out of Essex" occurs alongside psychological and emotional disorder. In both episodes, separated by nearly forty years, Clare's physical bearings correspond with his emotional state and they thus illustrate the reciprocal condition of ecological sensibility which informs his poetics.

Walking connects fellow inhabitants because it enables visitation and thus a host of other activities which bind subjects to their community. In visiting a local subject, the walker can interact with that subject by sharing sound, speech, gesture, and visual recognition; by acting upon or being acted upon; and by witnessing its existence (most certainly a communal binding, at a basic level of recognition). As of result of these interactions, the walker can record and publish details about the subject as well as its spatial surroundings and abode. Walking additionally connects fellow inhabitants because it facilitates recognition and identification of other local habitats. By revealing the "homes" of other subjects within a shared geographic space, walking enhances the walker's conception of his/her own home to include the dwelling(s) of neighbor subjects.[147] Walking likewise underscores the commonality and the importance of that shared geographic space as a collective home for all communal subjects.

[146] I discuss this anecdote later in this chapter.

[147] All homes are ecological, and the process of recognizing them is connective. The English root *eco* comes from the Greek word *ὀίκος* 'house, dwelling.'

The walker witnesses in several senses—aural, visual, tactile, olfactory—but none of these are possible without his/her first setting foot.[148] So though walking is similar to aurality and orality in its dual use as a mode of environmental engagement and poetic production, its relation to aurality and orality is ultimately causal. Walking is proof of care, respect, and curiosity. Though it can be commenced for solitary purposes, it is always exhibiting the presence of other things and other subjects. Walking particularly cooperates with listening and seeing—for these actions help the subject to orient himself/herself vis-à-vis his/her external environment. Walking is more like aurality (than orality) because both are activities that enable the walker to witness, take in, and respond to other subjects. And in this sense, a walk is part of a show: it has a linear and a temporal progression which entails new and interesting experiences.

It is in this latter sense (of the walk as a story or a show) that walking has a powerful poetic aspect.[149] A walk, like a poem, has sequence, presents sensory stimuli, and activates human thought and feeling. When Clare comes across something unusual or affecting in his walks, for example a "will o whisp[150]," it stimulates his imagination (and often writing). The rambling motif in many of Clare's walking poems is an effective poetic frame that conflates the progression of steps with the progression of sounds and images. This motif also provides a pragmatic rationale for the presentation of other subjects. The expansive (and quasi-aerial[151]) travel figured in *The Seasons* may be unfamiliar and artificial to the impoverished laborer (or any

[148] Clare's poem "Sighing for Retirement" maximizes the conceit by which the poet finds inspiration afoot. The speaker states: "I found the poems in the fields / and only wrote them down" (15-16). These lines compare poetic composition to one of Clare's botanizing rambles. They attribute voice (and poetic creation) to nature—"the very essence & soul of Poesy" according to his third natural history letter (*NHP* 41)—and they depict his authorial role as that of a discoverer and transcriber.

[149] It can be noted also that walking has a powerful poetic aspect by tradition. The relationship between walking and human literature (and religious texts) is longstanding; the eighteenth century peripatetic genre is certainly not the first literary mode to represent walking. The rhythmic nature of walking coincides with oral literature and recitation.

[150] A vaporous luminescent phenomenon common to the marshy fens surrounding Helpston.

[151] Or is it just imaginative? Clare was certainly affected by Thomsons's portrayal of nature, which includes sweeping movement across vast geographic regions and places.

other individual without the means and opportunity to travel), but the poetic structure of the walk is recognizable and relatable to many people. Walks lend themselves to poetry because they are repeatable sequences that are capable of variation and development. Moreover, walking poems (or textual walks) represent specific places which readers may not visit, and they provide a familiar basis for readers to imaginatively connect with those places. They also model the [environmentally connective] activity of walking for practice within other geographic settings.

Walking serves Clare's documentary poetics because it has two textual functions (i.e., the "footed" and the "written"). A walk, as a footed text, temporarily checks and touches the bounds of a geographic area. But rendered as a poetic text, a walk documents the existence and presence of other environmental subjects (by description, by noting speech or sounds, etc.). Further, physical walking is a sensory platform for the walking subject to perceive, observe, and identify other communal subjects, and, in turn, for those other subjects to perceive the walking subject. As such, walks set up sensory colloquia by which subjects in an environment share and exchange in common behaviors. During a walk, Clare sees, hears, touches, and smells things—sometimes he tastes things too—and he is likewise seen, heard, and sensed by other subjects. Each walk provides opportunities for the exercise of sense faculties and their accompanying bodily organs, by which "man and other animals perceive external objects."[152] In response to his walks, Clare records all sorts of details, not only aural ones. These records offer regional field data about plant, animal, insect, fungi, and bird species, as well as historical information about Helpston, Northamptonshire, and the social and cultural changes associated with enclosure and the early nineteenth century. This work of documentation is inherently political. And walking serves it directly because it furnishes Clare with local data, sights, and sounds to document. The journal entries, letters, and poems all record details gleaned from his frequent walks and rambles

[152] "Sense, *n*." Def. 1a. *OED Online*. June 2013. Oxford UP. 18 July 2013.

outdoors. Clare's poetic recognition and representation of alterity—other subjects, other objects—requires the sensory input afforded by local walks.

Furthermore, walking (and the sensory exercise it provides) assists the walking subject in perceiving his/her own bodily condition. Because walking has the curious effect of highlighting sensation, it emphasizes the subject's corporeality and spatio-temporal bearings, as it enables the subject to distinguish other subjects. In addition to exercising and accentuating the senses, walking produces specific sense impressions which recognize "a fact or a condition of things."[153] Such percepts are valuable poetic material, but they also serve a historical purpose by recording (mentally and otherwise) facts and conditions about the external environment. The percepts gained by walking carry an emotional significance which further enhances the documentary record of a landscape.

As mentioned earlier in the case of "Journey out of Essex," Clare's poems and prose stress the correspondence between one's physical bearings and one's psychological and emotional state. John Barrell accounts for this fact by observing Clare's "sense of indifferentiation between self and place" and by noting the unique relations to place experienced by Helpston's inhabitants: "[K]knowledge of the world was . . . an extrapolation from their knowledge of the place in which they lived" (*Poetry* 119, 118). The locational-psychological correspondence illustrates the reciprocal conditions of ecological embeddedness which inform Clare's poetics, and the baseline analogy uniting land with text. Walking offers unique and valuable sensory opportunities for this spatio-affective overlap to take place, and to therefore be observed and made public. The correlation between spatio-temporal proprioception and emotion (seen in Clare's youthful anecdote about chasing the horizon, the sonnet "Trespass," and "Journey out of Essex") is another way of approaching the physical-mental (or literal-figurative)

[153] "Sense, *n*." Def. 16a. *OED Online*. June 2013. Oxford UP. 18 July 2013.

framework repeated throughout Clare's poems. Clare's ability to formulate and portray this spatio-affective correlation in his poetry, and to do so from a variety of vantage points, helps to challenge the nature-culture binary (and corollary binaries: ecocentric-anthropocentric, literal-figurative, physical-mental). Like the transmission of sound, walking is a transgressive activity; it crosses over boundaries to show overlaps and correspondences that are common, yet ignored or unvoiced.

Like aurality and orality, walking provides an alternate mode of ecological engagement that differs from dwelling, a concept which has dominated ecocritical approaches to Romantic texts. Walking produces experiences that enable the human subject to consider the ways in which human culture is bound up with the external environment and non-human cultures (e.g., agriculture, animal domestication, the building of nests in human structures, husbandry, gardening, excavation, and seasonal customs) and vice versa. Because walking furnishes local examples of the cooperation between nature and culture, it illustrates the folly of exclusively assigning value or primacy to either. Lastly, in both of its aspects, footed or composed, walking confronts and documents the legal, political, and economic exigencies that regulate movement of subjects across the land, and the effects of these conditions on communal subjects.

In order to demonstrate how walking operates as an ecological mode for communal engagement and as a poetic mode for documentation, I analyze a variety of verse and prose texts, including: the natural history piece "Autumn"; excerpts from the natural history prose and letters; two rambling poems ("Sunday Walks" and "A Ramble"); four sonnets with walking scenes ("Schoolboys in Winter," "Stepping Stones," "Careless Rambles," and "Trespass"); the asylum period poem "A Walk in the Forest"; and the prose account "Journey out of Essex." Each

of these texts portrays walking as a platform for sensory stimulation and presents a narrative figure who engages with his environment through the act of walking.

To establish the similarity between walking and aurality/orality, and support the notion that walks trigger aesthetic exchange, I refer to the trope of conversation, which is conceptually broadened to signify all back-and-forth, alternating movement occurring between two or more subjects. Conversation is an effective conceptual platform for Clare's poetics. The etymology of this word demonstrates a dual meaning in which dwelling and talking overlap ("Conversation, *n*."). Its Latin root, *conversari*, means "to turn oneself about, to move to and fro, pass one's life, dwell, abide, live somewhere, keep company with" ("Converse, *v*."). This overlap of meanings suggests the imbrication of dwelling and interacting with other subjects. I propose that alternating movement—turns between distinct subjects—constitutes viable communal interaction and reciprocity. The practice of taking turns accentuates and counterbalances individual subjectivities, as it produces a record of lived interactions. This can readily be seen in the oral or written records of a community. This chapter applies the trope of conversation to the act of walking in order to conceive the possible ecological and poetic effects of walking. It suggests that Clare's individual walks, particularly as they are codified in verse and prose, also serve as records of lived communal interactions; it therefore asserts walking as an effective tool in a documentary poetics. Walking is like conversation because it demonstrates alternating movement, and its early etymology stresses this fact. Though it does not indicate mutual oral response, it does imply the meeting of two parties. I apply the trope of conversation to walking in an abstract way to acknowledge a broader sort of interaction between communal subjects. The most basic example of interaction triggered by walking is that between the human subject and the land itself. This tropic application is possible because dwelling comprises numerous modes

of communal, intersubjective interaction (on top of conversation). Walking is just one means for subjects within a community to come into contact with each other. And, as Clare's rambling poems demonstrate, there is a pleasurable analogical correspondence between walking and talking.

To argue for walking and movement outdoors as a sensory platform within Clare's poetics, it is helpful to look at the history of the word *walk*. The verb *to walk* has a long history and its various historical senses illustrate a deeper overall meaning than the predominant notion today of perambulation. The original use emphasizes any back-and-forth and connective movement (e.g., kneading, rolling, pressing food, or fulling cloth with the hands and feet). The lexicographers of the Oxford English Dictionary explain the unique history of this verb, which was originally transitive:

> It is remarkable that to the end of the Old English period the primary sense of the verb . . . is 'to roll', and that from the beginning of the Middle English period it is 'to move about, travel'. . . . The development of sense appears to have been from 'to roll, fluctuate, move back and forth' to 'to move to and fro, roam about, wander here and there' to 'to journey, travel, go on foot'. . . . By the end of the 15th cent. the new sense 'to move about, travel' had entirely superseded the original sense.[154]

The early uses of sense I emphasize rotation and undulating movement. Sense II means "to move about, journey, circulate." It is closely related to, and now taken as an extended use of Sense IV, which refers to the walking or journeying of a person. Sense III figuratively emphasizes walking as passing "one's life . . . in a certain condition" and as a mode of conduct. The rotational movement indicated by senses I, III and IV evokes Clare's reciprocal relation to his village. Moreover, sense III conveys a moral quality of walking, which Clare uses to separate heedless clowns from men of taste—for the heedless clown thoughtlessly speeds across the landscape while the man of taste often pauses in raptures. Conversation and walking both emphasize an

[154] "Walk, *v*." *OED Online*. Mar. 2012. Oxford UP. 23 Mar. 2012.

active, back-and-forth, and circular movement between two or more things. Walking, as Clare does it and writes about it, contextualizes this movement within a local community. Clare's poems exhibit rotational movement by evoking reciprocal relations amongst village subjects via conversation and walking.

Just as Clare treats the literal activities of listening and talking in a playful and figurative way—developing a poetic notion of a vocal, literate, and tasteful nature—so can he treat physical walking in an abstract way so as to emphasize the mental and imaginative movements and connections it triggers.[155] The transition from the physical and concrete to the mental and abstract is characteristic of Clare's poetics; many poetic notions originate in his physical participation with things outside of himself. That is, sensory stimulation and exercise trigger his poetic process. This is one reason why enclosure was so disastrous for Clare. Not only did it confirm his lapsarian sense and spur nostalgia, but it barred access to the physical points of contact (e.g., fields, fens, commons, wastes, and woods) so central in the formulation of his poetics.[156] Enclosure also destroyed the footpath system that was vital to Helpston's communal and communicative network. Ronald Blythe writes:

> John Clare mourned the loss of many of them [footpaths] after Helpston was enclosed. Indeed he raged and ranted about it; justly, at what for him was the sacrilege of destroying one of the holiest places in any village: that way along which his people had walked for centuries, a sanctified route to work, a sanctified route to love, a sanctified route to companionship, and to things which were infinitely precious to a man, a woman, or a child. ("*Solvitur*" 20).

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[155] It is interesting to consider how little Clare did travel outside of Northamptonshire: a brief and unsuccessful trip to Godwin's Wisbech for a job interview as a law clerk; some travel with a local militia; jobs in Casterton and Pickworth burning lime; four trips to London (including one in which he witnesses Byron's funeral procession and another in which he journeys to Bloomfield's grave in Richmond); a visit to Boston, Lincolnshire, where he sees the sea for the only time in his life; his transportation to Dr. Allen's asylum at High Beach in Epping Forest, Essex; his escape from Essex and eighty-mile walk home along the Great York Road in four days (recorded in prose and examined in this chapter); his removal five months later to the Northampton General Lunatic Asylum; and the removal of his body (by train) back to Helpston upon his death in 1864. It should be noted that some of these instances are compulsory travel.

[156] As Daniel Crowson puts it in his pamphlet "Rambles with John Clare" (1978), "John's right to roam wherever he fancied were [sic] severely restricted" (7).

Moreover, the enclosure of Helpston destroyed specific places (Langely Bush), social traditions (drinking sugared water at Eastwell Spring on Sundays), and the commoning way of life as well as the agricultural traditions surrounding it. "None of us realise what walking was like to the people who lived in villages like Helpston, all over Britain, for centuries," Blythe writes ("*Solvitur*" 17). In the rural community of Helpston, walking via footpaths was a regular way to move about the parish, to go to and from work, to go to church, and to recreate; it was also performed as an annual ritual during Rogation week (in a custom known as "beating the bounds") to mark parish boundaries (Jarvis 178-9). The system of roads and footpaths in Helpston, when it was still an open-field parish, was a "labyrinth, whose secret [could not] be learned without a guide" and it confirmed the circular sense of space that Barrell presents in his 1972 landmark study of Clare's poetry (*Idea of Landscape* 87). Enclosure straightened out this labyrinth and delimited public space. "Pedestrian choices for any given journey before enclosure were typically plentiful," Robin Jarvis writes, "but enclosure drastically curtailed and channeled the mobility of villager and traveler alike (184). By occluding physical access and movement, enclosure challenged the mental, linguistic, and aesthetic connections between neighboring inhabitants (and Helpston's geographic and inanimate features). It compromised the circular framework of paths and the circle of conversation that defined Helpston's history.

Nature became a renewed site of contest when the British parliament implemented a wave of land enclosures in 1750. By 1830, over 4000 separate enclosure acts had been passed and enforced, forcing thousands of individuals to leave the countryside for the city and the promise of wage labor. New attitudes about the natural environment arose in response to material improvements in agriculture, a growing vogue for picturesque gardens and landscape art, the decline of traditional peasantry, and the rise of the public sphere. In the face of so much cultural

change, nostalgic representations of country life emerged to recover a sense of the past as they subtly authorized the new economic prosperity.[157]

Still, the historical tide of enclosure (and the concomitant financial revolution) was irreversible. "Most commoning economies," J.M. Neeson writes, "were extinguished by enclosure at some point between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries (5). Before enclosure prevailed as a system of land management, common right and open-field systems were in place. Common right allowed "commoners" access to lands in order to grow crops, graze livestock, and gather fuel. Faced with the loss of these rights, peasants were increasingly forced into wage labor, a situation in which work is directed away from one's personal sustenance. Enclosed farms, with greater amounts of land and crop yields, required a new form of farm labor: paid farm workers. Because of these changes, agricultural production is removed (to an extent) from the traditional peasant or commoner. He can no longer personally enjoy the products of his labor. Enclosure thus caused the disruption and loss of a fundamental way of life, economically, politically, socially, culturally, and spiritually.

The exigencies of economy and agricultural improvement caused the British Parliament to pass an act of enclosure for the lands in Helpston and neighboring parishes when Clare was only sixteen years old.[158] The enclosure took over ten years to be fully implemented. The centuries-old open-field system, which united the community, was transformed into privatized plots of land. Old footpaths were closed and new roads were built. Other poets before Clare did respond to the loss produced by enclosure. Oliver Goldsmith, for one, saw "the rural virtues leave the land" in "The Deserted Village" (1770), his popular poem about the fictional, enclosed "Auburn." But these poets lacked Clare's personal experience of enclosure. His poetry grieves

[157] Ann Bermingham's *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition*, *1760-1840* argues this point persuasively, particularly as it relates to representations of nature in painting and portraiture.
[158] Crowson states that the effects of enclosure came about around 1812, when Clare was nineteen (7).

the loss of the Helpston's commons, footpaths, and communal haunts and it memorializes a former way of life. It also responds to enclosure by reframing the land according to his personal authority—a power based in language. We can learn from the example of his imaginative, personal, and linguistic interactions with nature, particularly as these are a form of opposition and activism.

One of Clare's responses to enclosure, characteristically playful and subversive, was to continue the movement and interaction between communal subjects in nature virtually—by representing it in language.[159] He wrote about trespassing and he wrote travelogues in his journal. Most importantly, he explored places shut down by enclosure within the space of the poem—a second sort of conflation of land and text.[160] Jarvis reads in several of his peripatetic poems a subtly encoded "politics of pedestrianism" that utilizes a "wide range of literal and figurative boundary-breakers" (181). He cites John Goodridge and Kelsey Thornton's thesis about Clare's "fantasies of penetration and escape" as a possible motive for this figurative boundary-breaking. He also remarks that Clare's poetry "gives a wholly positive view of rural walking" and that rural dwellers like Clare derive knowledge "from the constant perambulation of a small locality" (Jarvis 161).

"Rambling" poems such as "A Ramble" and "Trespass" reveal a landscape by physical movement and poetic framing. They operate spatially and linguistically to encircle and register a

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[159] Other responses included anger, depression, cooperation (Clare worked on enclosure gangs), poetic elegy, and criminal subversion (via trespass).

[160] Clare's poetics relies upon an assumed linguistic association between nature and humanity. Often, he represents this association in terms of the "book of nature," where subjects in nature make letters, speak to him, prompt writing or composition, and espouse understanding and taste. He relies upon personification to work this effect—to figure the sentient, vocal nature that reaches out to the amanuensis peasant poet. But the conflation between land and text is also approached from the opposite end, in the case of such enclosure poems as "The Lament of Swordy Well" or "The Moors." Clare ventriloquizes the voices of Helpston in these texts via prosopopoeia. The second conflation of land and text uses the space of the literary text to remove the frame of the human speaker/mediator and imaginatively relocate the reader with the land. The vehicle of language is useful for the reciprocal exchange so central to Clare's poetics. There is a land that calls out to us, and there is a call that takes us to the land.

place according to Clare's personal participation in it (e.g., via childhood games, wandering, structured walks, and specific historical episodes) and how he wishes to present it. Rambling, as a concept, conflates language with physical and mental movement and thus underscores the association between nature and language.[161] If enclosure has closed off a common path, regulating where any body can be, Clare's poems trespass and open up alternative paths for travel. In this sense, Clare's poems act out against enclosure. By documenting a particular location through its sounds as well as its topography, Clare's poems illustrate an ironic link between land enclosure and poetic framing: poetic natural history replaces parliamentary hedgerows as a way of experiencing the land.[162]

Enclosure offers a specific access point to the analogue between nature and textuality by providing a model for the framing of land against which Clare reacts creatively. It is useful to Clare in some sense; it inspires poems and it models the framing of land. The topics of poetry and enclosure figure prominently in "The Progress of Rhyme," a poem which was unpublished until the twentieth century. In it, Clare subtly links editing with enclosure; this identification allows him to represent his voice by the image of an errant stream. In the following passage, Clare identifies natural objects with language, and introduces the simile of a brook to describe the process (and progress) of his song:

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[161] In speaking of Rousseau's formative ideas about walking, Rebecca Solnit writes that walking "provides him with a literal position from which to speak. As a literary structure, the recounted walk encourages digression and association, in contrast to the stricter form of a discourse or the chronological progression of a biographical or historical narrative" (21). She goes on to link walking to the style of stream of consciousness. "Unstructured, associative thinking," she writes, "is the kind most often connected to walking, and it suggests walking as not an analytical but an improvisational act" (Solnit 21).

[162] Of course the nature poetry of peasant poets is also the literate production of sentient minds attempting to take part in a national literary history and tradition. By emphasizing the generative and subversive uses of poetry, I do not mean to imply that Clare or other peasant poets would never have written but for enclosure. With the boom in print and public literary culture during the eighteenth century in England, peasant poets (Duck, Bloomfield, Clare, Yearsley, and Collier) participate in a widening circle of literary production and consumption. Still, enclosure helped to push people—to print, to wage labor, to cities, and to sentimental nostalgia for the land.

> Like pasture brooks through sun and shade,
> Crooked as channels chance hath made,
> It rambles as it loves to stray
> And hope and feeling leads the way. (153-6)

The iambic tetrameter lines—with their coordinating conjunctions, alliteration, and multivalent words—suggest redundancy, non-utility, and twoness. But this doubleness is a sign of freedom, as the mazy movement of the stream and the ambiguity of the words *ramble* and *stray* stand for unencumbered poetic movement. The wayward channel of water (and poetry) does two things: it rambles and it strays. Each of these actions has dual aspects. First, both intransitive verbs describe a sense of physical movement and trespass. To ramble means "to wander or travel in a free, unrestrained manner, without a definite aim or direction. . . . [T]o walk for pleasure through the countryside, freq. in company and on a specified route."[163] To stray is "to escape from confinement or control, to wander away from a place, one's companions" and "to wander up and down free from control, to roam about."[164] Just as the brooks' path is laid by chance, so the speaker's straying is led by his own hope and feeling—forces of inspiration and movement outside the influence of friendly editors[165] and foes.

Secondly, rambling and straying denote a mental sort of roaming. The verb *to ramble* describes "mental pursuits or studies." Rambling also denotes linguistic activity, as the second definition states: "to wander freely in speech or writing; (now more usually) to write or talk in an aimless, incoherent, or inconsequential fashion, without an ordered sequence of ideas." These multivalent words conflate nature's channels of movement with active voice. With this simple double meaning, Clare artfully attributes voice to nature—the brook "rambles as it loves to

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[163] "Ramble, *v*." Def. 1b. *OED Online*. Mar. 2012. Oxford UP. 23 Mar. 2012.
[164] "Stray, *v*.[2]" Def. 1a and 2a. *OED Online*. Mar. 2012. Oxford UP. 23 Mar. 2012. The third definition applies specifically to the meandering of streams.
[165] "Whose taste were such that mine were shame / Had they not helped it into fame" ("The Progress of Rhyme" 131-2).

stray." This brook's voice is predicated upon unrestrained wandering, deviation, and digression––principles that operate spatially and sequentially yet which fail to demonstrate a "sequence of ideas." *To stray*, a verb "[s]aid also of the mind or thoughts," carries a similar denotation: "to wander or deviate in mind, purpose, etc." The vehicle of the brook, which bubbles and babbles as it moves, correlates nature with language and it models structural independence. Clare's freedom to rove and ramble is ensured by the fount of his own emotional responsiveness: "No matter how the world approved, / 'Twas nature listened—I that loved. / No matter how the lyre was strung, / From my own heart the music sprung" (211-4).

This brief moment (in a longer poem that describes poetic vocation in cooperation with nature) illustrates a trope that pervades Clare's work: the image of the solitary speaker roving and rambling about local places and subjects. This trope allows Clare to remove poesy from the realms of the given and the human and place it in the realms of the natural and the experiential. Clare proposes that poetry's source springs from one's active participation in and with nature (as this is practiced by listening to and recording sounds as well as walking).

Walking, and its broader sense of travel, can inform ecological ways of being.[166] In "A Question of Nature: Byron and Wordsworth," Andrew Hubbell reads Byron's "wandering immersion" in Greece against the normative standard of a "Wordsworthian eco-poeisis" and suggests that wandering is another possible mode of ecological epistemology. After addressing the two main terms informing contemporary Romantic ecocriticism (*nature* and *dwelling*), Hubbell suggests a third: *wandering*.

[166] "It is widely felt . . . that walking is the most environmentally-sensitive mode of travel, as it restores a sense of proportion between traveler and environment obscured by other forms of transport, and because it minimizes the traces of its passage" (Jarvis 188). However, in *Walking, Literature, and English Culture* (1993), Anne D. Wallace attacks the "non-reading" of walking and the uncritical conflation of walking with travel (2). Wallace calls for analysis of the material effects of "the specific physical process" of walking (2).

Hubbell identifies an equation, developed by Romantic ecocritics (e.g., James McKusick and Jonathan Bate to a lesser extent) who have taken up Heidegger's discussion of dwelling, between "dwelling, environmental sensitivity and ethical care for one's place" (14). Such an equation prevents interpreting Byron's "wandering immersion" in Greece as a mode of ecological knowing. Hubbell's essay is useful in a discussion of Clare's walking because it makes a claim for movement within and across a location as a mode of ecological epistemology and sensibility. Of course, Byron is no Clare, and Clare is no Byron (for all his emulation and playful rewriting of Byronic texts later in life). Byron's movement across continents, bodies of water, and political and national boundaries is quite different from Clare's movement across parishes, counties, and familiar and native landscapes. Still, both men represent the epistemological function of movement within and across a landscape. Clare's walks trigger sensory interactions with Helpston's subjects and locales, and they supply data for the documentary record of Helpston and its surroundings.

One assumption about dwelling as an enhanced mode of ecological epistemology is that "[t]he greater the length of time spent in one place, the more extensive the dialogic action" between "[i]dentification, belonging, and place-meaning" (Hubbell 14). Clare fulfills this Heideggerian criterion of dwelling, but I would add that his extended dwelling with/in Helpston is augmented and exercised by the back-and-forth, circulatory movement of walking.

At stake here are the environmentally conscious activities of observation, thinking, and belonging—activities which involve studying the dynamic that unites a place with its inhabitants, knowing a place, valuing the meanings of that place, and extending ethical care to it. McKusick's concept of "rootedness" and Buell's notion of "embeddedness" account for these processes. Hubbell shows that these ends can be achieved by Byron's wandering and touristic travel. By

disrupting the "dwelling-wandering" binary, Hubbell-cum-Byron also problematizes two other significant paradigmatic binaries ruling deep ecology: nature-culture and ecocentric-anthropocentric. Byron's unique and prescient contribution is to debunk the false dichotomy established (or at least fortified) within his period between nature and culture. According to Byron, the two work together and mutually define each other:

> Mr. B.[167] asserts that Campbell's "Ship of the Line" derives all of it's [sic] poetry not from "*art*" but from "*Nature*." – "Take away the waves—the winds—the Sun &c &c &c *one* will become a stripe of blue bunting—and the other a piece of coarse canvas on three tall poles."—Very true—take away the "waves"—"the winds" and there will be no ship at all—not only for poetical—but for any other purpose—& take away "the Sun" and we must read Mr. B's pamphlet by candle-light.—But the "poetry" of the "Ship" does *not* depend on the "Waves &c"—on the contrary—the "Ship of the line" confers it's [sic] own poetry upon the waters—and heightens *theirs*.—I do not deny that the "waves and winds"—and above all "the Sun" are highly poetical—we know it to our cost by the many descriptions of them in verse—but if the waves bore only the foam upon their bosoms—if the winds wafted only the Sea-weeds to the shore—if the Sun shone neither upon Pyramids—nor Fleets—nor Fortresses—would it's [sic] beams be equally poetical?—I think not—the poetry is at least reciprocal. (Byron qtd. in Hubbell 15)

Byron identifies a basic poetry belonging to the waters (nature) and a basic poetry belonging to the ship (culture). He fights against the assumption that nature's beauty is independently poetical. On the contrary, the reciprocal interaction between natural beauties and artificial (or cultural) beauties heightens the overall poetic effect. Thus Campbell's poem derives its effect from a reciprocal exchange between the poetry of the sea and the ship. Byron dismantles the alienating (and post-lapsarian) nature-culture binary and, more importantly, creates a space within the "poetical" for the cooperation between natural and cultural subjects. He also challenges the easy identification between the city and culture. Hubbell continues: "Both Wordsworth and Byron draw on definitions of nature to articulate their aesthetics; however,

[167] William Leslie Bowles proposes nature as an "antithesis of culture" in his 1819 essay "The Invariable Principles of Poetry" (Hubbell 15).

Byron is the one who expresses an ecological consciousness by deconstructing the false binary, nature-culture, and replacing it with the more inclusive 'environment'" (15).

Challenging the nature-culture binary is a crucial step towards acknowledging the implication of human culture, community, and habitation within any environment. Clare's attribution of utterance to nature (illocutionary and locutionary), and his representation of linguistic correspondence and aesthetic evaluation between nature and humanity, goes a step in this Byronic direction to utilize human culture as an instrument to observe, understand, cooperate with, and belong to nature. Both Clare and Byron promote (and practice) the belief that culture does not alienate humans from their surrounding environments, but rather attaches them in meaningful and poetic ways.

Walking goes some way towards showing cooperation between nature and culture. In her history of walking, Rebecca Solnit points out that walking acquires aesthetic and Romantic significance (in the West) during the eighteenth century with Rousseau and Wordsworth. This period, with its neoclassical impulses, raised up the *Peripatos* of Aristotle and the *Stoa* of Zeno (both public colonnades or walks where philosophical education occurred) to align walking with thinking (Solnit 14-5). The abstract and metaphysical sense of walking is not present in the early etymology or meanings of the word *walk*, which signified a back-and-forth movement or travel between two locations. Walking had been useful, repetitious, and result-driven, and its early association with processing woolen cloth bears this out. It might have spurred the imagination or created pleasure, but it was not pursued for its own sake.

After Rousseau's intervention, two senses of walking emerged: the perfunctory sort of travel undertaken to reach an end and the willful movement undertaken for no apparent

purpose.[168] Both produce pleasure, experience, and meaning. Clare's walking does not fit neatly into either of these two rubrics. Blythe highlights the ambiguities of his footpath walking:

> Just before this century, everyone walked. Clare's constant walking in his landscape was the norm; except that sometimes he walked, where his Helpston neighbors were concerned, to what was recognisably work—gardening, ploughing, hedging, erranding; and sometimes to what to them was clearly not work—reading and writing, in dips and hollows—a very strange thing to do; and sometimes he walked just to look. And so he became what most village people dread being: odd, strange, different. ("*Solvitur*" 21).

In his autobiographical prose, Clare demonstrates awareness of his fellow villagers' opinions that he is over-studious or crazy. Jarvis cautions against a "materialist calculus" in interpreting individuals' choices to walk, nevertheless he addresses Clare's walking from the perspective of class, noting that space is "genderised" and "socially stratified" (22, 161). "[F]or Clare, walking, or the kind of walking he valued most, signified freedom from labour," which in turn conditioned his environmental awareness and creativity (Jarvis 179, 181). The political significance of walking, for Clare, "hinged on questions of land ownership and rights of access" (Jarvis 188). The active enforcement of the Trespass and Game Laws explains Clare's "realistic fears of persecution by the rural authorities[169]," though Jarvis also points out that "much of Clare's local rambling around Helpston and Northborough had no political meaning or intent" (181, 188).

Clare's walks, both leisurely and pragmatic, enable him to witness and record examples of the cooperation between nature and human culture: husbandry, plowing, milking, harvesting,

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[168] In his study of Romantic Pedestrianism, Robin Jarvis alludes to other types of walking. Travel under compulsion often happens on foot. This involuntary sort of walking is caused by displacement (e.g., Clare's 80 mile trek home from Dr. Allen's asylum in Essex, or the exodus of Rwandan refugees into Zaire in 1994) (Jarvis 161, 23). The other sort is travel for pleasure—the leisured sort of walking that is not expressly utilitarian (23, 169). According to Eric J. Leed (*The Mind of the Traveller: From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism*), involuntary travel can "muddle rather than define the persona of the traveler" (28). Jarvis identifies an example of this depersonalizing effect in "Journey out of Essex": Clare's inability to recognize his wife or children when they intercept him outside of Northborough (161).

[169] "We think of him always walking trackless ways; yet we have to realise how much that was a deliberate, often difficulty and dangerous thing to do" (Goodridge and Thornton 99).

domestication of animals, the building of bird-nests in human structures, gardening, sport, and seasonal customs. Helpston culture is agricultural, both before and after enclosure. The literary and musical tradition associated with agriculture attaches to places, people, and objects. In walks, Clare visits these environmental subjects and rehearses with them this musico-literary tradition; in his walking poems, he records the existence of these subjects.[170]

For McKusick, who argues convincingly for a dwelling influenced poetry, the language of the poet and speaker is influenced by ecological habitat (29). Wordsworth's preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, with its emphasis upon "the real language of men" and "the real language of nature," underscores the sense of a language heavily informed by natural settings. The ideophonic quality of dialect coinages, discussed in the previous chapter, provides one example of this link. Hubbell shows ways in which Byron disputes this current of influence, in order to foreground humanity's makings and doings alongside aspects of nature. Clare's repeated portrayals of affective dialogues between speaking and listening subjects in the Helpston environment display a degree of care about this vexed binary. That is, an animal (and its voice) is not collapsed into the subjectivity of some focalizing human speaker, just as the speaker is not dissolved by his blissful perceptions into the surrounding environment. True, Clare is frequently concerned to document and publish what he perceives to be the voices within nature, often at his own expense. But many poems configure natural voices alongside the speaker's linguistic and perambulatory actions.[171]

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[170] Applying Santayana's threefold division of aesthetic experience (sensory, formal, and expressive), Jarvis discusses the "physical level" of walking as an aesthetic experience: "On the first level, one would expect that the pedestrian's unique exposure to sensory stimuli from the country s/he passes through would give rise to more particularised and 'realistic' observations of nature, in certain kinds of writing, as the middle-class cultural reclamation of walking takes place: one might look, that is, for more strenuous attempts to explore and record the individuality of different locations (as against their conformity to prefabricated landscape ideals), as well as the consciousness of the perceiving subject who is, in the fullest sense, as a walker, a 'material witness' of their ever-changing appearances" (70). Jarvis's diction—*record*, *individuality of different locations*, and *witness*—underscores the notion of a loco-documentary poetics.

[171] Jarvis supports the notion that Clare is aware of the association of nature and culture, pointing out "the ordinary self-voicing of nature" in Clare's poem "Sunday Walks" (180). "Despite the obvious risks of pious sentimentality or

Byron's insight is to see the "interdependence of nature and culture" as well as the folly of attempting to "fix value on one side or the other" (Hubbell 16). According to Hubbell, Byron replaces this arbitrary and erroneous binary with "the more inclusive [concept of] 'environment,'" which is "the ground and condition on which human action depends" (15). If Byron exposes the falsity of the nature-culture binary, he also reveals the extent to which we are of necessity implicated by culture. As Hubbell remarks, his logic implies that a human presence is necessary for nature to have aesthetic value: "Is a Storm more poetical without a Ship? . . . without the vessel—what should we care for the tempest?" (Byron qtd. in Hubbell 16). The ship and the storm "aid each other," and this interdependence "falsifies any attempt to define a 'pure' nature outside a cultural perspective" (Hubbell 16). Byron's response to this false binary, proposed by William Leslie Bowles, continues:

> In Landscape painting the great artist does not give you a literal copy of a country—but he invents & composes one. . . . Even where he presents you with some famous city—or celebrated Scene from Mountain or other Nature—it must be taken from some particular point of view—& with such light & shade and distance &c as serve not only to heighten it's [sic] beauties but to shadow it's [sic] deformities.—The poetry of Nature alone exactly as she appears is not sufficient to bear him out. . . Nature,—exactly, simply, barely, Nature, —will make no great Artist of any kind—and least of all a poet—the most artificial perhaps of all Artists is his very essence. (Byron qtd. in Hubbell 16)

Byron suspects the idea of representing a pure nature in art. Once art represents any subject, it assimilates that subject into the realm of human culture and human perspective. Clare is aware of this hermeneutic predicament. All the same, he invents a poetics of documentation to enter the

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mock-heroic whimsy, this is not a conventional neo-classical rhetoric of animated nature, but a genuine attempt at a non-anthropocentric vision of the holiness of life: the speaker is eavesdropping on the 'prayers' of creatures who constitute their own legitimate centres of being" (Jarvis 180). In "Reccolections after a Ramble," a "loose train of naturalist's observations" framed by the form of a walk, Jarvis identifies Clare's ambiguous stance on this binary: "Although Clare's images are not without traces of sentimental anthropomorphism, the creatures he describes have their separate and legitimate existence, and are not swept into service in some overarching plot of the poet's consciousness. The place that the various observations and experiences Clare assigns to his ramble have is the place which they are assumed to have occupied on the line of the walk. No doubt this lack of design is artefactual in its own way . . . but it is a designless design which aptly renders the effect of an open, unpremeditated movement through space, permeable to experience and connecting with the world passionately yet unobtrusively" (Jarvis 186).

hermeneutic circle so that he may share his conviction that nature is a "great artist." Might a compacted (or flattened) nature-culture binary reflect an ecological point of view? Hubbell argues that:

> The logic of [Byron's] statement implies that the external world is always already constructed by the human gaze, and what we call "nature" is an emanation of the cultural desire for its opposite. The nature-culture binary reflects a cultural point of view—"Nature" is culture's self-critique—not an ecological understanding. Understanding the world as an ecological whole means understanding culture *and* nature as part of the environment. (16)

Clare's attempts to document voices and values in nature are part of the web of human culture, though it is hard to say that he espoused the nature-culture binary.[172] Surely his poems are cultural products, but they also model the sort of ecological understanding that Byron and Hubbell promote here because they reflexively portray Byron's conviction that there is no such thing as a literal copy of nature.[173] Clare dexterously portrays the agency and subjectivity of his human speakers (and characters) alongside the irreducible strangeness of animals, plants, and places. Yet he also memorializes the longstanding communal traditions and natural history phenomena that mediate between these worlds. The "environment," at least in the sense that Hubbell uses it here, encapsulates both Langley Bush and Clare's poem "Langley Bush." It is the "ground and condition on which human action depends" (Hubbell 15). Clare's poetics strives to portray the "ground," the human action treating that ground, and the ways in which the "ground" acts upon humans. In this sense, his poems are less portraits of nature than they are portraits of a history of human ecological sensibility. He mourns the loss of human customs which are bound up with natural environments just as much as he mourns the loss of specific spots in Helpston, for the two are entwined.

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[172] For a variety of reasons (enclosure, poverty, deaths of loved ones, frustration, and loss) Clare did resort to nostalgic [and Augustan?] tropes and images, for example: the fall from grace, the casting out of Eden, the prelapsarian innocence of childhood, and a preoccupation with time and eternity.

[173] Though Clare praises DeWint's paintings as the "very copys of nature" (*Prose* 234).

Still, Clare would not completely agree with Byron's assertion that aesthetic value only comes into play once human representation occurs, though his poetics acknowledges the role of human perception in creation. Much of chapter four shows the beauty, mystery, and taste that he ascribes to an underlying force of nature. Clare's abiding conceit of nature's artistry and textual communication is a poetic strategy to legitimize and empower all forms of artistic expression, and it reflects his ecological point of view. Wherever value or meaning originates, his poetics stresses the repetitive, back-and-forth movement between non-human and human subjects as a means of environmental engagement and aesthetic experience. His many walks and rambles occasion intersubjective exchanges (with both non-human and human neighbors), provide opportunities for listening and witnessing other subjectivities in the environment, and thus stimulate the sense of reciprocity that defines his ecological and poetic sensibility.

Hubbell includes dwelling and wandering under Lawrence Buell's term "existential embeddedness," which can mean "place identification," "a regime of long-term sympathetic immersion and *discipline*," "environmental knowledge," and "ethical commitment" (Hubbell 16). John Muir and Jane Addams, both geographical transplants, wonder of their chosen places and inhabitants: "shall I be allowed to enter into their midst and dwell with them?" (Buell 14). Buell perceives their voluntary poverty and asceticism as requisite to this embedding. Clare's routine walks, botanzing rambles, and writings qualify as a form of discipline capable of embedding him within the Helpston environment.

A review of some of the distinguishing features of walking that "begin to find rhetorical-poetic expression" towards the end of the eighteenth century supports the idea that Clare's perambulations facilitate "existential embeddedness" (Jarvis 70; Buell 14). Jarvis delineates these features in order to move beyond the travel aspect of walking and show how walking is "a

way of experiencing landscape or . . . a form of consciousness-in-motion" (67). First, the pedestrian's experience of the landscape is "a *participatory* rather than disinterested one: s/he is in constant sensuous contact with the environment" (67). Secondly, pedestrian experience is "of a slowly but continuously changing field of experiences," over which the walker has control by stopping and altering movement; this variety contrasts with the limited "'perceptual envelope' inhabited by the passenger [of a vehicle]" (68). Thirdly, walking produces a "readjusted sense of proportion between humanity and the wider natural environment. . . . The pedestrian *at best* feels 'equal', and often feels *un*equal, to his/her surroundings" (69). Fourthly, because walking develops alertness "to the multiplicity of appearances and the particularity of actual landscapes," it "foster[s] resistance to any idealising aesthetic tendencies the traveller may start out with" (69). Lastly, walking presents a "progressional ordering of reality" (69).[174] These walkerly mental traits present certain conditions that characterize Clare's ecological sensibility: participation, sensuous contact, perception, proportion, equality, multiplicity, particularity, and seriality. These conditions can be met by any number of intersubjective processes, though Clare's poetics stresses aurality, orality and walking. Together, these conditions illustrate that walking can "condition or mediate thought and perception" (Jarvis 67) and thereby produce "long-term sympathetic immersion," "environmental knowledge" and "ethical commitment."

In his tenth natural history letter, Clare describes the close connection between walking, sympathetic place identification, and environmental knowledge. This letter presents perambulation as a means to study the lessons and sermons of nature. Clare refers to his "botanizing rambles & naturalizing excursions" (in which he hunted pooty shells for three weeks

[174] This progressional effect can be observed in the serial presentation of images and details in Clare's rambling poems. Seamus Heaney observes Clare's penchant for descriptive seriality (an aesthetic consequence of his pedestrianism according to Jarvis) as a "love for the inexorable one-thing-after-anotherness of the world" (qtd. in Jarvis 184).

straight). He deletes the word "rambles," perhaps to lend a more focused sense to his specimen gathering. After reminiscing about the childhood sports of hunting for pooty shells and "cock fighting" (a game in which the "knibbs" of two shells are pressed against each other until one breaks), Clare reflects on the longevity of the various snail species inhabiting Helpston and Northamptonshire. What begins as a botanical walker's log becomes a moralistic statement, as Clare considers the vanity of human ambition:

> A person had been digging a dyke in the old roman bank by the side of a fence . . . in the deepest places I found the most shells most of them of the large garden kind which had been clarified as it were in the sandy soil in which they were bedded I suppose them to have lain ever since the road was made & if it is so what a pigmy it makes of the pride of man Those [*del.* legions] centurions of \their/ thousands & 10 thousands that commanded those soldiers to makes these roads little thought that \the house of/ a poor snail horn woud out live them \& their proudest temples/ by centurys it is almost a laughable gravity to reflect so profoundly over a snail horn but every trifle owns the triumph of a lesson to humble the pride of man—every trifle also has a lesson to bespeak the wisdom & forethought of the Deity (*NHP* 65)

Clare enjoys noting the transience of the Roman legions (and their temples) alongside the perpetuity of the snail horns[175], which he compares to the houses of the poor. Clare attributes to these trifles a figurative sort of sound: as horns, they "bespeak" a lesson about the Deity's wisdom and forethought. Continuing this vein of praise, Clare comments on the "remarkable" instinct of the snail to know its own speed and travel home in time before deadly sunrise. This instinctual and efficient animal movement occurs throughout nature. Clare professes: "the power of Instinct in the most trifling insect is very remarkable & displays the omnipotence of its maker in an illustrus manner nature is a fine preacher & her sermons are always worthy attention" (*NHP* 66). Though Clare begins this natural history letter with the tone of intellectual curiosity

[175] These snails are, after all, helped by the Northamptonshire chalky soil. J.G. Evans (*Land Snails in Archaeology* 1972) notes: "The degree of preservation varies considerably but in most terrestrial deposits which are highly calcareous . . . it is good, the finest details of shell sculpturing being preserved. . . . Shells from ditch deposits on river gravel . . . are generally less well-preserved, being fragile and eroded" (qtd. in *NHP* 65). In Helpston, snail shells are more plentiful than elsewhere.

and the spirit of inquiry, closely recording details about various snail species, he soon marvels at the curious and efficient brilliance of animal instinct. He attributes such marvels to the mysterious, sublime category of the Deity. His substitution of the tropes of the lesson and the sermon depict these observable phenomena as texts to be consumed and studied via perambulation and interaction in the environment. Such study will humble the pride of humanity in its dominion over nature.

Clare's 1841 prose piece "Autumn" demonstrates the documentary nature of walking and the usefulness of the walk as a narrative frame.[176] It also makes numerous references to the speaker's walking and the sensory pleasures it gives. "Autumn" employs the narrative device of a guidebook (written in first-person-plural) to lead the reader on a walk through Helpston and beyond. The piece portrays different aspects of the Helpston environment (e.g., human, animal, ornithological, topographical, economic, and cultural). These "living objects"[177] are united by the walk, and the text that serves as a historical record of this walk and this community.

The manuscript materials for "Autumn" spread across two documents: Northampton MS 6 and Peterborough MS A62. Grainger, who has seen these autograph texts firsthand, speculates that Clare made field notes during his rambles: "The blunt pencil of A62 suggests that Clare may have made some of the entries in this notebook while he was actually walking in the fields exploring his old haunts; when a thought struck him he noted it down as he used to do when he was a young man" (328). Thus, a footed walk becomes textual.

"Autumn" rehearses many of Clare's idiosyncratic poetic tendencies. He alludes to the signs and signals of nature as well as human graffiti (land-text trope); he portrays specific sounds

[176] "Autumn" is "Clare's most significant late natural history prose passage," according to Grainger (*NHP* 327). This note was written in the same five month period as "Journey out of Essex," *Child Harold*, and *Don Juan*, and it is contained in the same foolscap notebook (Northampton MS 6).
[177] So Clare calls them in his fifth natural history letter (*NHP* 47).

and attributes voice to natural objects; he personifies topographical features along the route; he emphasizes the dichotomy between artificial taste and natural taste; he indicates place names as well as bird and plant species; he associates specific locations with memories of childhood and stresses a theme of loss; and, he presents a standard of beauty characterized by the cooperation of nature and culture.[178]

As walking texts go, "Autumn" is remarkable because it makes so many reflexive references to the speaker's walking and love of walking. Early in the passage, he announces: "[I]t is now very pleasant to take walks in the morning & in fact at any time of day though the mornings are misty & 'the foggy dew' lies long on the grass" (*NHP* 329). At several points in the piece, the speaker mentions conditions that might otherwise bar reluctant walkers. He warns the reader of an impediment: "now we have a flaggy ditch to stride which is almost too wide for a stride to get over—a run & a jump just lands on the other side" (330). This apostrophe effectively conscripts the reader into imagined action. As the piece closes, the speaker praises the simplicity of nature and emphasizes the joy of walking: "I love to clamber over these bridge walls & when I get off the banks on the road I instinctively look both ways to see if any passengers[179] are going or coming or carts or waggons passing—now here is a stile partitioning off sombodys portion of the bank but the middle rail is off so I stoop under to get through instead of climbing over it" (335-6). The speaker stoops under the broken middle rail of a stile (rather than climbing over it) as he enters the public roadway, where others are also walking. This conclusion draws attention to the perambulatory motion that unites subjects in this community.

Clare's 1824-5 journal includes many entries detailing facts and understanding gained from his rambles, which Margaret Grainger speculates, must have provided a welcome break

[178] "[E]ven these rustic implements & appendages of husbandry blend with nature & look pleasing in the fields" ("Autumn," *NHP* 336).
[179] Passers-by, foot-travellers.

from writing. In this sense, we can conceive of the walk as an adjunct activity which aids Clare's poetic composition.[180] The walks in this period, and their record in Clare's journal, show how walking enables fellowship (e.g., visits to Artis or Henderson), discoveries (e.g., fossils or ferns), and communication (e.g., village news and mailed letters).

Some journal entries, as well as the sonnet "Trespass" and the prose piece "Journey out of Essex," record pragmatic and material aspects of walking, including the dangers, physical barriers, and fears related to moving about in post-enclosure Helpston (and beyond), as well as occasions which frustrate Clare's intention to walk (e.g., illness, depression, weather) and auspicious conditions (e.g., leisure). These entries show a variety of kinds of walking, including exploratory travel, work-related walking, perfunctory transit, trespassing, pleasure walking, rambling, and walking to visit with friends and associates.

Clare's walks produce documentary content and meaning in a variety of ways. Throughout his 1824-5 Journal, Clare records factual and concise details about his walks. As with the "botanizing rambles" in Natural History Letter X, Clare sets foot to search out specimens: "whatever my wanderings may meet with that are not too common" (*NHP* 214). There are over a dozen entries in which Clare explicitly states his intention of walking, which is usually to locate ferns or other botanical specimens of interest. There are another two dozen or so entries which eschew any explicit indication of walking, yet which mention the discovery of a plant or animal specimen. Walking doubles as a platform for social visitation (with non-humans and humans alike), scientific and archaeological exploration, specimen hunting, emotional relief, and leisure. Within each of these entries, Clare concisely reports details about the purpose, progress, and result of the walk. There are numerous examples: the disappearance of a woodstile

[180] Though it should be noted that Clare often combined these activities, as the famous anecdote about his "hat serving him for a desk" attests (Taylor, *Critical Heritage* 50).

from a "favourite spot"; finding ruins of an old Castle in Ashton lawn; getting wet on a unsuccessful hunt for the harts tongue fern; going to Southey Wood and Gees Holt with his neighbor Billings to hunt ferns, and taking a sample of a new species of moss fern; finding three distinct species of the Bramble or mulberry on a walk to Simons wood; taking a walk to Hilly Wood and bringing home the white maiden hair fern; journeying to Emmonsales Heath for heather and furze bushes for his garden; inspecting flowering nut trees in anticipation of the nutting season; hunting snails in Royce close; visiting an old favourite spot, once loaded with ferns, in Oxey wood; seeking "geese & goslings" (or "cats & kittens") of sallow palm for village children on Palm Sunday; traveling to the Roman station near Oxey wood with Artis and Henderson (of Milton Hall[181]); and walking to Milton Hall to visit Artis and Henderson, or to borrow a book from Lord Fitzwilliam's library. Together these copious examples illustrate the importance of walking to Clare's intellectual and social life, as well as to his ability to physically connect to his environment and community.

Margaret Grainger asserts that walking must have been a pleasurable break from the extensive amount of writing that Clare was doing in 1824 (the period of the Journal). "Only when one surveys," she writes, "the sheer bulk of the Clare MSS of this time does one realize how many hours Clare must have spent actually in writing" (*NHP*168). Grainger adds that walking also proved to be a source of intellectual stimulation for Clare:

> His rambles and experiments such as the one with silver birch bark[182] must have been a welcome change from all that studious sitting. Sometimes his field and woodland excursions were solitary; sometimes he records the company of Billings, Artis, or Henderson with whom he could discuss his, and their, 'finds'. Through the last two friends he gained access to the handsome volumes of

[181] "Artis, Henderson, and Clare, made an unusually powerful combination in artistic and scientific endeavor in the early 1820s," Grainger notes in her introduction to the natural history prose. "They sought plants, birds, snail shells, fossils, and coins; they excavated Roman sites, and discussed literary and scientific matters; and when they could not meet, they exchanged letters" (Grainger, "Introduction," *NHP* xxxviii).
[182] This is the episode in which Clare experiments with birch bark as writing paper.

> Linnaeus, Curtis, and Pennant in the Milton library; and Henderson, in particular, was generous in drawing phenomena to Clare's notice and in reviving his spirits. (*NHP* 168-9)

Grainger emphasizes the fellowship to be had by walking, as well as the gains in knowledge enabled by such fellowship.[183] This fellowship and visitation happens at several levels in the Helpston community. Clare calls on plants, insects, birds, animals, grounds, streams, bridges, groves, woods, buildings, and humans alike. Regular interaction with these various communal subjects occurs via walking and it enables other, more specific, modalities such as sound and sight. But Grainger also cautions the reader:

> One must guard against imagining that these country wanderings were all romantically pleasurable. There were occasions when Clare caught cold, was nearly taken up as a poacher, when he was frustrated in his search for a specimen or creature. And often he was saddened by actual, or by impending, changes in the landscape. (*NHP* 169)

Clare records the danger and fear involved with walking in a post-enclosure Helpston in a journal entry for April 16, 1825. Clare goes bird-nesting and botanizing, but instead is nearly apprehended by the "meddlesome consieted keeper belonging to Sir John Trollop" (*NHP* 234). This keeper accuses Clare of poaching, though Clare has "never shot even so much as a sparrow in my life." He calls gamekeepers "terrifying rascals" who "make a prison of the forests & are its joalers." Their vocation is martial, oppressive, and hostile to rambling. Worst of all, they produce fear about walking.

In his entry for September 9, 1824, Clare reveals the fear caused by hunting, which effects a double bar against freedom of movement: not only must he be careful of game laws, but he must be careful not to become game himself:

> Took a pleasant walk to day in the fields but felt too weak to keep out long tis the first day of shooting with the sportsmen & the poor hares partridges & pheasants

[183] All travel stimulates "comparative consciousness" (Jarvis 66). The comparative quality of walking is illustrated by its visitational aspect, by which one subject interacts and shares with another.

> were flying in all directions panic struck they put me in mind of the inhabitants of a Village flying before an invading enemy . . . I was forcd to return home fearing I might be shot under the hedges (*NHP* 174)

What begins as pleasant customary movement becomes perilous, for the hunted animals as well as Clare. The metaphor describing the prey as villagers under military attack raises the emotional tension already present in Clare's sympathetic projection onto the "panic struck" animals. In a rare instance of capitalization, Clare refers the animals as "inhabitants of a Village," not of Helpston, per se. This intentionally vague reference emphasizes a universal quality of community over the particularity of the Helpston community. By referring to the rabbits and pheasants as "inhabitants of a Village," Clare stresses their generic social and communal value. And, conversely, by closing with a meditation upon his own vulnerability, Clare stresses his status as potential animal prey.

Clare records when he cannot walk, and frequently this means he is ill or suffering emotional anguish. In late September, 1824, Clare writes about the wet weather, his illness, and his disturbed conscience: "Tryd to walk out & coud not have read nothing this week my mind almost overweights me with upbraidings & miserys" (*NHP* 181). As an adjunct to other regular activities like reading and writing, walking signifies vitality and strength and its absence signals weakness. If he is able, Clare walks to palliate his suffering. In May of the following year, he writes that he is unable to sleep and so takes a 3 a.m. jaunt about the fields.

At this period in his life, Clare is revising his will in fretful anticipation of dying. The news of the dire poverty of Bloomfield's widow and children, and financial complications relating to the conditions of the annuity designed by his patrons, contribute to his distress. Walking is one of the basic activities and privileges of the able-bodied living. On September 23, 1824, he describes death as blocked movement: "very disturbd in conscence about the troubles of

being forcd to endure life & dye by inches & the anguish of leaving my children & the dark porch of eternity whence none returns to tell the tale of their reception" (*NHP* 181). The liminal image of death as a "dark porch" from which no travelers return to "tell the tale" suggests an impossibility of physical movement, communal visitation, fellowship, and conversation.

Walking activates imaginative movement, particularly when Clare comes across something unusual. In one note, he records seeing a "will o whisp" or "Jack a lanthorn." In another, he reveals his terrible fright "on seeing a will owisp for the first time" (*JCBH* 45). Though, he continues, "my fears grew less by custom for there are crowds about our fenny flats yet I never coud take them on the credit of philos[oph]y as natural phenomenons at night time but always had a suspicion of something supernatural belonging to them." In this same note, he records a humorous story about the "night fears" he experiences while walking home in the dark:

> the worst fright I ever met with was on a harvest night when I workd at Bassets of Ahston we was always late ere we gave over work as harvesters generally are and ere we finishd our suppers it was nigh midnight by the time I started home which was but the distance of a short mile but I had a terror haunting spot to cross calld Baron parks in which was several ruins of roman camps and saxon castles and of course was people[d] with many mysterys of spirits the tales were numberless of ghosts and goblings that were seen there and I never passd it without my memory keeping a strict eye to look for them and one night rather late I fan[c]yd I saw something stand wavering in the path way but my hopes put it off as a shadow till on coming nearer I found that it was somthing but wether of flesh and blood was a question my astonished terrors magnified it into a horrible figure it appeared to have ears of a vas[t] length and the hair seemd to hang about it like [ ] I trembled and almost wishd the earth woud open to hide me I woud have spoke but I coud not and on attempting to pass it I gave it the road and ran off as fast as I coud and on stopping at the stile to look were it was my increasd terror found it close at my heels I thought it was nothing but infernal now and scarce [know]ing what I did I took to my heels and when I got home I felt nearly fit to dye I felt assurd that ghosts did exist and I dare not pass the close the next day till quite in the day when every body was abroad when to my supprise I found it was nothing but a poor cade foal that had lost its mother and had been raisd with milk till it was grown up and had been turnd ther[e] to wean it the day before it followed me again and my disbelief in ghosts was more hardened than ever. (*JCBH* 45-6)

Clare shows his lively imagination in this passage and his susceptibility to village lore. Though he elsewhere chides fanciful projections onto nature and advises direct observation, Clare heeds the talk of the village in this particular experience with the Helpston landscape. In the beginning of this prose note, Clare reveals that "in company" he feels "a disbelief of ghost witches etc," but when he is "a lone in the night" his "fancys created thousands." When surrounded by peers, he seems more circumspect; he is at pains to check what he calls elsewhere his "childish propensitys"; but when he is alone, his imagination bounds (*JCBH* 44). The squeals of badgers, for instance, horrify him because they resemble the "screams of a woman." But Clare does not only pay lip service to village lore in this passage. He also indulges in some Gothic detail, as though he were trying on another mode of writing. The locale is particularly suited for the gothic mode because it contains ruins and because it is the subject of superstitious accounts. Eric Robinson and David Powell observe that the story of the pet horse is "so near to Robert Bloomfield's poem 'The Fakenham Ghost' that one wonders . . . whether fact and fiction may not have become intertwined in Clare's mind" (*JCBH* 291). This reading explains this literary parallel as some sort of mental break, and can thus be read as a precursor to Clare's certification of insanity in 1837. However, the overlap may be intentional. Just as Clare indulges a mood of terror, so he is experimenting with literary adaptation and allusion. Furthermore, this scene of terror is undergirded by pragmatic realities: Clare's work as a harvest laborer, his mile-long walk home, the late hour, and the foal's weaning in the park.[184]

In a memorable autobiographical fragment from Peterborough MS A34, Clare describes the sense of leisure associated with walking. On Sundays, the young Clare worked at horse or cow tending and his labor was of relatively solitary nature. Before commencing to describe a particular walk, he establishes the metaphoric sense of the landscape and his activity within it.

[184] The horse's presence establishes a Radcliffean dénouement to the anecdote.

He refers to his "whole summer" as "one days employment as it were in the fields" (*JCBH* 39). This figure of speech suggests the captivating quality of the fields as well as their ability to slow down his perception of time. His choice of one day as a vehicle for the entire summer also emphasizes the diurnal motions of the sun and the horizon, two concepts which figure largely in the scene he is about to relate.

Clare continues this passage, writing that he becomes so comfortable in "the qu[i]et love of nature[s] presence" that he is never at ease except when he is in the fields "passing my Sabbaths and leisures with the shepherds and herd boys" (*JCBH* 39). Despite the claim to solitude, Clare mentions several other human figures that inhabit these scenes of leisure: shepherds, herd boys, and gipseys. There is a "religious feeling" in these haunts (the "fields was our church") shared by Clare and his boyhood companions. He contrasts the chiming church bells with the boys' religious experience playing in nature and the old shepherd's reading "some favour[i]te chapter from an old fragment of a Bible which he carried in his pocket for the day." The passage's effect relies partly on the sense it creates of regular and sweeping movement. It portrays cycles of several kinds (diurnal, weekly, seasonal, parochial, and geneaological). The old shepherd's bible, particularly, bears out a sense of repetition of lifecycles: "a family relic which possesd on its covers and title pages in rude scrawls geneoligys of the third and fourth Generations when aunts uncles and grandmothers dyd and when cousins etc were marri[e]d and brother and sisters born occupying all the blank leaves in the book" (*JCBH* 40).

Human references notwithstanding, Clare insists "I loved this solitary disposition from a boy." His sense of solitude is not personal but spatial. A *solitude* is a lonely, unfrequented, or uninhabited place; it denotes physical seclusion and remoteness from human habitations. Clare

describes his "curiosity to wander about the spots were I had never been before," and thus begins to relate one particular incident of walking:

> it cost my parents some anxiety it was in summer and I started off in the morning to get rotten sticks from the woods but I had a feeling to wander about the fields and I indulgd it I had often seen the large heath calld Emmonsales stretching its yellow furze from my eye into unknown solitudes when I went with the mere openers and my curiosity urgd me to steal an opportunity to explore it that morning I had imagind that the worlds end was at the edge of the orison and that a days journey was able to find it so I went on with my heart full of hopes pleasures and discoverys expecting when I got to the brink of the world that I coud look down like a looking into a large pit and see into its secrets the same as I believed I coud see heaven by looking into the water so I eagerly wandered on and rambled among the furze the whole day till I got out of my knowledge when the very wild flowers and birds seemd to forget me and I imagind they were the inhabitants of new countrys the very sun seemd to be a new one and shining in a different quarter of the sky still I felt no fear my wonder seeking happiness had no room for it I was finding new wonders every minute and was walking in a new world often wondering to my self that I had not found the end of the old one the sky still touchd the ground in the distance as usual and my childish wisdoms was puzzld in perplexitys night crept on before I had time to fancy the morning was bye when the white moth had begun to flutter beneath the bushes the black snail was out upon the grass and the frog was leaping across the rabbit tracks on his evening journeys and the little mice was nimbling about and twittering their little earpiercing song with the hedge cricket whispering the hour of waking spirits was at hand which made me hasten to seek home I knew not which way to turn but chance put me in the right track and when I got into my own fields I did not know them every thing seemd so different the church peeping over the woods coud hardly reconcile me (*JCBH* 40-1)

At least two steps precipitate this excursion. First, Clare describes having seen Emmonsales Heath previously, a fact that whets his curiosity. The appearance of the heath, "stretching its yellow furze from my eye into unknown solitudes," creates a sense of Burke's artificial infinite. Clare thinks of the indistinguishable threshold or limit of this heath, and conflates it with the illusory appearance of the horizon. Secondly, he experiences "a feeling to wander about the fields." As he indulges this feeling, he experiences "no fear," only "wonder seeking happiness." This use of the noun *wonder*, which puns on *wander*, refers to "unknown solitudes." Clare's walking, as figured here, as a sort of exploratory travel whereby the walker deliberately seeks out

and encounters new experiences and subjects.[185] It can be distinguished from perfunctory walking, trespassing, or even pleasure walking. Clare's description of the unfamiliar scenery as a foreign country, in which the birds and flowers ("inhabitants of new countrys") fail to recognize him and in which the sun itself is a "new one" shining in a "different quarter" of the sky, contributes to the sense of walking as exploratory travel.[186]

Clare uses the phrase "out of my knowledge" to describe his physical disorientation, but the phrase also implies his mental and perceptual confusion.[187] As he encounters "new wonders every minute," he wonders why he has "not found the end of the old" world. His confusion is caused by the "childish wisdoms" that urge him to look for a discrete limit separating worlds, as the horizon implies. The continued appearance of the horizon (where the "sky touchd the ground") challenges his "brink" hypothesis, and causes him to recalibrate his perceptions to a new concept of the natural world. The anecdote recycles liminal imagery (*worlds end*, *edge*, *brink*, *pit*, *track*), and this repetition images imparts the allure of childish novelty. As in "A Ramble," where the speaker longs to turn aside the "blue blinders" of heaven to see "what gods are doing," Clare entertains a conceit about breaching an absolute, obtainable boundary between the sublunary and cosmic realms; he compares it to the familiar image of a pit. His other belief that looking into water can reveal heaven emphasizes a visual aspect to this conceit. Peculiarly, the youthful Clare considers that one day's journey is sufficient to reach this threshold. In this detail, as in others, we can see how the cyclical movements of the Helpston environment imprint his conceptions. In this case, Clare mistakenly conflates the amount of time required for the sun

[185] We might call it rambling, though the account does not feature extensive verbal or linguistic play.
[186] This account challenges the lococentric characterization of Clare (in which he rejects geographical difference). His youthful lack of fear and joy of "finding new wonders every minute" show his exploratory spirit.
[187] In Peterborough MS A49, Clare assigns a pleasurable effect to the disorientation caused by rambling: "In such a beautiful wilderness of wild flowers we are amused with the very variety & novelty of the scene so much that we in our pleasure loose all sense of weariness or fatigue in the length of our wanderings & get to the end before we are aware of our journey" (*NHP* v).

to travel through the sky and re-illuminate the morning horizon with the distance separating him from the illusion of the horizon.

Though he is "out of his knowledge," Clare accurately identifies the night-time activities of the white moth, black snail, frog, field mouse, and hedge cricket. He reads these signs accurately to restore his temporal orientation.[188] They seem clearer to him than night's gradual entrance. His sense of temporal cycles is stronger and more reliable than his spatial memory is (at this point in his life at least). The awareness of nightfall, activated by his interpretation of certain environmental signals, rescues him. He reports finding the right track home only by chance.

The young boy does cross a boundary, though it is not the sort he anticipates. In walking towards the edge of the horizon, he slowly and imperceptibly loses his spatio-temporal orientation. He imagines that the bird and flower species he encounters are "the inhabitants of new countrys."[189] The sun too seems to be a different sun. The hints of the imagination instigate a certain willful misperception. The boy's acknowledgement of the omnipresent horizon restores his perceptual accuracy, or at least it turns the tide in the passage; after the point in which he acknowledges his perplexity he observes the details that help him rediscover his bearings. Still, a sense of transformation pervades the passage. Though Clare has walked a large circuit, both losing and recovering his orientation, he comes home a stranger. He does not "know" his "own fields" and even the prominence of Glinton spire[190] cannot "reconcile" him to the strange misfit between his perceptions of Helpston that morning and later that day. This prose account

[188] "[I] it is implicit in the notion of intersubjective relations with plants and animals," Jarvis writes, "that he would relearn his kinship with the natural 'inhabitants' of Helpston" (190).
[189] Clare is presumably wandering southwest of Helpston, having passed through Emmonsales Heath. This would place him near the village of Upton, which is surrounded by woodlands and is therefore similar in topography (and biodiversity) to Helpston.
[190] Glinton spire is perhaps one of the most distinct topographical images in Helpston's vicinity.

illustrates the power of walking to both disrupt and confirm place identification. The exploratory and alluring nature of walking can be seen in the boy's psychological and cognitive experience, which goes hand in hand with the imperceptible, increasing succession of steps.

Rambling poems reveal and document a landscape by physical movement and poetic progression because rambling, as a concept, conflates language with physical and mental movement and thus underscores the association between land and text (or between nature and language). Rambling poems foreground a motif of leisure which does more than establish pleasure. The indeterminacy and non-utility of rambling facilitates listening as well as individual inclination and [oral] expression. Often in rambling poems, a speaker's physical movement corresponds (or directly stimulates) his mental and affective experience. "The Progress of Rhyme," for instance, presents its subject—Clare's natural muse and his early attempts at stringing the poetic lyre—in terms of the speaker's boyhood rambles and interactions with the natural elements around him. These rambling poems—rambling because they linguistically ramble but also because they include any scene, no matter how brief, of ambling—valorize thoughtful movement for its ability to trigger aesthetic experience and reveal the kinetic potential underneath surfaces, and they censure mindless travel for its inattention.

In rambling poems, a speaker's physical and spatial movement outdoors cooperates with a kind of mental movement to produce a linguistic codification. The connection between walking, mind, and language may be viewed in terms of what Jarvis calls the aesthetic and formal consequences of Clare's pedestrianism. In "Sunday Walks," for instance, walking enables the speaker to listen to other environmental subjects and eventually compose.[191] Jarvis writes:

[191] Clare, like Wordsworth, composed peripatetically; he remembered lines of verse when he could not write them down (e.g., when he was ploughing) but he also stopped to scribble whenever he could (e.g., while working as a lime-burner). "He often writes of dropping down, a kind of birdlike movement, when some thought strikes him, in order to make a note of it" (Blythe, "*Solvitur*" 21). Clare also reads on his walks.

> The poet's ability to listen in, his humility in face of the 'homly sabbath', is conditional upon the undetermined, hence pleasurable, character of his walk. And if freedom from labour is the prerequisite for his environmental awareness, it is also the ground of his creativity: it is in these wanderings off the 'public way' (l. 100), following the 'winding baulks' (l. 103) or roaming at will over the 'trackless' hills and heaths, that he acquires the facility to 'add a song' to those of 'natures minstrels' (ll. 137-8)—thereby claiming, even while diminishing, his share in the aesthetic produce of leisure. (180-1)

The indeterminacy and non-utility of walking facilitate the speaker's listening (aurality), individual inclination, and singing/composing (orality). Jarvis's reading of the speaker's "song" in "Sunday Walks" supports the association between walking and conversation in two ways. First, that rambling must prefigure singing suggests the same interlocking, or dialogic, character of poetic composition and communication. Secondly, the speaker's song introduces the notion of proportion amongst nature's subjects—one of the unique mental traits associated with walking, according to Jarvis (69). Like one step of many, or one subject among many, his song is added proportionally as a "share." Furthermore, Jarvis observes in Clare's "dominant aesthetic" several principles that apply to both walking and conversation: "in its commitment to seriality, multiplicity and particularity, [it] affects to disown the colonial gaze of the Romantic nature-poet in favour of the 'simpler tongue' of things-as-they-are-experienced" (187).

One of Clare's earliest pieces—"A Ramble"—uses the land-text metaphor to show how a speaker's movement outdoors corresponds with his mental and aesthetic experience. The poem's simple plot describes a speaker's mourning jaunt as he encounters the beauty of a sunrise. This loose structure enables him to compare the diurnal motions of nature to visual art.[192] The speaker quickly exploits the double meaning of *ramble* to show how his walk stimulates a mental sort of

[192] Clare praises DeWint in his "Essay on Landscape": "look at his sketches his studies there is the simplest touches possible giving the most natural possible effects the eye is led over the Landscape as far as a sunbeam can reach & the sky & earth blends into a humanity of greetings & beautiful harmony & symetry of pleasant imaginings—There is no harsh stoppage no bounds to space or any outline further then there is in nature—if we could possibly walk into the picture we fancy we might pursue the landscape beyond those mysterys (not bounds) assigned it so as we can in the fields—so natural & harmonious are his perceptions & tints & lights & shadows" (*Prose* 211).

wandering that is characterized by a high sensitivity to sensory input yet which is grounded in textual detail:

> How sweet and dear
> To Taste's warm bosom and to health's flushed cheek
> Morn's flushing face peeps out her first fond smile,
> Crimsoning the east in many tinted hue
> The horizon round, as edged with brooding mist,
> Penc'ling its seeming circle round so uniform
> In tinge of faintly blue—how lovely then
> The streak which matchless nature, skirting sweet,
> Flushes the edges of the arching sky
> And melting draws the hangings of the morn. (1-10)

By personifying the morning and the sun as visual artists, the verses forge an association between land, text, diurnal movement, and aesthetic production. Tints and shapes abound, as do verbs relating to visual art. The speaker also personifies "Taste" and "health." The drift of these personifications creates a sense of human company, as though the speaker and taste itself were visiting friends. But morning visits the speaker too; her face pops in to cheer and warm him. This spectacle of morning is visual but the speaker describes it in terms of an artificial text. The speaker's perambulation through the landscape connects to the cyclical artistry of the sun. A repetition of circular and curved images (*bosom*, *cheek*, *face*, *smile*, *round*, *circle*, *skirting*, *arching*) further underscores the concentric connection of the speaker and his surrounding environment. In addition to the circular imagery, which establishes a geometric aspect, the speaker foregrounds the artificiality or constructedness of the scene by including various visual lexical groupings. There are color words and phrases: *crimsoning*, *many-tinted hue*, *faintly blue*, *blue sky*, and *blue binders of the heavens*. There are words that emphasize sight, light, or visual effects: *flushing*, *mist*, *penc'ling*, *tinge*, *mark*, *smoke*, *peeping*, *dew-gilt*, *witness*, *appear*, *look*, *eyes*, *blinded*, *blank*, *'ankering gaze*, *blinders*, and *see*. Some words emphasize abstract shapes, spaces, edges, and lines: *horizon*, *round*, *circle*, *streak*, *skirting*, *edges*, *arching*, *sky*, *tracing*, and

nookèd track. Words and phrases such as *rambling*, *tracing*, *muse along*, *behind*, *wound*, *hie*, *tread*, *soodles*, *pass*, and *stalks* connect the intense visual work of the poem with the speaker's perambulations. He too marks the landscape, as he and his dog leave behind a "nookèd track wild wound / From bush to bush." Clare goes so far as to include painterly words that attribute to morning some degree of aesthetic agency and power: *hue*, *limning*, and *draws*. Nature is also personified in a dramatic sense, as though she were performing morning, and stage, dress, and fabric images contribute to the visual play of surfaces in the poem (*skirting*, *hangings*, *dress*, *charm*, *curdled coat*, *wears*, and *blinders*).

In addition to the visual-textual approach to movement and walking, the speaker creates a sense of the cognitive differences represented by kinds of walking. Words like *seeming*, *seems*, *seem*, *appear*, *cannot think*, *witching*, *unmeaning*, *'wildered*, *'quisitive*, *uncomprehended*, and *hidden* underscore the sense of illusion and cognitive difficulty associated with sight. The poem intensifies the mood of cognitive lack by ending with the speaker's stated desire to "Turn the blue blinders of the heavens aside / To see what gods are doing." Walking accumulates intense curiosity, which can both spur more walking or halt walking. To illustrate this effect, the speaker contrasts his own "'ankering gaze" with the blind stalking of the "heedless passenger." Sight, in this case facilitated by walking, is a conduit to aesthetic contemplation of nature and to formation of correct taste.[193] It is noteworthy that the speaker expresses his pleasure in terms of the eye ("Her every trifle please much mine eye—") and the simultaneous desire to dismantle this visual

[193] In "Note A" from Peterborough MS A27, and in several poems, including "A Walk in the Fields," Clare develops his notion of artificial taste, which is represented by the ambiguous figure of the "Man of Taste" (who stands for poetic natural taste or, conversely, for the artificial taste of landscape improvement). In "Note A" he contrasts the clean gravel walks of landscape gardens with the open heaths, commons, and meadows, where there are no spruce borders. He then asserts that the man of taste prefers order, whereas the poet prefers variety. In other texts, however, the man of taste represents a favorable sort of aesthetic which notices the beauties of nature's trifles. I address this ambiguous usage at further length in chapter four.

scene to get behind it and discover "the hidden cause." In fact, his visual preoccupation halts his steps,

> I cannot think it how the reason is
> That every trifle nature's bosom wears
> Should seem so lovely and appear so sweet
> And charm so much my soul while heedless passenger
> Soodles me by, an animated post,
> And ne'er so much as turns his head to look
> But stalks along as though his eyes were blinded
> And as if the witching face of nature
> Held but now a dark unmeaning blank. (33-41)

Though nature's trifles stun the speaker, his stoppage is active. He is an "animated post" subject to the sway of appearances and impressions. In an odd reversal of the poem's rambling motif, walking is figured passive and meaningless by the person who soodles[194] past him with eyes "blinded." This type of walking fails to trigger the visual wonder which the speaker experiences and describes. In contrast with the passenger's blind walking, the speaker's halted movement prompts a mental sort of transport. This shift occurs at the only stanza break in the poem. The speaker proclaims:

> O taste, thou charm
> That so endears and nature makes so lovely,
> Nameless enthusiastic ardour thine,
> That 'wildered 'witching rapture 'quisitive,
> Stooping bent, genius o'er each object—thine
> That longing pausing wishing that cannot pass
> Uncomprehended things without a sigh
> For wisdom to unseal the hidden cause—
> That 'ankering gaze is thine that fainly would
> Turn the blue blinders of the heavens aside
> To see what gods are doing. (42-52)

Taste is responsible for the speaker's stoppage. The alliteration, assonance, elided prefixes, and repetition of the *–ing* ending create rhythm and movement that complement this moment of rapt stillness. The speaker's cognitive ordeal and frustrated desire to "unseal" some hidden truth

[194] To soodle is to saunter lazily.

mimic the dilatory forward movement of his ramble. Though I have spoken about a deep association within Clare's poetics between land and letters, or nature and text, this example suggests that it is the express lack of lettered textuality or logic that inspires forward movement and poetic rapture. Instead visual art is made to service the textual function, though it only baffles the speaker more; nature's painting both stops and spurs physical and mental movement.

This poem contrasts movement and stopping in various ways. Movement triggers aesthetic experience. And stopping, which takes unusual forms in the poem, is mostly associated with heedlessness. If we were to summarize the poem's structure and plot, it would run something like this. Nature, represented as the sunrise, moves in lines 1-10, and this movement is rendered in particularly painterly terms. In lines 11-20, a hypothetical sleep halts the sense of movement, barring both physical and cognitive progress ("snoring supinely"). A turn at line 20 describes the speaker's forward movement, which is reinforced by his imperative tone ("come now, we'll start, / Arise") and supported by the dog's presence. After the speaker registers his taste for nature's every trifle, another turn halts movement, as the speaker contrasts his thoughtful pause with the passenger's blind soodling. This blindness, incidentally, cancels out all visual and color imagery (lines 38-41), to present an "unmeaning" landscape. In the only stanza break in this formless ramble of a poem, the speaker re-focuses the aesthetic and motional power established earlier by incorporating an apostrophe to taste. Taste distinguishes these two walkers. Where the clown simply fails to see, the speaker notes opacity and obscurity. His prolonged stooping "o'er each object" stops his physical momentum, but the remainder is a mental and poetic rambling that hints at the kinetic potential underneath surfaces.

Clare plays with senses of movement and stopping in this poem, mixing their associations until the reader recognizes a special sort of cooperative movement between body and mind (and

soul). Typically, this cooperation occurs outdoors, where the human subject listens with his/her ears and corresponds with his/her mouth and feet. This ramble is two-fold; a walk prompts a mental and vocal ramble about what the speaker encounters on this walk. Again, I would here like to stress the habit in Clare's poetics, to narrate abstract experience via physical, concrete and literal experience.

Like aurality/orality, walking is an ecological mode and a poetic mode. Clare's walking sonnets illustrate this dual capacity in forceful and poignant ways. They adapt a popular and well-established literary form to showcase pedestrian moments and sensory details. Clare's sonnets have been criticized (or praised, depending on the critic) for flouting traditional sonnet form, either by their level of focus, subject matter, lack of turns, or abrupt endings. In "Schoolboys in Winter," Clare purposely flouts the closedness and order of the traditional English sonnet form in order to establish a prevailing mood of leisure associated with play, physical movement, and walking. [195] Yet its tight and interlocking lines enable Clare to portray cycles of movement and corresponding mental states, creating a compact and pleasurable mediation upon the commingling of human movement and play with the external environment.

This sonnet establishes a contrast between leisurely, playful schoolboys and the busy world around them. The subject of the poem is human activity in nature, including: movement, play, interaction, and observation. A general interlocking pattern plays out whereby the boys' physical movements trigger corresponding mental experiences. The boys never do arrive at school in this dilatory ramble, though there are several references to the lessons in nature.[196] The

[195] His sonnets preserve a fourteen line structure, rhyme, and iambic pentameter.

[196] The subject of learning is both a presence and non-presence in the poem. Clare's image of the "letters" formed in the sky by the flight of the geese repeats the trope of the book of nature as well as the corollary notion of nature as a teacher or educational source. The boys, in a sense, practice their spelling while playing hookey. They also observe bird habitats, identify botanical species, and exercise. Their imaginative and intellectual schoolwork is further implied by the poem's repetitive stress on their mental states. It is interesting to note that the schoolhouse is located in a neighboring village; this detail underscores the "unlettered" sense of Helpston that Clare establishes in

subject of learning is invoked by the title and line two ("to neighboring village school with playing speed"), but it exists more as a non-presence in the poem.

The poem represents physical movement as a catalyst of mental activity, and it demonstrates Clare's talent for presenting a subject vividly within the confines of structured, rhymed, and metered verse. This sonnet combines English and Italian elements. The rhyme scheme (ABABABACACCDCD) contains both quatrains and couplets, and the poem recycles its end sounds in quatrain two before it moves on to new ones in quatrain three. There is a noticeable lack of variety of end sounds (only four); this detail sounds out the circular and interlocking movements of the titular boys. The poem's structural and sonic quality of interlocking cycles parallels its thematic emphasis upon the human cycle of physical and mental movement.

Like other portraits of leisure, this poem presents a variety of pastimes and games associated with the natural environment. The boys: (1) ramble to school with "playing speed, / Loitering with pastimes' leisure till they quake"; (2) look for droves of wild geese and watch the "letters which their journeys make"; (3) pluck haws, hips and sloes; (4) slide on top of frozen lakes; (5) and run races with their shadows, which become imaginary giants on the "shining snow." Each of these activities exemplifies a cycle of initial leisure, playful movement, and a resulting phenomenon. The poet's use of temporal indicators (*still*, *till*, *oft*, *anew*, *then*) and verbs of physical transformation (*quake*, *awake*, *glow*) also support the cyclic structure and theme. The first three lines set up the trope of progression and fulfillment—of physical movement and a corresponding phenomenon: "The schoolboys still their morning rambles take / To neighboring village school with playing speed, / Loitering with pastimes' leisure till they quake." In this

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"Helpstone." It also maximizes the educational activities which do take place within their local village and habitat—the wintry schoolhouse of nature.

example, the speaker foregrounds the children's movement and progress. We learn that such rambles are customary ("still their morning rambles take"). We also learn that the schoolboys have some distance to cover en route to this neighboring village, a fact which provides a spatial element of delay and dilation. The participial adjective *playing* in the adverbial phrase "with playing speed" introduces contradiction (between delay and urgency) and further emphasizes the protracted progress of the travelers. Iambic pentameter, alliteration of the [th] sound, and sibilance create a sustaining rhythm not unlike the falling footsteps of walking.[197] The overall poem has a truncated yet measured flow. Leisure is the remainder—the thing that carries over to each new scene to instigate another cycle of action and fulfillment, as it does in line 3 when the boys "loiter with pastimes' leisure." This phrase's redundant emphasis on ease maximizes the mood of physical freedom. The iambic gallop of lines 1 and 2, so helpful in drawing the listener in, gives way to the trochaic (and alliterative) triple emphasis upon LOITering, PASTimes, and LEISure. But this maximal phase must soon conclude; the critical mass of pleasure and leisure causes the boys to "quake" at the end of line three, just before they move on to their next enterprise.

These cycles end with a visual marker, as each motion becomes fulfilled: the boys look up to the geese droves and then see their visual letter formations[198], they pluck haws "on which the fieldfares feed," they skim over ice "where they like shadows go," and they blow on their fingers "till they glow." The poem's strong visual sense is also exemplified by the movement of the winter sun, which creates shadows, shines on the snowy surfaces, and casts "pale splendour."

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[197] Clare does switch to trochees, and some lines fall in to tetrameter, but the alternating stress pattern prevails throughout, maintaining a tight rhythm which contrasts nicely with the boy's dilatory rambles and sport.

[198] This image also appears in Clare's prose fragment "[Leisure]": "The wild geese scudding along and making all the letters of the Alphabet as they flew" (*JCBH* 38). These two appearances, in prose and verse, suggest the steps of SLD: active sensory experience, recording or copying information relating to that experience, and representing it in fresh composition.

Its presence throughout the day is like the protection and supervision of a caregiver and teacher. The sun also serves as a spatial marker of time on this leisure-filled day of hookey and it concludes the sonnet, having in effect eclipsed the intended destination of the schoolhouse.

Just what are the phenomena or mental experiences triggered by the boys' physical pastimes? As noted above, the poem's interlocking cycles of movement (at the line-level) correspond with simple visual phenomena (geese formations, shadows, glowing fingers). Each gambit is connected to a specific result. But the poem also portrays a broader result—something which is not verbalized. The word "splendour" in line 14 comes closest to intimating a sense of this payoff. The "pale splendour of the winter sun" graces and enlivens the scene and imbues the reader with a sense of the boys' invigoration. As they move throughout their day, finding amusements outside of the schoolhouse, their minds glow with "fresh pastimes" like their ruddy cheeks. The mental phenomenon that results from action is their ecological sensibility, enhanced creativity, communal values, and ensuing joy. The schoolhouse is unnecessary to the life of the mind, which receives vital stimulation via physical engagement in and with the external environment. The boys illustrate the effective and automatic relation that exists between subjects in an environment, which necessarily entails human and non-human activities. "Schoolboys in Winter" depicts an environmental engagement structured by repetitive play cycles that involve natural objects and that germinate in the boys' minds. These gambits associate interactional movement outdoors with mental stimulation, but the association is not causal. Rather it seems to operate by a principal of temporal and spatial contiguity, as instanced by the gambit of lines 7-10: "—and on each shallow lake / Making glib slides where they like shadows go / Till some fresh pastimes in their minds awake / And off they start anew." The back-and-forth movement

between Clare's human subjects and their co-habitants comprises a central function in Clare's poetics. This function is served by the poem's interlocking sound and sense cycles.

"Stepping Stones," also accentuates leisurely human movement and activity in connection with features of the landscape in order to illustrate the power of walking to engage or disengage a subject from his environment. This sonnet calls upon a familiar framework to present a rustic scene. A weary traveler and a leisurely young boy both occupy a bed of stepping-stones which cross a meadow stream. These two figures represent a contrast between the whimsical pleasure of leisure activities and the compulsory yet wearisome transit across a given landscape. The stones are not a walkway so much as a stage for human activity. Here, the "boy, with laughing leisure in his face, / sits on the midmost stone, in very whim, / To catch the struttles, that beneath him swim" (4-6). The traveler, only mentioned once, "steps" with "a weary pace" across this spot that "look[s] picturesque amid springs golden gleams" (3, 2). Though he moves across this rural scene, he is insensate except for his personal weariness. Walking for purposes of transportation, in this case, is rendered tedious and unrewarding. Clare's speaker spends little time with the traveler figure, though, and returns to the theme (and plot) of youthful play in lines 10 and 13. In each instance of youthful leisure, the boy is playing or interacting with some creature in the environment. In line 6, he attempts to catch fish. In line 10, he "hunts to find the pooty shell." The uncomplicated opposition between weary traveler and laughing boy is pleasantly disrupted by "the boisterous geese with golden broods," in lines 11-4. These fowl "Hiss fierce & daring in their summer moods" and thus instigate a group of passing boys, who "pull off their hats while passing bye / In vain to fright themselves being forced to flye." This final display of human movement illustrates a humorous interchange between environmental

subjects and it models responsive interaction with the environment, particularly as it results from movement outdoors.

"Careless Rambles," is similar to the two previous sonnets because it uses the narrative vehicle of the walk to showcase sensory delights and the pleasures of leisure, but it differs from the previous sonnets because it presents only one narrative figure. Moreover, the poem portrays sensory and intellectual impressions which alternately pause and propel the speaker's ambulation. The ironic overlap between the poem's movement and the speaker's footsteps, a feature of the rambling motif addressed earlier, acts out the peculiar and automatic correspondence between one's physical and mental bearings.

"Careless Rambles" presents one human subject (the speaker) in a natural environment. The poem maximizes the motif of leisure—no hapless travelers here. The summer setting, the mood of luscious ease, and the speaker's "idle will," accentuate the leisure indicated by the title. The verse presents a dilatory and aimless sort of walking in what seems to be a suspended state of Eden filled with sensory pleasures. Extensive interaction does occur in this idyll, though, as the speaker's human drives and desires operate. A general shift from concrete imagery to abstraction occurs throughout the poem. The speaker identifies various pleasurable activities: wandering, kneeling to sip water, lying under the shade of a maple bush, resting, cropping and eating peas, straying amid woodland-walks, plucking and eating strawberries, musing, and treading. For his idle ramble across this summer landscape, nature rewards the speaker with sustenance, shelter, and pleasure. A sense of Eden and bounty pervades the scene, as the speaker's role in this ecosystem is naturalized and protected. This abundant environment never receives from the speaker—it simply gives. After being nourished, the speaker experiences a mental sort of satiation:

> Where oaks for aye o'er their old shadows stand;
> 'Neath whose dark foliage, with a welcome hand,
> I pluck the luscious strawberry, ripe and red
> As Beauty's lips;—and in my fancy's dreams,
> As 'mid the velvet moss I musing tread,
> Feel Life as lovely as her picture seems. (9-14)

The transition from body to mind, and from concreteness to abstraction, occurs with the speaker's impromptu simile comparing the summer strawberry to the lips of Beauty. The simile is mixed because it implies the additional metaphor of Beauty's personification and eroticization (as female). But the figure works. The lips of Beauty call to mind the lips of the speaker, who eats the berry and almost seems to kiss Beauty. The effulgence of this alimentary and romantic moment spills over to the speaker's consciousness in a brief moment of pause (noted by the em dash). Here nature's bounty transfers to his mind and he is wrought up by "fancy's dreams." A remainder of satiation and pleasure prompts the familiar and repetitious cycle (seen in the previous poems) of physical and mental movement. In this case, the speaker is propelled forward in ambulation, thus restoring his physical interaction with the environment. Though something remains from this moment of Fancy: musing and treading "'mid the velvet moss" the speaker "Feel[s] Life as lovely as her picture seems." This final line presents the first mental verb for the speaker: *feel*.[199] Though it emphasizes the power of his perception and his experience of summer, it introduces a hint of uncertainty. Might this Eden be a convincing reproduction at best? Some element of care seeps into this careless ramble—an anxiety about the work and effect of representation. This uncertainty might be Clare's way of accounting for the peculiar and regular fluctuation between physical and mental sensations.

[199] In this instance, the verb *to feel* describes a mental or emotional activity, not a physical one; though the previous line's reference to "the velvet moss" invokes the tactile sense and complicates easy categorization between bodily and mental feeling. Still, I want to emphasize the passive aspect of the speaker's *feeling life*; this experience of fancy, dreaming, musing, and feeling *happen* to him after he plucks the strawberry.

In the sonnet "Trespass," written at Northborough sometime between 1835-7, Clare exposes the legal, political, and economic exigencies that regulate walking. Like two of the previous sonnets, "Trespass" uses the sonnet form to symbolize a real contrast between freedom of movement and stasis, but this poem does not idealize leisure or walking (as an index of leisure). Rather, it is a complaint for the loss of pedestrians' rights of way. "Trespass" employs the poetic frame of a [problematic] walk to demonstrate the effects of enclosure upon the speaker's environmental engagement.

"Trespass" narrates a speaker's physical and mental experience trespassing on private land. There is nothing transgressive about the verse form. This English sonnet adheres to strict iambic pentameter. Each quatrain is composed of a set of two heroic couplets and a final heroic couplet appears in lines 13-4 after a noticeable turn in the speaker's voice. Though this sequence does not follow a strict Shakespearean or Spenserian rhyme scheme, the poem's break with formal patterns ends there.[200] The couplets overlap with the poem's sense units, so that each sentence or thought is neatly contained in a rhyming couplet. This organization, in which content conforms to its container, illustrates a pleasurable sort of poetic enclosure that ironically contrasts with the content of the poem. It also establishes a hopping, forward moving effect that goads the reader to consent with the speaker's act of trespass.

"Trespass" contrasts the concept of pedestrian freedom with the reality of land ownership and trespass laws. In the face of another person's absolute land ownership, the speaker risks walking "where there was no path." He fantasizes about owning land, indicates his own poverty, and expresses a principle of community (as united by non-ownership). The thematic contrast between conceptual freedom and real constraint is displayed by a mental and physical dichotomy

[200] "Trespass" includes a linguistic pattern that divides it into two thematic portions (physical and mental activity), though I do not consider this a formal verse pattern, or an instance of transgressive verse form.

that divides the poem. The first seven lines of the poem present physical verbs and verb phrases (including the phrase *dreaded walking*[201]): *press*, *turn to look*, *go*, *venture*, and *gain the road*. In lines 8-14, mental verbs proliferate: *fancy*, *think*, *appear*, and *feel*.

"Trespass" shows the political and practical realities of walking in early nineteenth century England. It does not idealize the leisure or freedom to be had by walking, but rather it uses the trope of walking to publicize the political attack on commoning and pedestrians' rights of way. The speaker moves in two senses. Physically, he is unimpeded, though he ventures across private property boundaries. Nonetheless, trespass law thwarts his mental and imaginative movement. His walking does not generate imaginative fancies nor does it bring about creative interactions with inhabitants in the landscape. Rather, the threat of retribution hangs over his head and triggers a cycle of fear, guilt, and alienation. Thus, the speaker's freedom is impeded in two ways: he must stick to the road and so must his thoughts. The use of anaphora at the end of the first quatrain creates a sense of mounting dread: "I dreaded walking where there was no path / And pressed with cautious tread the meadow swath / And always turned to look with wary eye / And always feared the owner coming by." The contrasting transition word "[y]et" in the beginning of line 5 indicates a small turn whereby the trespasser gains momentum; he notes the appearance of beauty. What follows are verbs of perception: *appeared* and *fancied*. This small turn prefigures a larger turn at line 8, where mental verbs take over. The boundary between physical verbs and mental verbs is accentuated in line 7 by the "road where all are free." Despite the prohibition against walking, the speaker uses words of walking as well as lexical relatives.

[201] "[D]readed walking" sums up the poem's idea. It combines an emotional verb with a physical one, just as the poem portrays actual walking and the feelings of fear and alienation. These two aspects of trespassing operate together and yet separately. The speaker chooses to violate boundaries in spite of his negative emotions. Clare uses two unique verbs–*dreaded* and *feared*–in these first seven lines. These verbs do double duty; they portray mental states which are accompanied by physical effects.

These span throughout the poem's two halves, and include: *walking*, *path*, *tread*, *swath*, *turn*, *coming*, *gone*, *ventured*, *trespass*, and *walk*.

As mentioned briefly, visual perception and appearance matter in this poem. The word *appearance* occurs three times, *look* occurs twice, and *eye* occurs once. Appearances encourage the speaker to move forward and yet they shame him, checking his mental movement and encouraging delusional fantasies of ownership. This ironic tension (between encouragement and constraint) is portrayed by the fact that the speaker is both fearful and emboldened by the beauty he witnesses: "Yet everything about where I had gone / Appeared so beautiful I ventured on" (5-6). These lines establish a sense of inertia whereby the ground covered justifies and triggers more walking. Once the speaker has crossed the property boundary, a force (of beauty? of ground covered?) compels further trespass. The lines which follow initiate his imaginary punishment: "And when I gained the road where all are free / I fancied every stranger frowned at me / And every kinder look appeared to say / 'You've been on trespass on your walk today'" (7-10). The words *fancied*, *kinder*, and *appeared* indicate the speaker's ironic awareness (of his undetected crime). The form of the trespass law acts like a Calvinist god. Certain members of society are elect land owners while others can be characterized by a fallen state of moral weakness. Clare's speaker contributes to the gloom. He experiences dread and fear, confesses his wrongdoing, and he portrays judgment in the form of prosopopoeia: the passers-by are threatening "stranger[s]" whose looks utter accusations. Still, trespass law cannot dispense justice or irresistible grace. It only inspires fantasy and covetousness. The land itself—and the condition of the land having already been encountered by the speaker—signifies beauty, encouragement, and grace.

Though encountered land metes out a sort of grace in "Trespass," walking alienates the speaker from the human inhabitants of this community. There is a sanctioned form of walking

and an unsanctioned form. The "strangers" walk according to law, and it is by walking that they encounter and [appear to] condemn the speaker. The force of law, the speaker's self-criminalization, and his strained relation with others gives way (at least contiguously) to a fantasy of ownership in line 12. No hint of the speaker's property (or desire thereunto) appears in the first "physical" portion of the poem (lines 1-7). After this short-lived desire, the speaker closes the sonnet with the pragmatic recognition of his poverty. The finishing couplet ennobles poverty as a basis of communal unity and of equal land use according to the commoning system. The speaker's alienation is first reversed by the appeal to non-ownership in line 13 and then it is reinstated by the final line: "But, having naught, I never feel alone / And cannot use another's as my own" (13-4). This reclamation of commoning renovates the speaker's fantasy of ownership into a reality of community. The uniting principle of this community is a lack of personal property; but this principle becomes perverted by the introduction of private ownership (via enclosure) which thwarts the peasant's access to local land and his ability to walk about and interact with his environment.

The early asylum poem "A Walk in the Forest" presents walking as a platform for sensory stimulation, communal connection, and news. Along with aurality, walking triggers the substance of the poem—the events, details, and images noticed by the rambling speaker. The speaker lists a variety of sights and locations along a walk in the forest and affirms his affection for these familiar points, which seem almost to resemble persons. There is a strong sense of the habitual in the lines' sights and sounds. The speaker has taken this walk many times before. His familiarity is demonstrated by the fact that he recognizes and fondly mentions "friendly Campbell," "the breakneck hills," "Beach Hill," "Bucket's Hill," the "tinkling bell" of the cows moving homeward, the woodman, and his dog. Tidy couplets underscore this sense of

familiarity. The interlocking rhyme scheme creates forward emphasis and a mood of exploration; yet this walk only recounts known sights. The poem also conveys a personal tone: "I love" is repeated three times and the speaker foregrounds his personal senses ("I hear," "And see"). However, this personal element is nominal. Despite focalization from the speaker/walker's perspective, the poem presents mostly description of the environment and its inhabitants. The point of the walk has little to do with the speaker's subjective state, but rather the goings-on in this forest community. Walking facilitates acquisition of information. Like Clare's fern-hunts, botanizing rambles, or walks to visit Henderson and Artis, the speaker's walk allows him to connect with a place and its dwellers. The connection, in this instance, is spatial ("leave me high and half the world below"), temporal ("daily rounds"), sensory ("I love to see," "I hear the cows"), social ("friendly Campbell"), and mnemonic. The documentary ethic, so strong in Clare's poetics, takes over the final five lines of the poem, where the speaker focuses on a particular scene: "And see the woodman in the forest dwell, / Whose dog runs eager where the rabbit's gone— / He eats the grass, then kicks and hurries on, / Then scrapes for hoarded bone and tries to play / And barks at larger dogs and runs away." The "boisterous geese" of "Stepping Stones" come to mind. Clare often finishes a poem with an animal tableau. The dog's motions and motives are singled out in pleasurable detail, providing a singular image (sans speaker) to end this walk. Though this asylum poem describes a walk in Epping Forest, its tone of familiarity and interactive plot are redolent of the lost landscape of [pre-enclosure] Helpston.

Clare presents another aspect of his walking life in his prose piece "Journey out of Essex,"[202] which describes his 80 mile walk from Dr. Allen's asylum in Epping Forest, Essex to Northborough, Northamptonshire. "Journey out of Essex" is a compelling and original account of foot travel that exposes walking's ecological and compositional functions from a different

[202] 1841, written between Clare's institutionalizations at High Beach and the Northampton General Lunatic Asylum.

angle. Unlike Clare's walking poems, "Journey out of Essex" does not show the power of walking to connect subjects; it does not have the measured pleasures and leisure of the sonnets or the rambling discoveries of the longer walking poems. Furthermore, "Journey out of Essex" is set outside of Northamptonshire and Helpston. In this prose piece, walking reveals the speaker's fundamental sense of alienation, though he practices walking with a faith that his physical return to Helpston[203] will rectify his loss. This prose account nonetheless demonstrates Clare's sensitivity to the physical environment and his compositional practice of incorporating details from his walks. At several key moments of disorientation, Clare's emotional conjuring of the memory of Mary Joyce propels his movement forward—for he has associated Helpston with her. "Journey out of Essex" demonstrates a spatial-affective correspondence, according to which the speaker's attitudes and ideas about his physical orientation are impacted by past memories and emotions.

Walking in "Journey out of Essex" co-operates with a sort of environmental engagement characterized by discomfort, confusion, privation, and suffering. Unlike the local walks represented in the rambling poems and the sonnets, the "Journey out of Essex" denotes a truly linear walk and as such presents a succession of new locations and faces, few of which offer succor or communal engagement. This alienating effect of compulsory walking contrasts with the connective capacity of local, leisured walking.

This account does not include natural history; nor does it portray the motif of rambling leisure seen in earlier poems. Clare's primary goal throughout the piece is to depict a process of homecoming. Jarvis compares this instance of compulsory travel to Clare's move to Northborough in 1832, noting in both Clare's "mental distress" (160). Like "Trespass," this

[203] He is really walking home to Northborough, but in his delusions of Mary Joyce he is certainly thinking of Helpston.

account reveals pragmatic details about walking. It contains a series of chronological diary entries that indicate the villages along Clare's route and provide a sense of schematic progression. The account portrays the mechanics and logistics of walking, and these are not idealized.[204] After an abortive attempt to escape with a crew of "gipseys," Clare leads his army of one to Enfield, the nearest town. His walking account includes details about stops, roadside inns, directions, hunger and nutrition, places of shelter, weather conditions and temperature, the gravel of the Great North Road, the hole in his shoe, and the hobbling pain in his foot. On this drive homeward, Clare sings to pass the time pleasantly and when he discovers he is near his destination, his spirits pick up. He records the lucky breaks—when a man on horseback throws him a penny for ale, or when two old Helpston acquaintances manage to give him 5 pence. But he becomes increasingly fatigued and "foot foundered" as his journey progresses. The occasional boons or amiable connections he strikes up fail to overturn the sense of displacement and loss that pervades the piece.

Throughout "Journey out of Essex," Clare maintains the delusion that he is journeying home to see his first "wife," Mary Joyce. Though Mary has been dead for some time[205], Clare believes he has been institutionalized as punishment for his bigamy in marrying both Mary and Patty. Eventually his wife Patty spots him while she is riding in a cart and takes him aboard. He does not recognize her, thinking her "either drunk or mad." When he does arrive at

[204] Clare writes two verses ("Two Songs from Child Harold") in the five-month interim between his tenure at Dr. Allen's Asylum and the Northampton General Lunatic Asylum. Both songs employ a trope by which Clare spatializes an abstract or emotional subject. In Song A, Mary Joyce's love and affection are home, towards which the speaker wanders wearily. In this case, walking is a form of suffering and a sign of disaffection. Song B also conflates the power of place with the power of memory and affection. It rehearses a here/there (and now/then) framework as it portrays the speaker's alienation and Mary's absence. The fourth stanza mentions the pleasurable, juvenile sort of walking that characterized the speaker's lost childhood: "The churchyard where she used to play / My feet could wander hourly / My school walks there every day / Where she made winter flowery." These two songs, together with "Journey out of Essex," demonstrate how movement is also traumatic. In "The Flitting" (also called "On Leaving the Cottage of My Birth") Clare represents his forced movement from Helpston as a dislocation from, and loss of, a lifelong friend.

[205] In this account, Clare refers to the "old story of her being dead" as "blarney[,] having seen her myself about a twelvemonth ago alive and well and as young as ever" (*JCBH* 264).

Northborough, finally, his first act of homecoming is to note Mary's absence. He does not recognize his home entirely, though he does emphasize his mobility: "so here I am homeless at home and half gratified to feel that I can be happy anywhere" (*JCBH* 264). In a following passage, Clare refers to his beloved Mary again: "Returned home out of Essex and found no Mary—her and her family are as nothing to me now though she herself was once the dearest of all—'and how can I forget" (*JCBH* 265). In these two passages, Clare presents a distinct sense of home based on memory, feeling, and personal presence. The spatial context of Northborough is irrelevant; in fact, he claims to be happy anywhere. This conclusion demonstrates a rejection of the correlation between affect and locale, though the journey and its account depict a powerful correspondence between locus and affect.[206]

In keeping with this distinct and personalized sense of home, Clare's orienteering overlaps with references to Mary (including the Scottish tune he sings, "Highland Mary"). Clare's emotional and interpersonal disorientation[207] works together with his spatial disorientation in this prose piece. At one crucial point, he reaches a fork, loses his bearings, and wonders which way is north. He tramples on for several more miles before he can affirm his direction:

> there was a sort of shed or gighouse at the end but I did not like to lie there as the people were up—so I still travelled on the road was very lonely and dark in places being overshaded with trees at length I came to a place where the road branched off into two turnpikes one to the right about and the other straight forward and on going bye my eye glanced on a mile stone standing under the hedge so I heedlessly turned back to read it to see where the other road led to and on doing so I found it led to London I then suddenly forgot which was North or South and though I narrowly examined both ways I could see no tree or bush or stone heap that I could recollect I had passed so I went on mile after

[206] Movement inaugurates the concepts of nostalgia and nature. Clare's physical journey north, towards his native home, shows a belief in the correlation between place and feeling—a belief which rests upon Mary Joyce's presence. His recognition of her physical absence disrupts this correlation. The paradoxical conclusion of Clare's account may be explained by the topographical alienation he experiences as a result of the Helpston enclosures and his move to Northborough, or by the person loss he experiences.

[207] He fails to recognize his wife and child when they collect him.

> mile almost convinced I was going the same way I came and these thoug[h]ts were so strong upon me that doubt and hopelessness made me turn so feeble that I was scarcely able to walk yet I could not sit down or give up but shuffled along till I saw a lamp shining as bright as the moon which on nearing I found was suspended over a Tollgate before I got through the man came out with a candle and eyed me narrowly but having no fear I stopt to ask him wether I was going northward and he said when you get through the gate you are; so I thanked him kindly and went through on the other side and gathered my old strength as my doubts vanished I soon cheered up and hummed the air of highland Mary as I went on (*JCBH* 261-2)

Though shelter is available, Clare is wary of taking it. This choice underscores his loneliness. The road is also "lonely and dark," and he soon becomes disoriented. Strangely, he makes the correct choice of paths, though he doubts it. After crossing the toll, a limen between the "doubt and hopelessness" (and hunger) of the south and the passage north to Mary, Clare revives and his doubts vanish. At this juncture, Clare's spatial re-orientation produces an emotional effect, as shown by his spontaneous musical flourish.

As a record both of physical movement, and mental and emotional states, "Journey out of Essex" suggests that spatial orientation (and the related categories of place and perambulation) and affect are associated. Scholars of walking affirm, in various ways, the psychological element of perambulation and movement. Eric J. Leed outlines the ideological functions of mobility, referring to the "indeterminacies" as well as the pleasure and autonomy of mobility (13). Jarvis contends that pedestrian motion "can condition or mediate thought and perception" (67). "[R]arely a parochialism of the body," walking "leads a mental and aesthetic life that is both distinct from, and continuous with, its bodily one" (Jarvis 4). Clare's walk triggers perceptions, thoughts, desires, and analogies which he quickly writes down upon returning home.

Another instance of the affective and spatial overlap occurs early in Clare's escape. Clare has been "careless in mapping down the rout as the Gipsey told" him and so misses a lane to Enfield; he must rely upon the assistance of a person at the "'Labour in vain' public house"

(*JCBH* 258). Clare goes on to cover a distance of nearly twenty miles on this first day, at which point his "legs were nearly knocked up" and he "began to stagger" (*JCBH* 258). Scaling a pile of fencing, Clare finds a hovel and lays down on a pile of clover bundles. He has an "uneasy dream" in which his "first wife" Mary is taken away from him:

> I thought my first wife lay on my left arm and somebody took her away from my side which made me wake up rather unhappy I thought as I awoke somebody said "Mary" but nobody was near—I lay down with my head towards the north to show my self the steering point in the morning (*JCBH* 258)

It is possible that Clare's emotional distress and displacement instigates the dream of Mary in the first place. His waking re-emphasizes his feelings of unhappiness and loneliness ("nobody was near"). He even seems to have an auditory hallucination, hearing Mary's name although no one is about. At this moment of emotional loss and disorientation, he lays his head down "towards the north" so as to plan his physical orientation at sunrise. In this case, directional certainty seems to assuage his pangs and substitute for emotional presence.

The correlation between spatio-temporal proprioception and emotion is another way of approaching the physical-mental framework repeated throughout Clare's poems. Clare's ability to formulate and portray the spatial-affective correlation in his poetry, and to do so from a variety of vantage points, compromises the nature-culture binary. Like the transmission of sound, walking is a transgressive activity; it crosses over boundaries into new spaces. It tests out what is there. To describe it according to Ralph Pite's terminology, walking cuts across the subject-object oriented conservation of light ecology and the unifying vision of deep ecology.[208] Walking is a mode of ecological knowing.

In the "Essay on Landscape," which is properly a prose examination of the virtues and failures of various landscape painters, Clare reveals his opinion that the true essence of a

[208] See Pite's "How Green Were the Romantics?" in *Studies in Romanticism* 35.3, pp. 361, 363, and 366-372.

landscape is only to be experienced by walking and the direct visual and aural contact that it affords. Hence the essay's privileging of found objects over the objects of fancy—for such objects can only be discovered on foot, and by the engagement of the physical senses with the external environment. This essay promotes a connection between walking and art when it describes how the artistry of nature seems to have "stept out out of the Arabian Nights Entertainment" and when it suggests "walk[ing] into the picture" as a means of confirming DeWint's superior landscape artistry (*Prose* 211).

In the "Essay on Landscape," Clare privileges found objects over objects of the fancy (*Prose* 214). He thus praises landscape painters such as DeWint and Rippgingille, who do not invent whimsical landscape features but rather present these as they are found in the natural environment:

> yet when nature dreams herself into extravagant vagaries & fancy pictures they are always beautiful fancys & who hath not seen some of these vagaries on beholding a Forrest cloaked in the magic foliage of a snowstorm—while walking in the fields in winter when the snow hung in light fairey shadows upon every tree & bush & tiny stalk of witherd herbage—what beautiful bits of effective landscape hang about the skirts of a forrest with its shelterd cowsheds underneath its magnificent branches glows like a scene of fairyland—or a rural picture of enchantment with its pendant branches—its picturesque cattle—their hovel & haystack—& the foddering boy all attired in the brilliancy of a snowstorm like some supernatural prospect just stept out of the Arabian Nights Entertainment. (*Prose* 214)

In the passage, Clare defends a notion of nature as a skillful artist. His emphasis upon nature's artificial capacity calls to mind (and challenges) Byron's notion of a reciprocal art that denies full poetry to nature. Clare describes a fantastic sort of [visual] art practiced by nature. He uses words such as *vagaries*, *fancys*, *magic*, *fairey*, *beautiful*, *effective*, *landscape*, *magnificent*, *enchantment*, *brilliancy*, and *supernatural* to depict nature's scenes (her dreams)—though these

very words convey the sense of whimsy and fancy he chides in other landscape painters.[209] Whereas Byron attributes poetry to a reciprocal relation between nature and poet (who is alone the master of artifice), Clare sees an independent source of poetry in nature that does not necessitate human framing but which can be accessed by humans via sensory contact. Clare's vision of poetry enlists the poet as the audience and critic of nature's art; he completes the interpretive circle and models it for others.[210] Thus, Clare's version of the relation between nature and humanity calls upon a subject's hermeneutic, aural, and ambulatory faculties. In this passage, the "fancy pictures" of nature are displayed as a function of walking ("who hath not seen some of these vagaries on beholding a Forrest . . . while walking in the fields"). The process is similar to Byron's description of reciprocal poetry. The mutual presence of a natural scene and a walker creates something larger than the sum of its parts. In this particular example, walking is the artificial work of the poet; Clare does not refer to writing, speech, or sound. And Clare, in typical fashion, goes so far as to attribute walking (and poetic artifice) to this natural scene, which "like some supernatural prospect just stept out of the Arabian Nights Entertainment." The scene also demonstrates the cooperation of environmental features, including non-human and human images (e.g., a snowstorm, cowsheds, fields, cattle, a haystack, and the foddering boy).

Walking goes a significant way towards engaging an interpretive cycle between non-human and human subjects, and thus producing a comprehensive understanding of the environment that involves humans and non-humans. It starts an interactive and cooperative process (between the walker and the ground/nature) whereby the walker views a spectacle. Solnit

[209] I wonder if Clare is just pulling these words from a lexical store of "art" words. His use of certain terms ("taste" for instance) does fluctuate throughout his prose.
[210] Or is it a trope? Perhaps the poet qua documentary audience member/critic is a useful figure to achieve certain effects in meaning.

elucidates the visual and motional aspects of walking, and suggests how these constitute a cognitive experience:

> Walking can also be imagined as a visual activity, every walk a tour leisurely enough both to see and to think over the sights, to assimilate the new into the known. Perhaps this is where walking's peculiar utility for thinkers comes from. The surprises, liberations, and clarifications of travel can sometimes be garnered by going around the block as well as going around the world, and walking travels both near and far. Or perhaps walking should be called movement, not travel, for one can walk in circles or travel around the world immobilized in a seat, and a certain kind of wanderlust can only be assuaged by the acts of the body itself in motion, not the motion of the car, boat, or plane. It is the movement as well as the sights going by that seems to make things happen in the mind, and this is what makes walking ambiguous and endlessly fertile: it is both means and end, travel and destination. (5-6)

As she clarifies her point, Solnit hits upon the dual and paradoxical character of walking. Her emphasis upon the walker's movement as well as the adjoining movement of sights and the creative effect upon the human mind underscores the sort of walking I have been discussing—a walking characterized by interactive exchange between environmental subjects. This exchange is social and connective. Clare's personification of nature, and of Helpston as an extended family, cooperates with the connective function of walking (and listening/speaking). Solnit testifies to this connective function when she speaks of walking as a sort of conversation between cooperative elements: "Walking, ideally, is a state in which the mind, the body, and the world are aligned, as though they were three characters finally in conversation together, three notes suddenly making a chord" (5). The tropes of talking and walking are useful to a person's conception of his or her relation to a particular natural environment. Both cross over discrete boundaries to connect individual entities. Both provide a concrete, delimitable, and recordable activity by which to exercise this relation.

Walking informs Clare's ecological sensibility and way of being, both of which are characterized by scientific wonder, ethical care, moral sentiment, personal attachment, and

communication. Walking achieves this impact because it facilitates an exchange between the human subject and a surrounding landscape and its various inhabitants and features. This exchange is one aspect of the underlying association between land and text, seen throughout Clare's poetry. Solnit accounts for this exchange by alluding to the peripatetic tradition initiated by Rousseau and Thelwall. She links walking with thinking: "There is an "odd consonance between internal and external passage, one that suggests that the mind is also a landscape of sorts and that walking is one way to traverse it" (6). This link implies something very crucial about the way the human mind works. If walking is a way to explore both the external and internal worlds, and to facilitate connections between entities, then perhaps the mind and its contents can be understood spatially. The metaphoric conflation of land and text takes on a new charge when considered from this perspective. The fact that so few of Clare's late life poems narrate details from actual walks (and instead pull material from his memory of Helpston, childhood, Mary Joyce, etc.) lends credence to Solnit's notion of the mind as a landscape.

Clare's rambling poems, walking sonnets, and prose pieces about walking and landscape display the habit in Clare's poetics of portraying physical movement within a communal environment and the concomitant linguistic and poetic record that movement produces. The exercise of aural-oral correspondence and of walking is the work of an embedded communal member. Both actions establish the back-and-forth movement that constitutes Clare's documentary poetics. It is not accidental that Clare's poetics relies so heavily upon personification, prosopopoeia, and an overall emotional investment in land and nature. In his poetic vision, visitation, correspondence, and exchange between all the inhabitants of a community produce meaning and value. For him poetry's source springs from one's active participation in, and with, nature. What is crucial here, alongside the issue of the validity or the

truth of such a reciprocity, is the abiding impulse that unites spatio-temporal activity with linguistic, aesthetic, and communal activity. Walking exercises human agency, records history, and unites communities.

Chapter Four: Taste

> "But he, the man of science and of taste, / Sees wealth far richer in the worthless waste." John Clare, "Shadows of Taste"

In order to better comprehend Clare's conception of a reciprocal relation between humans and localized nature, and appreciate the literary contribution of his loco-documentary poetics, a discussion of aesthetics and taste, as these were understood during Clare's period, is required. This discussion also helps to contextualize Clare's work within the eighteenth and nineteenth century waves of critical thought and practice in poetry. Clare displays a preoccupation with taste throughout his work—he even reifies it as a character in some poems. He has a unique understanding of taste and in his poetry he uses this understanding as a principle to animate the aural/oral economy of Helpston. Taste is more than a subject of interest for Clare; it serves as a guiding concept in his vision of life, braiding moral, ethical, and aesthetic demands. It is a binding element in the reciprocal relation between subjects in a local environment.

To help analyze Clare's treatment of taste, I rely upon Walter Jackson Bate's authoritative, if dated, history of the development of taste in the eighteenth century, *From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth Century England* (1946), and Walter John Hipple's philosophical survey of eighteenth-century aesthetic systems, *The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory* (1957). Any argument that purports to evaluate Clare's aesthetic practice needs to grapple with the prevailing ideas about art, feeling, and imagination during the long eighteenth century as well as the legacy of earlier systems of thought.

Clare's ideas about taste are somewhat eccentric, though he manifests some neoclassical and Romantic aesthetic tendencies. First, taste is not relative in his practice; he bucks the subjectivist trend set into motion by Hume and Shaftesbury and culminating in Kant. For Clare,

taste comprises a definite set of principles that he attempts to defend and that has a certain moral value. Yet there is also an idiosyncratic antipathy on Clare's part to systems in general, whether grammatical, Linnaean, or otherwise. Taste is acted out in a Clare poem rather than explicitly theorized. Clare avoids formulating a system because his conception of taste surpasses the realm of human ideas and commerce. His primary experiences of pleasure and beauty occur in isolated natural settings, a fact which encourages his conviction that his taste is shared by other entities in nature. Clare prefers to show taste in its natural habitat.

Etymology

The word *taste* dates back to the thirteenth century. As a Latin noun and verb, it originally referred to a sensory faculty.[211] By the fourteenth century, it described something like aesthetic judgment or preference. Sense 8.a, dating back to the late seventeenth century, refers to "[t]he sense of what is appropriate, harmonious, or beautiful; *esp*. discernment and appreciation of the beautiful in nature or art; *spec*. the faculty of perceiving and enjoying what is excellent in art, literature, and the like." Unlike earlier senses, which only note the presence of judgment, this new meaning implies nascent criteria for judgment.

Sense 8.b of *taste* illustrates the conceptual path that the word has taken. It refers to taste as a "style or manner exhibiting aesthetic discernment" and as the "style or manner favoured in any age or country." Senses 8.a and 8.b require the percipient subject to form assumptions about the function of art, beauty, fitness, or other proposed aesthetic ideals. Such assumptions vary from user to user. "There is in all aesthetic phenomena," Hipple writes, "an interaction of subject and object—of the faculties of the percipient with the properties and relations of the aesthetic object—which makes it impossible to define either variable independently of the other" (3-4). Thus, "taste cannot be discussed in abstraction from the nature of beauty, nor is beauty definable

[211] "Taste, *n*.[1]". *OED Online*. June 2012. Oxford UP. 14 July 2012.

apart from the nature of the mind apprehending it" (Hipple 4). Also, taste is not an exclusive term in eighteenth-century writings about art. Other conceptual categories like the Sublime and the Picturesque are theorized, sometimes in distinction with beauty. Clare himself utilizes a variety of terms when describing his appreciation of beauty and the pleasure it provides, including: *taste*, *rapture*, *joy*, *genius*, and *poesy*.

In her literary history of taste, Denise Gigante approaches the metaphor of gustatory taste as a way of explaining its applications in Romantic period criticism and poetry.[212] Exactly when the metaphor of taste was first applied to mental capacity is debatable, Gigante notes, but it likely happened on the continent. Addison's 1712 *Spectator* essay "On Taste" opens by referring to the Spanish writer Baltasar Gracián y Morales, who asserted that "just as large morsels are suited to big mouths, so are high matters to high minds" (qtd. in Gigante 17). Voltaire observed in his entry on taste for Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopedia* that "this capacity for discriminating between different foods, has given rise, in all known languages, to the metaphorical use of the word 'taste' to designate the discernment of beauty and flaws in all the arts" (qtd. in Gigante 17). Gigante underscores Hipple's observation when she argues that "[t]he tasting self hangs in the balance between subjective response and objective principles" (17).

According to Walter Jackson Bate, the term *taste* was in "general used as synonymous with a subjective *je ne sais quoi* sentiment until almost the middle of the eighteenth century" (44). In early English neoclassic writing it was applied to "only an untutored and innate sentiment" of the *je ne sais quoi* or Shaftesburyan variety (W. Bate 84). But by the mid-eighteenth century, it was "frequently employed in almost every sense." In the shuffle of

[212] For instance, Hazlitt's popularization of the word *gusto*, a continental term which was applied to culinary contexts in English language during the seventeenth century, illustrates the importance of tangible sensory experience in Romantic period aesthetics (Gigante 16).

meanings, *taste* referred to almost any aesthetic reaction and its accompaniments or to a specific and limited faculty. Eventually this term became a marker of preference in art.

Aesthetic Contexts

The eighteenth-century inheritance of classical and Renaissance humanist precepts about art created a critical climate in which the universal and diachronic were privileged over the local and temporary. Following this development, Augustan neo-classicism prized clarity of expression and familiarity of style over emotional appeal, surprise, variety, and particularization. The concept of nature expounded by classicism, and to some extent Renaissance humanism, did not refer to the phenomenal world but rather an ideal realm of human potential. Nature was the "central idea and form which the particular struggles to attain" (W. Bate 10).[213] Samuel Johnson and Joshua Reynolds use the word *nature* in this sense when they recommend laws of criticism for the just representation of "general" or "ideal" nature. Both advise against an over-concern with the particular, local, temporal, novel, and non-human. A skillful "portrayal of animal life or of landscape," Reynolds writes, "may often draw a just applause . . . but it may not claim the highest praise" (qtd. in W. Bate 80). At the bottom of this assertion is the belief that the particularities of external nature contribute little value to human aesthetic efforts. Reynolds instead advises students to habituate themselves to the principles and ways of thinking of the masters by long application. Bate paraphrases Reynolds's strategy for acquiring aesthetic taste: "By means of the prolonged contact which is established through 'the habit of contemplating and brooding' over the works of such artists, the principles and conceptions to which the observer is exposed will eventually become 'a part of himself,' and be 'woven into his mind'" (90). If we

[213] Aristotle's definition of poetry as the "imitation of nature" uses this classical sense of nature: "he did not mean the indiscriminate copying of any individual, but rather the selective imitation of what is general and representative in man" (W. Bate 10).

substitute "places and things in Helpston" for "works of such artists," Clare's life habits exemplify this artistic habituation.

Johnson's belief that the customs of a particular age and social milieu are antithetical to the objective truth of "general nature" contrasts with Clare's locally-derived poetics.[214] Moreover, Johnson's ideas cast deep suspicion on the role that personal sentiments play in art. They are changeable, subjective, and "elicited and determined by that which is immediately before" them (qtd. in W. Bate 73). According to this line of thinking, contiguity (whether spatial, temporal, or emotional) obstructs clear perception. Johnson's attacks on the "unschooled inclination" and "vain imagination" assume that representations of particular aspects of external nature thwart artistic truth and that representations of the particular are somehow subjective, self-expressionistic, and relativizing. The poetry of John Clare illustrates otherwise.

Johnson also recommends withdrawal from the senses, which have a tendency to trap us in the present moment. Clare's poetic sensibility contradicts this view, as his senses connect him to the past, present, and future. Clare focuses upon the past and the future in many poems, including "Childhood," "Eternity of Nature," and "Decay: A Ballad." However, this focus does not neglect the present per se; Clare often reminisces about a previous time as a result of present experience. That is, current sense triggers mental time travel. In distinction with Johnson's view, Clare demonstrates the usefulness of the senses, alongside an acute grasp of the past and future, in the presentation of his poetic subjects.

In his survey, Bate notes the rise of new principles in addition to the neoclassical premise of general or ideal nature. The advent of Baconian experimentation and British empirical

[214] Imlac states that the poet "does not number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades of verdure in the forest. He is to exhibit in his portraits of nature such prominent and striking features, as recal the original to every mind" (Samuel Johnson, *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*. Ed. Jack Lynch. Rutgers, n.d. Web. 16 July 2012.) The Johnsonian poet is a "being superior to time and place" who examines the species, not the individual (qtd. in W. Bate 66).

psychology in the seventeenth century fostered the growth of individualism, the doctrine of the association of ideas, and what Bate calls the premise of feeling. In the wake of the anti-rationalism of empiricism, European Romanticism turned away "from the classical standard of ideal nature" and substituted for this premise "the belief that such truth as can be known is to be found primarily in or through the particular" (W. Bate 94). Accordingly, the empirically-inflected criticism of 1750-1800 concerned itself with the psychological nature of aesthetic creation and response. [215] This focus helped to instigate the cult of "uneducated" and "original genius" in which Clare, the "Northamptonshire Peasant Poet," played a part (W. Bate 95).

The transition from neoclassical to Romantic aesthetics was gradual, and the late-century mix of values is reflected in Clare's attitudes about taste. There is an abiding sense of the ideal and immemorial in his poetry—of a natural and communal way of life as represented by agricultural and seasonal customs, song and music, and the activities of the various human and non-human inhabitants of Helpston. Yet Clare's poems and prose notes demonstrate his strong interest in the particular spatio-temporal manifestations of these eternal features. His unique fusion of the historical ideal and the temporal particular paints an ecological portrait of human society in which human history and civilization simultaneously function as a constituent factor and outgrowth of the natural environment, not in spite of it.

In the gradual shift in attitudes toward art and imagination during the eighteenth century, the doctrine of the association of ideas—advanced in 1731 by John Gay and developed by David Hartley, Joseph Priestley, Erasmus Darwin, and the Scottish Common Sense School—provided a persuasive model for how the mind works. The tendency of associationism was to view the entire mental and emotional nature of humankind as a bundle of habits—a barrel organ set into motion by the world. Certain psychological principles of association, it was theorized, control the mind's

[215] One example is James Beattie's *Essays on Poetry and Music as They Affect the Mind* (1776).

operations, including: causation (learned by repeat experience), resemblance, contiguity, and contrariety.[216] Though there is no evidence to suggest that Clare subscribed to the tenets of associationism, this doctrine and its attendant concepts do provide a basis of explanation for his perceived reciprocity with Helpston, and thus his poetics.

Clare's definition of beauty is not associational. It is not solely mental (as it is for Hume and Abraham Tucker[217]) nor is it a form; rather, beauty is a thing and a quality other than, and outside of, humans. It is not created by the perceiving mind. It already exists in the material world, ready to be perceived.[218] Clare does participate with beauty, but he does not conceive of this participation as creative of the object of beauty. This participation, according to his presentation of it in the poems, occurs between two subjects in the environment. Nor is it demonstrable that Clare accepted the other associational premise that the human mind is an instrument set into motion only by external particulars. Both of these propositions undermine the agency of humans and non-humans.

Certain associational relations nonetheless elucidate Clare's principle of reciprocity. These relations include: the repetition of physical and mental experiences and the pattern of causation thus produced (e.g., Swordy Well brings up feelings of joy and thoughts about Boswell's Crew[219]); resemblance and similitude (e.g., oral mimicry); spatio-temporal contiguity; transference; and expression.[220] These relations provide a vocabulary for talking about the poet's

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[216] Associationism also allowed for the reconsideration of the classical notion of mimesis as a pleasing and natural function of the mind.

[217] Tucker's extreme associationism is thus illustrated: "nothing is beautiful in itself" (qtd. in W. Bate 103).

[218] Priestley claims that art attains its insight through the direct experience of the concrete, where the strongest associations are (W. Bate 110). Clare expresses this idea poignantly in "Sighing for Retirement," when he writes: "I found the poems in the fields / and only wrote the down."

[219] Swordy Well, once common land before enclosure, is located south of Helpston, near Cowper Green and Southey Wood. In addition to other nearby heaths, it was a common place for gypsies, like Boswell's Crew. "In Clare's childhood, gypsies had camped in this ancient roman stone quarry" (J. Bate, *Biography* 390).

[220] In his associational treatise *Light of Nature Pursued* (1768-78), Abraham Tucker identifies four modes related to beauty: order, variety, transference, and expression. The notion of transference, or what he calls "translation,"

habituation to particular features of his environment. But it should be noted that Clare's poems foreground the external world's properties in addition to (and sometimes over against) the experience of the human speaker. Clare's notions of beauty and taste are informed by his direct experiences interacting with the human and non-human aspects of Helpston life—nature is the "soul of poesy" he writes in the third natural history letter. This is not to say that he did not sometimes reflect in his poetry about the influence of his mind on creating a particular percept. Indeed, Clare qualifies many images with words like *seem* or *as*. But his willingness to acknowledge his own mental processes does not mean Clare accepted the principle of association (and its hypothetical operation in the human mind) or the related idea that external stimuli merely reflect mental states.

The associationist doctrine of coalescence typifies the mid to late eighteenth-century understanding of the imagination as a totalizing and aggregative faculty. It also reveals a broader assumption that "an immediate, comprehensive, and unified conception of the particular is achieved through an instinctive employment of experience" (W. Bate 122). Past data compose the present moment. According to associationist doctrine, the recognition of a larger purpose or design happens when a dominant association (e.g., causality, resemblance, contiguity, or vicinity) "acts as a controlling and unifying purpose" (W. Bate 122). This associational control can be triggered by a central passion, object, or purpose. Though associationism places causality above the relations of contiguity or vicinity, Clare's lateral aesthetic subverts such a hierarchy.

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describes how humans transfer the pleasure experienced in an object/idea to the thing itself. Expression is "that which reveals what we conceive to be the genuine character of a particular as a cause of delight" (W. Bate 103). Clare can be said to "transfer" the pleasures he experiences in Helpston to its inhabitants and places, which "express" beauty and virtue. The concepts of transference and expression also describe Clare's poetic personifications. The upshot of Tucker's theory is that it [relativistically] conceptualizes beauty as something which pleases by according with the associational construction of the individual mind (W. Bate 103). Thus, Clare's idiosyncratic associational construction comprises various factors, including: locus, aurality, orality, sight, walking, emotions, memories, and a sense of community.

Contiguity, vicinity, resemblance, and dissimilitude are equally esteemed by Clare. In fact, according to Clare's aesthetic, the relations of vicinity and contiguity supplant, or merge with, causality. Tucker's notion of transference explains the fundamental associations formed between nearby places, feelings, and ideas.[221] For example, when Clare hears the bells of Glinton Church the relations of vicinity, contiguity, resemblance, and causality unite. Each successive chiming strengthens the association between the sound and his affect.[222]

Clare shows us that experiential connection with a locality is a cause sufficient for a theory of art; and associationism, to an extent, supports this view. Within the Helpston landscape, Clare encounters instinct, design, beauty, taste, art, suffering, and tragedy—all in concrete forms. His perception of immediate sensory data, coupled with his keen ear and writing habit, helps him develop his idiosyncratic and locally-inspired aesthetic. In demonstrating the power of dwelling to produce a theory of art, Clare counteracts the neoclassical dictum that art rise above particulars. He shows us an approach to poetry that fructifies locally by dwelling, listening, documenting, conversing, walking, and interacting.

Clare's conceit of interspecies communication and feeling reflects the associationist relation of similitude. He projects the human traits of speech, affect, vocation, language/literacy, and aesthetic taste onto his poetic subjects. He also reveals their existence as part of a human, agrarian, and cultural framework that consists of gossip, histories, folktales, songs, customs, and anecdotes. Along these lines, he subsumes their existence, as well as his own, under a broad rubric of taste, which operates according to the relation of similitude. But he also carefully foregrounds the intractable strangeness of nature in his bird nest poems and natural history prose.

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[221] Murray Schafer's notions of the soundmark and keynote sound, discussed in chapter one, also theorize the association formed between sensory events and the subject's mental state.

[222] Clare has other past data relating to Glinton Church, including his memories of attending school there and his admiration for Mary Joyce, who lived nearby. Also, the church's spire was visible from a large area and served as a visual marker for Clare's many rambles.

The relation of similitude thus extends non-human traits onto human subjects (as in "Helpstone," "Childhood," and "The Progress of Rhyme") and vice versa. This subsuming work is aural and oral, and it relies upon the trope of conversation.

Clare's documentary aesthetic did not come about by bookish isolation.[223] His immersion in the local environment and intimate acquaintance and interaction with its fellow inhabitants populated his poetic reservoir with sounds, sights, feelings, associations, and memories. In this regard, he flouts the eighteenth-century critical maxim that "resemblance must never be too exact in art" (W. Bate 157). His aesthetic effect is built upon attenuated and minute descriptions of nature and the speakers who focalize (and auscultize[224]) nature. His contemporaries instantly perceived this effect. In a letter to Clare, H.F. Cary wrote: "What you most excel in is the description of such natural objects as you have yourself had the opportunity of observing, and which none before you have noticed, though every one instantly recognizes their truth" (qtd. in Todd 85). Keats voiced concern about this quality in Clare's poetry, noting in a letter to Taylor that the "Description too much prevailed over the sentiment" (qtd. in Todd 85). According to associational theory, Clare's imagination combined and reanimated these "natural objects" in the space of the poem. This creative process is often triggered by his fresh interactions with the Helpston landscape.

Sympathy

Sympathy is another concept in eighteenth-century critical discourse that elucidates Clare's poetic sensibility. The notion of sympathy propounded by thinkers like Shaftesbury,

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[223] Clare also studied and appreciated sources from beyond Northamptonshire, including English masters (Shakespeare, Walton, Thomson), Scottish poets (Burns, Cunningham), laboring-class poets (Bloomfield), continental landscape artists, and the bible (he particularly enjoyed the "Song of Solomon"). This fusion of disparate interests and influences is characteristic of Clare.

[224] This is Melba Cuddy-Keane's coinage for narrative focusing via listening. She proposes the terms *auscultation*, *auscultize*, and *auscultator* to parallel the existing narratological terminology of *focalization*, *focalize*, and *focalizer* (Cuddy-Keane 385).

Dugald Stewart, James Beattie, John Ogilvie, Archibald Alison, Hazlitt, and Keats held that the imagination was capable of identifying with an object by means of sympathy, and thus gaining "through a kind of direct experience and feeling, the distinct nature, identity, or 'truth' of the object of its contemplation" (W. Bate 132).[225] The critical focus on sympathy led to a belief in the annihilation of the poet's subjectivity—a pervasive aesthetic assumption during the Romantic period. According to this view, the poet must demonstrate "extreme sensibility" and a "consequent 'enthusiasm'" in order to fuse with the "object of his concern" and therefore achieve "sympathetic understanding" (W. Bate 135-6).

The aesthetic criteria of sensibility, enthusiasm, imagination, and experiential knowledge can be extended to the poet's sympathetic identification with aspects of external nature. Langley Bush, Hilly Wood, and Emmonsales Heath are like people to Clare; his poems about these subjects exude sensibility and sympathy. He displays an imaginative facility of placing himself in different circumstances vis-à-vis these subjects. Moreover, this sympathetic identification often abets his strong moral sense.

Certain elements from various eighteenth-century aesthetic systems clarify Clare's sympathetic identification with Helpston's non-human inhabitants. One critic who particularly emphasized the role of sympathetic participation was John Ogilvie. According to Ogilvie's *Philosophical and Critical Observations on the Nature, Characters, and Various Species of Composition* (1774), an "exquisite sensibility" and "the most copious imagination" are regulated by study and practical experience (qtd. in W. Bate 137). A blend of feeling, imagination, and

[225] For Hugh Blair, Lord Kames, and James Beattie, sympathy is a matter of rhetorical execution. When the artist is capable of entering into the character he contemplates, then he will represent it accurately (avoiding excessive description) and thus achieve a natural style. These rhetorical sources prize verisimilitude over "indiscriminate naturalism" in art (W. Bate 141). Clare's documentary aesthetic challenges the reader's sense of excessive description.

experience make up "discernment," which enables poetic identification as well as correct taste. With this combination of factors, the poet can

> enter . . . deeply into the characters of those with whom he is conversant. He gains a facility of reading in the countenance those sensations, however closely concealed, that actuate the heart; and of collecting from casual, loose, and unsupported assertions thrown out apparently at random . . . such significant and distinguishing criteria as are decisive of their justness, propriety, and importance. (Ogilvie qtd. in W. Bate 137)

Ogilvie speaks of discerning the human heart, but his notion of poetic discernment can be applied to non-humans.[226] Clare displays a facility of entering into the feelings of humans, but his habit of listening to, documenting, and poeticizing non-humans illustrates the importance of the entire Helpston community. Through his listening, recording, and rambling, Clare displays the sensibility, experience, and creativity prerequisite to sympathetic identification. Ogilvie describes sympathetic identification in terms of linguistic communication: the poet is "conversant" with other characters, he "reads" their faces, and he "collects" their "assertions." Clare presents moments of identification in similar terms, a fact which underscores the metaphoric conflation of land and text.

Another critical rationale for Clare's sympathetic identification with Helpston's non-human subjects appears in Erasmus Darwin's 1794 essay "Of Instinct," which links the sympathetic function of humans to the pleasure of imitation. According to Darwin's thesis, when a human being identifies with the passions of another, he/she imitates that other subject. Clare's poetics and process of SLD demonstrate this relationship in reverse. The following compositional practices all make use of imitation as a means of hypothesizing shared emotions and understanding: the prose documentation of the sounds produced by local birds, animals, and weather; the playful echoing of such sounds by speakers within particular poems; and the use of

[226] James Beattie extended the concept of human sympathy to the inanimate in order to argue that a "lively conception" of an object's significance and purpose can stimulate sympathy.

prosopopoeia to attribute voice, affect, and imitative (and incantatory) instinct to all of nature. This mimicry reveals three strengths in Clare's poetics: extreme aural sensibility, imaginative treatment, and patient and regular experience and study. Clare's documentary aesthetic and imitative process demonstrate sympathetic [mimetic] identification at work, and they also enact the reciprocity and aural/oral exchange that are so fundamental to his poetics.

In his survey, Bate claims that Romanticism extended the feeling of sympathy to animals (e.g. Keats), but that this was less sympathetic identification than an "outflow of vague fellow-feeling," and that it represents a general and sentimental sort of sympathy (144). But Clare's portrayal of the nightingale in "The Nightingale's Nest," or the badger in his sonnet on badger baiting, can hardly be described as a "general and sentimental sort of sympathy." Rather, his poetry presents a range of modes of acute identification, including: sentimental projection, introjection[227], thought-reading (conjecture), neutral reporting, and alienation.[228] Some poems project particular emotions onto non-human subjects and thus create pathos. The speaker in "The Flitting," for instance, observes that a singing nightingale "like to me seems at loss / For Royce wood"; and the wistful speaker of "Childhood" speaks of a "fading leaf," a "cold world," and "withered wreaths" to convey a sense of personal loss. Clare's attribution of voice to non-human subjects in "The Lament of Swordy Well" and "The Lamentations of Round Oak Waters" constitutes an extreme form of sympathetic identification—one that imagines how a given place feels. But Clare also presents scenes of flora and fauna that are not sentimental. For example, the portrayal of the badger and badger-baiting in "The Badger" lacks "explicit moral judgment" and "emotional bias" (Todd 96). Though the poem does portray human cruelty at length, there is no

[227] *Introjection* is a twentieth-century psychoanalytic term that denotes "the forming of a subjective image of an object and the transfer to it of emotional energy previously given to the object itself." ("Introjection, *n*." Def. 3a. *OED Online*. June 2013. Oxford UP. 28 July 2013.)

[228] The actions of listening, speaking, and walking also help to form a basis for intersubjective identification, as does the local environment.

"intrusive pity" even during the scene of the badger's death. Ashton Nichols reads this neutrality as a feature of Clare's "idiosyncratic understanding of the role of animals in human life" (qtd. in Wolfram 7). According to Nichols, the "disconnectedness" of non-human creatures "from human morality confers superiority." The poem alternates between "multiple human and animal points of view" thereby refusing "to assert significance beyond the material reality of what is described" (Nichols qtd. in Wolfram 8). Lastly, Clare not only forgoes sympathetic identification, but he also counteracts it. In some poems (e.g., "The Vixen") the speaker experiences a feeling of alienation between himself and a non-human subject, and he describes its strange features and behaviors.

In addition to this range of modes of identification, Clare portrays identification as a function of vicinity and vocation. In the prose piece "The Woodman or the Beauties of a Winter Forest," a log-cutter identifies with various living elements of his work environment, including songbirds, privet, and brier. The woodman's daily labor is contrasted with the shepherd's and the milk-boy's; the latter two curtail their walks whereas the woodman "glories in the weather" (*NHP* 5). "He and he only," the narrator affirms, "knows and sees the beauties and horrors of winter mingled together through the short day." This piece portrays work as a form of knowledge and communal interaction. This vocational slant is presented as a basis of taste in many of Clare's poems.

The idea, advanced by Richard Payne Knight and Edmund Burke, that sympathy requires obscurity poses a difficulty for Clare's aesthetic. According to this line of thinking, clarity counteracts the imagination whereas concealment stimulates it.[229] This criterion fits poorly with

[229] Clare does emphasize the obscurity of Helpston's subjects, but he unconceals them also. Obscurity, concealment, and unletteredness are celebrated by Clare as they are undone by his detailed descriptions. At stake here are differing conceptions of obscurity—visual or social.

Clare's trifling aesthetic[230], which engages direct description of manifest objects (familiar to the speaker) while emphasizing the "unletteredness" or anonymity of these objects. In his "Essay on Instinct," Clare disputes Burke by arguing that "little things excite the astonishment" because they can be grasped (*NHP* 281). "[G]reat things," Clare continues, "exite no wonder at all because we have no comprehension to understand them & what is worse ignorance often excites derision." Clare's version of obscurity is cultural, not visual or physiological. The "unknown" or "unheeded" subjects in his poems aren't inconspicuous to the human eye—they are so by habit and ignorance. Clare celebrates their anonymity as a source of value (as he paradoxically negates it). These trifles become symbols of his poems and their obscurity is a sign of his lack of fame.[231] The basis of Clare's identification with Helpston's non-human subjects is not obscurity. Rather it is a peculiar blend of emotional projection, personal familiarity, knowledge, memory, repeat experience, spatial proximity, literary exclusion, and public obliviousness (or heedlessness).

The sympathetic facility of entering "deeply into the characters of those with whom he is conversant" constitutes Clare's poetic practice. Specifically, his identifications with non-human aspects of his local environment (and his original presentation of such identities via SLD, prosopopoeia, and the rambling poet figure) demonstrate an ecological and communal application of sympathy to the work of poetry.

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[230] Clare's trifling, bottom-up, or low aesthetic becomes plain in a later poem "Shadows of Taste" (1832). By this phrase I mean the countless references made by Clare's speakers to the "lowness" or "meanness" of various human and non-human subjects, which are nonetheless ennobled and held up as poetic subjects. He emphasizes lowness (and the lowness of the rural laboring poor particularly) and its many aspects, including vulgarity, poverty, humble admiration, and genius. "The Progress of Rhyme" obeys this trifling aesthetic by claiming there is no such thing as a "weed in nature's poesy" because "nature's love is even there" (92, 104). For another example, of which there are dozens, see "To an Insignificant Flower, Obscurely Blooming in a Lonely Wild," which begins thus: "And though thou seem'st a weedling wild, / Wild and neglected like to me, / Thou still art dear to Nature's child, / And I will stoop to notice thee." In this poem, the speaker not only exhibits an aesthetic that values nature's "trifles," but he identifies—"like to me" his refrain—with the obscure flower.

[231] In his original prospectus written for Henson's abortive edition of his poems, Clare refers to his poems as trifles.

Placing Clare

Through his early, middle, and late life, Clare's aesthetic practice demonstrates a variety of attributes that span the transitional periods marked by Bate's survey. It is difficult (and perhaps unconstructive) to patly categorize him as a neoclassicist or Romantic. His writing both fulfills and overlooks certain neoclassical, associational, and Romantic premises, providing a unique fusion of diachronic ideal and spatio-temporal detail. Clare's presentation of taste (e.g., in "Dawnings of Genius," "Shadows of Taste," and the natural history prose) comprises an ideal standard as well as ethical correctness. In this regard, he adheres to a neoclassical humanist precept, avoiding subjectivism for a universal criterion. Yet he develops his aesthetic and moral ideal by extensive study of communal, not classical, sources. Art is moral for Clare, and evil does exist—in the form of a conceptual fall from Edenic nature. Clare's condemnation of enclosure and its disastrous effects on Helpston, and his portrayal of these as a form of tyranny and poor taste, illustrates the strong moral and ethical connection he forms between external nature and art.

Despite the fact that he was marketed as an untutored rural genius, Clare's personal habits and writings show multiple scientific, observational, and analytical strengths. His prescient rejection of Linnaean nomenclature for dialect words reveals the complex mixture of anti-nominalism, scientific curiosity, and local allegiance that makes up his character. His field notes for the natural history of Helpston, his person garden collection of native fern species and other plants, and his archaeological excursions with Artis and Henderson of Milton Hall demonstrate a spirit of scientific inquiry. Clare does not show the period's "restless . . . awareness of the newly-discovered inadequacy of man's mind and knowledge" (W. Bate 160-1).

His writing combats the ready division of primitivism and factual knowledge, and his poems repeatedly illustrate sensory experience (aurality, orality, and walking) a form of knowing.

Late eighteenth-century associational theories of mind fail to fully explain Clare's poetics because neither of the prevailing mental schema from this period—man/mind as a bundle of faculties or as a subjective ego that creates and projects itself—are reflected in his portrayal of human subjects. Associationism, as stated earlier, does offer a useful vocabulary to talk about Clare's process of witness, transference, and composition. However, Clare's poems break down ego boundaries by attributing speaking agency to traditionally voiceless and undeclared subjects, showcasing speakers who sympathize with (and wonder about) the experiences of non-human subjects, and incorporating those speculative experiences into the dramatic action of the poem.[232] He demonstrates awareness of his tendency to project content onto external nature, and the poems encode this affective fallacy in creative ways. However, it would be erroneous to claim that his concept of human nature is based on psychological faculties, subjectivity, or a disconnected ego. Further, there is no evidence that Clare endorses the relativist premise—a logical consequence of empiricism—that real knowledge is not possible. What else are his many bird nest poems, but an exposition of his experiential knowledge about Northamptonshire birds, their nesting habits, their eggs, etc.?

Categorizing Clare's work (and aesthetic) is challenging because he does not provide a cohesive statement about the essential nature of humanity. He frequently portrays human subjects in relation to, and in participation with, a surrounding environment that constitutes their meaning and purpose; his work implies that humanity's make-up is relational and communal. Neither reason, psychological association, or emotion completely account for Clare's "man of

[232] In a dissertation seminar at The Graduate Center in the Fall of 2010, while workshopping a nascent draft of this project, Professor Joan Richardson addressed the issue of Clare's ventriloquism (and late-life institutionalization): "Clare breaks down ego boundaries."

taste"—though a special solicitude developed by continual communal engagement seems to come closest. His trust in, circulation of, and practice of communal knowledge as a basis for identity contrasts with the late-eighteenth-century conviction that human nature is primarily a psychological matter.

Because late eighteenth-century British philosophical criticism increasingly regarded beauty as the product of the mind's subjective working, rather than the product of the skillful imitation of idealized nature, art came to be conceptualized as an "excrescence of mind" (W. Bate 170). This power of the mind (to suggest its own content) was prone to the criticism that it indulges aimless and undisciplined sensory stimulation and worse, that it seeks nostalgia "for its own sake" (166). Though Clare's writing may be charged with the indiscriminate copying down of natural details, there is no evidence that his mind (or his conception of the human mind) was "restricted in its communication with the external world" or that he viewed art as a thing divorced from "objective reality" (170). On the contrary, Clare is rather free in his communication with the external world. He combines skillful listening and imitation of nature with a savvy self-awareness, not in service of an aimless or untutored nostalgia, but a notion of artistic creation in conformity with the laws of the land. His poetics of listening to and collaborating with other inhabitants of his community contextualizes and delimits our sense of "John Clare" and his poetic persona. He is just as likely to portray his speakers as the recipients of nature's projections, whether the smiles of flowers, the whispers of petals, the lamentations of particular loci, or the imprint of wearing age upon his face. [233]

[233] Though age and time are not natural forces properly speaking, they are associated by the speaker of "Helpstone" with Helpston village, which becomes a *locus thanatos* or death place that the speaker longs for. This poem's grouping of age, time, and place is another instance of Clare's strategic conflation of locus and subjectivity. The middle period poem "Pastoral Fancys" offers another example of the ways in which Clare's speakers are often the subjects of nature's actions. In that case, the speaker compares himself to a fish that is caught on nature's baited hook.

Dugald Stewart's essay "On Taste" (1810) offers an explanatory scheme which can be applied to the development of Clare's taste:

> A sensibility, deep and permanent, to those objects of affection, admiration, and reverence, which interested the youthful heart . . . gives rise to the habits of attentive observation by which such a Taste alone can be formed; and it is this also that, binding and perpetuating the associations which such a Taste supposes, fortifies the mind against the fleeting caprices which the votaries of fashion watch and obey. (qtd. in W. Bate 175)

This sensibility sounds rather like a judicial faculty. Like Tucker, Stewart provides for an experientally-derived theory of art. In keeping with Stewart's developmental view of taste, Clare's countless rambles throughout Helpston and Northamptonshire, and their subsequent transmission into writing, demonstrate taste formation. These successive outings are the tutorial, refining work that should attend youthful or incipient fervor according to Reynolds, Wordsworth, and Coleridge. Stewart's explanatory scheme reflects the central tenet of associationism that instinct feeds upon experience and digests it for later use.

Clare fulfills critical Romantic criteria, but through different means. English Romantic thought, according to Bate's survey, avoided relativism and "mere emotionalism" by a "loose and compromising empiricism" (181). Its major contribution was its development of the "particular" as a fit subject for poetry and the relation of the essential nature of that particular. Yet the goal of this particularity, as practiced by Wordsworth for instance, is above all a classical goal, as his 1802 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* shows:

> Aristotle, I have been told, hath said, that Poetry is the most philosophic of all writing: it is so: its object is truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative; not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion; truth which is its own testimony, which gives strength and divinity to the tribunal to which it appeals, and receives them from the same tribunal. Poetry is the image of man and nature. (xxxii)

This brief excerpt illustrates a special kind of understanding which Bate calls the Romantic compromise. The Romantic compromise discloses "the naturalistic and almost independent 'truth' or character of the particular" as it reveals its "participation or reflection of the ideal" (W. Bate 184). Clare's more programmatic pieces (e.g., "The Progress of Rhyme," "Shadows of Taste," and "Dawnings of Genius") utilize particular images and non-human subjects in order to emphasize a living ideal and truth of taste. But other poems refrain from this unifying emphasis and merely disclose natural details and particulars, occasionally foregrounding their oddity alongside the speaker's sense of estrangement. Clare's phenomenology of listening to and documenting other voices (other content) pushes against the humanist maxim, propounded by Romantic compromisers, of the poet as ethical teacher. According to Clare's presentation in the poems, the non-human subjects of Helpston are the ethical teachers. He performs the roles of the apprentice, patron, interpreter, witness, and scribe—and so do his speakers. In the next section, I demonstrate Clare's ideas of taste via his prose and poetry.

* * *

Clare develops his attitudes toward taste in his prose fragments. The poems offer concrete demonstrations of his taste—there we meet the rambling poet, the rustic clown, and sentient force of nature—but the natural history prose fragments lay out the elements and principles of his taste in a straightforward (if scattered) manner.[234]

As mentioned, Clare's trifling aesthetic focuses on objects typically considered mean, trifling, or low. Clare (somewhat problematically) employs the words *rude* and *taste*

[234] Clare's prose exposition about taste is somewhat scattered. In this chapter, I examine eight different prose sources that address the subject of taste. Also, certain prose pieces are not expository but creative; I do not examine them in this chapter. For instance, "The Woodman or the Beauties of a Winter Forest" illustrates his poetic taste.

ambiguously.[235] In some accounts, rudeness or rusticity import a distinct lack of taste in humans; in others, rudeness is a term Clare uses to privilege the rustic poet or rural subject (over urbane votaries of fashion) as well as non-human rural trifles (e.g., weeds or insects). This confusion of terms indicates a degree of unsettledness within Clare's ideas about taste, though it also reveals his ambiguous footing as a rural peasant poet and aspirant for literary fame. Sometimes he prefers to identify his rudeness, though in other instances he is careful to distance himself from the uncritical and unreflective rudeness of those around him. "Helpstone," for instance, rehearses this hometown anxiety and embarrassment.

This ambiguity (of terminology and of reference) is the effect of a primary aspect of Clare's notion of taste: the necessity of contrast and difference in modes of taste.[236] Clare is alive to a multiplicity of tastes and lack of consensus but this is a fact he seems to regret, as he presents moralizing accounts of taste in poems that bemoan enclosure and ignorance of nature. Though nature displays an infinite array of curious expressions of taste (which Clare's speakers enjoy itemizing and wondering about), this array is animated and unified by nature herself and expresses right taste. Still, in presenting taste, Clare often resorts to a familiar running contrast between two figures whose names and modifiers shift somewhat: the "heedless" clown or rustic who fails to notice or hearken to nature's tasteful expressions and the attentive rambler/poet

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[235] For instance, two manuscripts (written about 1820) refer to the "man of taste" in different senses. In a short note entitled "Taste" in Peterborough MS A43, Clare places good taste outside of the realm of rudeness and vulgarity: "Taste finds pleasure where the vulgar cannot even find amusement the man of taste feels excessive rapture in contemplating the rich scenery of an autumn Landscape which the rude man passes unnoticed" (*NHP 283*). But in Peterborough MS A27, "Note A," Clare writes: "The man of taste admires order . . . [*del.* But] The Poet . . . loves variety better" (*NHP* 290-1). In this context, variety refers to the unarranged nature of "old heaths & commons & meadows." The latter use, however, is less common in Clare's writing. Generally, the "man of taste" figure is presented in a positive light.

[236] This contrast is particularly stark in "Taste," Peterborough MS A43, noted above. Grainger observes that so many details from A43 recur in Clare's Autobiography, that "one feels he is at bottom describing himself" (*NHP* 282). However, Grainger warns against equating the man of taste with the rambling poet or with the Clare of the autobiography: "Clare had carefully considered reservations about both the 'man of taste' and the 'man of science' and these he expresses with a pointedness verging on the satiric. His real sympathies, not surprisingly, lie with the 'poor shepherd boy' and with the poet" (282-3).

figure (sometimes called the "man of taste") who relishes nature's voices.[237] This running contrast implies the existence of a hierarchy or scale of value, and Clare's emphasis upon nature's trifles implies this basic hierarchy. Yet Clare also invokes the sense of difference implied by this hierarchy in order to topple or flatten it; many poems play with contrasts between high and low only to assert a lateral scale of value. One contrast that recurs throughout his poetry is that between commoners and monarchy (or political rulers). Another contrast figuratively elevates non-human subjects to the status of princes (or devout disciples), while it demotes kings and tyrants and questions their humanity.

The natural history letters frequently present a contrast between modes of taste. Letter three refers to the "poetic eye" which looks upon and "magnifys" the pleasure of nature; yet "naturalists & botanists" seem to have no taste for this poetical feeling (*NHP* 38). These men of science kill specimens and "make collections" after "Leanius" whereas the poet experiences an associative pleasure in nature's objects which calls to his mind further aesthetic specimens. Clare continues: "I always feel delighted when an object in nature brings up in ones mind the image of poetry that describes it from some favourite author" (*NHP* 39). Both men's experiences of nature trigger some indexical function, though the poet's associative leap to poetic verses (those "cuttings" referred to in chapter two) is propagative.

About forty lines after the initial reference to the "poetic eye," Clare continues to develop the contrast:

> A clown may say that he loves the Morning but a man of taste feels it in a higher degree by bringing up in his mind that beautiful line of Thompson's 'The meek eyd morn appears the mother of dews' the [*del*. Clown] rustic sings beneath the evening moon but it brings no assosiations he knows nothing about miltons description of it . . . other flowers crowd my imagination with their poetic assosiations . . . the clown knows nothing of these pleasures he knows they are flowers & just turns an eye on them & plods bye therefore as I said before to look

[237] Potkay refers to the rapt man of taste as Clare's "pausing boy" figure (191).

> on nature with a poetic eye magnifys the pleasure she herself being the very essence & soul of Poesy (*NHP* 41)

The poetic eye which looks upon nature not only prefers a various and intact nature, but it connects to this nature a repository of human cultural artifacts that magnifies its pleasures. This connection is not forged by humans alone; it is natural and it is a feature of the environment (as conceived by Byron and Buell). Clare very clearly outlines that the source of poetry is nature "herself."[238] His choice of the word "magnifys" playfully evokes the image of a microscope, though it also imparts a sense of scale and order.[239] As with the indexical response (whether Linnaean or poetical), Clare's contrasts imply that to look upon nature is to accept its fundamental order and hierarchy of values. Accordingly, his notion of taste incorporates this framework.

Elsewhere in the letters, Clare speaks of the contrast between the man of taste and the heedless rustic/man of science in terms of the assiduity and due diligence of the former. Aurality and careful silence, as well as attentive visual observation and regular visitation via walking, set the man of taste apart whereas the "carless observer . . . does not give himself the trouble to seek" out nature's beauties (*NHP* 45). In letter six, Clare applies this standard to poets who fail to use the beautiful images of the landrail and quail; he mentions Allen Cunningham is "the only poet that has deemd them worthy of notice" and suggests "an able Essay on objects in nature that woud beautifye descriptive poetry" so as to correct this error in due attention (*NHP* 51). In a prose note entitled "Taste," Clare offers a host of descriptions of this witnessing work. The "man of dissernment" finds happiness in "contemplating," "examining," and "lolling"; he prefers to "wander," "lean," "mark," "bend," and "list" those "matter of fact fancys that the mind delights to indulge in in rambles" (*NHP* 284). This process of tasteful discovery resembles the process of

[238] Clare writes in letter two, "all nature is poetic" (*NHP* 33).
[239] Clare writes in MS A27 "Note A," that both the poet and man of science enjoy botany.

SLD in which the poet carefully listens and records: "For nature never will her gifts consceal / From those who love to seek them."[240]

Clare's concept of taste not only trades in contrasts, but relies upon careful observation of these contrasts, and particularly the careful observation of "every thing else [that] is reckond low & vulgar" (*NHP* 51). These trifles are "too rustic for the fashionable or prevailing system of rhyme." Clare writes: when "some bold innovating genius rises with a real love for nature . . . then they will no doubt be considerd as great beautys which they really are" (*NHP* 51).[241] In a prose passage entitled "Instinct & C," Clare asserts that such a "low" focus need not detract from the majesty of nature: "Trifles may illustrate great mysterys without derogating any thing from their grandeur . . . trifles also explain great things . . . Nor is instinct in animals a lesser mystery . . . little things lead to great discoverys" (*NHP* 267-8).

Animal instinct presents another example of the toppled hierarchy that empowers Clare's low aesthetic. In the prose piece "Animal Instinct," Clare contrasts the force of brute instinct, "nicer then mathematical acurasy," with "the reason of human beings" (*NHP* 91). What Reynolds takes to be a mark of human perfectibility, Clare denounces: "The instinct of the animal world is a most wonderful faculty & not to be accounted for . . . for the human mind to be perfect in any art which it chuses to follow is obligd to undergo a long & laborius instruction" (*NHP* 91-2). The animal world escapes the cycle of error; it "never errs with an hairs difference." Animal instinct is often portrayed as a matter of preference in animals—for certain nesting locations or materials for instance.

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[240] "A Woodland Seat," lines 18-9.

[241] Grainger shares an unpublished passage in which Clare rails against "wrong taste" in pastoral poems: "It was too vulgar to call things by their own names—so I suppose the dead nettle had the good fortune to get knighted with the fine title of 'Archangel' by some poem of this 'golden age' & the nettle ought to be thankful for his lordships pastoral condesension" (*NHP* 51). Taste comprises the act of naming in this passage, which aligns wrong taste with the presence of political power.

In the tenth natural history letter, Clare expands animal instinct to include another central tenet of his notion of taste: religion or worship of a deity. Not only does animal instinct excel reason but it becomes a spiritual teacher. Clare writes: "the power of instinct in the most trifling insect is very remarkable & displays the omnipotence of its maker in an illustrus[242] manner nature is a fine preacher & her sermons are always worth attention" (*NHP* 66). This analogy is a particular version of the trope that unites land and text. It also allows for the aural and oral exchange of worship in song and praise—a poetic vehicle that Clare makes extensive use of. Songs and singing, clever emblems for Clare's own poems, symbolize worship of the deity. Through this vehicle, Clare appropriates many sounds in nature as part of a universal chorus of tasteful devotion.

Clare's poems provide the richest expositions and demonstrations of his theory of taste. They differ from the expository prose in their vivid representations of beauty *in situ*. They also give concrete examples of aesthetic reaction and emotion, illustrate the distinctive character of the rambling poet, and portray Clare's thematic contrast between levels of aesthetic appreciation. Most of all, the poems develop (via imagery and explicit statements) a specific notion of taste that accounts for the causes of pleasure and beauty. I propose reading the illustrative portrayals of taste in the poems as Clare's conscious choice to formulate this subject over time. The implications of his poetic portrayals of taste reach further than the basic ideas presented in his prose accounts. This is because Clare's use of figurative language and poetic conceit enable him to suggest eccentric and dynamic examples of beauty—and many of them. In fact, Clare's abundant poetic illustrations of beautiful trifles subtly demonstrate (by their form) the principles

[242] Grainger questions whether Clare means: "'illustrious', which Tibble supplies? If so, this is a neat paradox, but Clare's meaning could equally well be 'illustrative'" (*NHP* 66).

of multiplicity, seriality, particularity, locality and vicinity, scale, and diversity that contribute to his poetic taste.

In examining Clare's taste poems, I employ a thematic rationale (as opposed to a chronologic or dialectic one) in order to concentrate on the specific concepts, principles, and criteria of his poetic taste, which evolves throughout his writing career and life experiences. The majority of my examples fall between the years 1809 and 1835, Clare's early and middle periods. Most of the poems discussed below were included in *Poems Descriptive* (1820), *The Rural Muse* (1835), or Clare's unpublished collection *The Midsummer Cushion* (prepared in 1832). I begin with "Pastoral Fancies" and "A Woodland Seat," two poems from *The Rural Muse* which emphasize themes of solitude and silence. Next, I look at "Dawnings of Genius," a powerful (and early) source of Clare's ideas and sentiments about creation, which stresses locus as well as Clare's love of trifles. The next poem I examine, "Shadows of Taste," (published in 1831) develops these themes and introduces the idea of variety of creative tastes among nature's subjects. I then move on to examine "Autumn Robin" and "The Eternity of Nature," both published in *The Rural Muse*, to illustrate Clare's concept of poetic posterity. Following this, I briefly consider two poems—"Helpstone" and "Decay: A Ballad"—to further explore the significance of locus to Clare's poetic taste. Lastly, I discuss the metaphoric conflation of land and text as it is presented in "The Progress of Rhyme," a poem which illustrates another one of Clare's aesthetic conceits: the figurative invocation of poesy's (and beauty's) patronage. This fiction represents Clare's desire for reciprocity, understanding, and audience.

Judging from his early compositions (e.g., "A Ramble," "Helpstone," "Dawnings of Genius," and "The Autumn Robin"), it seems that some of Clare's attitudes and notions about taste were formed at a very early age—especially his place attachment and his abiding opposition

between the man of taste and the heedless passenger. However, a few later factors in his formulation of taste can be noted. For instance, John Taylor advised Clare to write a more programmatic poem offering a poetic manifesto; this was to become "The Progress of Rhyme." Another event that had noticeable effect on Clare's aesthetic sensibility—indeed it seems to have distilled his place attachment—was his family's move from Helpston to Northborough in 1832, when his patron Lord Milton arranged for his tenancy of a nicer (but more expensive) cottage. Furthermore, the enclosure of Helpston, beginning in 1809 and lasting until 1820, had drastic economic and emotional effects for laborers, tenant farmers, individual families, the gypsies, and of course Helpston's non-human inhabitants. Because it changed the way that Clare experienced the landscape (physically, emotionally, and ideologically), enclosure influenced the political, moralizing strand of Clare's poetics. His emphasis on obscurity and nature's trifles occasionally assumes a caustic tone and indicts existing political and economic power structures.

Clare's poem "Pastoral Fancys" illustrates the power of solitude in his notion of taste. Like the man of taste, the poem's speaker "lye[s] & listen[s]" and observes quiet (34). He presents a high/low contrast in his subjunctive description of a rural retreat: "Here would high joys my lowley choice requite" (37). By a sort of substitution, his human social needs would be met by nature: "The crickets mirth where talk enough for me / When talk I needed & when warmed to pray / The little birds my choristers should be / Who wear one suit for worship & for play / & make the whole year but one sabbath day" (41-5). This instance of prosopopoeia (wherein crickets talk and birds hymn) presents a tasteful picture in which aurality, orality, and religious devotion play key parts. This creative substitution also sets up several criteria of taste: physical isolation, solitude, and quiet.[243] In the following lines the speaker emphasizes the

[243] "Pastoral Liberty" also presents solitude, physical isolation, and quiet as factors of pleasure and good taste: "O lead me any where but in the crowd / On some lone island rather would I be / Than in the world worn knowledge

physical isolation prerequisite to pleasure: "In gentle spot to where few paths intrude / The hut of shepherd swain with rushes lined / Here would I tennant be to solitude / Seeking lifes gentlest joys to scape the rude" (51-4). The speaker retreats in order to embrace the pastoral life, but also to reject society and to search for a place to die: "Nor wordly intercourse my mind should have / To lure me backward to its crowded den / Here would I live & dye & only crave / The home I chose might also be my grave" (60-4). The themes of isolation and *loco-thanatos*, which the speaker supports as part of his vision of pleasure and taste, underscore the obscurity and facelessness of nature's trifles.[244] Clare also introduces these themes in "Helpstone," a poem which celebrates the unletteredness and anonymity of Helpston village. In both cases, the relative ingloriousness of a non-human subject becomes a metaphor for silence: for the respectful silence human observers must keep in order to hear nature's voices and for the shameful silence of poets who have not taken notice of her voices before. Nature's chorus is thrown into double-relief by these human silences.[245]

The poem "A Woodland Seat" likewise presents a tasteful natural scene in terms of its quiet and isolation from "intrusions." The speaker personifies his subject, a brook, with feelings and speech:

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noising loud / Wealth gathering up & loosing" (9-12). Politically charged words like *unshackled*, *unwronged*, *crowded*, *strife*, *wealth*, and *peace* place this pastoral idyll outside of the conflicts of human society and suggest as alternatives the eternity and justice of nature (*free as air*, *seasons fair*, *perrenial travels*, *peace & joy*, *health salutes me*, *joy breathes freely*, *calm joy & humble hope from quiet won*) (*MP*.iv 303-4).

[244] The poem "Stray Walks" demonstrates a tasteful ramble in which the speaker follows the process of SLD, and it shows some of the elements of taste I have been discussing here. The speaker's anonymity and solitude are singled out: "How pleasant are the fields to roam & think / Whole sabbaths through unnoticed & alone / . . . / To nestle in while small birds chirp & sing / & the loud blackbird will its mate provoke / More louder yet its chorus to repeat / How pleasant it is thus to think & roam / The many paths scarce knowing which to chuse / All full of pleasant scenes—then wander home / & oer the beautys we have met to muse" (*Poems of the Middle Period* IV.302).

[245] In "Pastoral Poesy," the speaker describes a "silence" wherever he goes, "that discourses more / Than any tongue can do" (37-40). The absence of aural stimuli carries with it an affective result: "Unruffled quietness hath made / A peace in every place / And woods are resting in their shade / Of social loneliness" (41-4). The final line's oxymoron gestures to the paradoxical character of quiet—an absence can beget a presence (of peace). The poem's concluding sketch of poesy forges a connection between quietness and habitation: "poesy's self's a dwelling joy / Of humble quietness" (107-8).

> to watch the wood brook run
> Through heaps of leaves drop dribbling after drop
> Pining for freedom till it climbs along
> In eddying fury oer the foamy top
> & then loud laughing sings its whimpling song
> Kissing the misty dewberry by its side
> With eager salutations & in joy
> Making the flag leaves dance in graceful pride
> Giving & finding joy (4-12)

The brook's actions convey a sense of reciprocity and sociability between itself and the dewberry leaves, and this joyful exchange is expressed in terms of the brook's orality (both vocal and labial) and friendliness. Though the scene is remote, social interaction is figuratively supplied by other topographic features. For instance, lines 15-7 emphasize the unselfishness of flowers ("Not only for themselves as we may feel / But the delight which they to others give") that likewise participate in the reciprocal exchange of "giving & finding joy." Furthermore, the poem emphasizes the powers of nature's trifles, a key element in Clare's aesthetic:

> In every trifle somthing lives to please
> Or to instruct us—every weed or flower
> Heirs beauty as a birthright by degrees
> Of more or less though taste alone hath power
> To see & value what the herd pass bye (29-34)

Through each of her subjects, however mean, nature pleases and instructs us. Thus Clare presents a notion of taste which is didactic and ethical. These trifles inherit their beauty from nature, who is portrayed as a sort of monarch or parent who esteems her subjects/children equally. The references to inheritance, birthright, and degrees gently challenge pre-existing power relations and offer an alternative to political rule: the rule of taste. The speaker's assertion that "taste alone hath power" to esteem natural beauty conveys the imbrication of human perception and the non-human world. However, such taste is uncommon, as the ironic animalization of the "herd" attests.

One of Clare's first published poems, "Dawnings of Genius," offers several illustrations of taste at work. The poem begins bluntly by defining the term "genius" as "a pleasing rapture of the mind, a kindling warmth" which is "unconfined" to learning and which "glows in each breast."[246] The conceit of fire is a useful vehicle to convey the rapid spread of mental perceptions and emotions as well as the dissipation of inspiration. Several themes course throughout the poem, including: a trifling aesthetic; the equal distribution of genius amongst all classes (and subjects) and its various manifestations; the fiery warmth of genius; perplexity and ineffability; and the flow of time, which triggers human memory and forgetting. Certain lexical categories organize the poem's scope: physiological nouns (*breast*, *vein*, *heart*, and *eyes*), aesthetic terms *(genius*, *pleasing*, *art's refinement*, *uncultured*, *taste*, *sympathy*, and *beauties*), and words of fire and heat.

The subject of "Dawnings of Genius" is the experience of genius itself, as demonstrated by three different figures: two rustics (a shepherd and a ploughman) and the speaker (who does not appear until the final dozen or so lines).[247] There is an implied affinity between the two rustics and the speaker. All work with materials of nature to steward those materials to life-giving or life-preserving ends, yet the speaker's experience contrasts slightly with that of the two

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[246] Sense 3 of the OED definition of "genius, *n*." emphasizes the distinctive character or spirit of a person, institution, age, place, or thing. Senses 4.a and 4.b come closer to how Clare uses the word in "Dawnings of Genius": "[n]atural ability or capacity; quality of mind; the special endowments which fit a man for his peculiar work" and "[n]atural aptitude, coupled with more or less of inclination to, for (something)." In contemporary use, senses 4.a and 4.b are mixed with sense 5 (which only began to spread during the mid to late eighteenth century), which defines *genius* as "native intellectual power of an exalted type." ("Genius, *n*." *OED Online*. June 2012. Oxford UP. 7 Aug. 2012.) Though the word *taste* only appears once in "Dawnings of Genius," Clare uses the term *genius* to describe the appreciation of intellectual and emotional effects—something very like taste in the predominant sense of the period. He writes: "[h]ence [from Genius] is that joy when every scene unfolds / Which taste endears and latest memory holds" (7-8). In Peterborough MS A42 Clare inserted "genius" above "taste" with an omission mark but did not delete "taste," a fact which also illustrates his synonymous use of these terms (*NHP* 283). But in the short prose note entitled "Essay on Taste," (Peterborough MS A45) Clare introduces a distinction between taste—that "uniformity of excellence" which "modifys expression & selects images" and "arranges & orders matters & thoughts"—and "genius," which creates them (*NHP* 267).

[247] The three figures structure the poem thus: the "lowly shepherd" (4-12); the "rough rude ploughman" (13-38); and the speaker (39-50).

previous figures. In the final five lines of the poem the speaker introduces a concluding summary about genius and human expression. In addition to these three anecdotal accounts of genius, the poem employs an assertive and declarative tone of voice in its exposition on genius, which gives it a philosophical and critical mood. From "Genius," the speaker states, comes that "warmth the lowly shepherd proves," the joy "when every scene unfolds, / Which taste endears and latest memory holds," that sympathy when "bush and tree companions seem and friends," and that fondness "from his soul sincere / That makes his native place so doubly dear" (1, 5-12). This list reads like a geneaology of sorts, as it details the origin for each of these pleasant states and passions. The lines emphasize several factors in the spread of genius' fire: an organism's "native place" or point of origin, time, memory, and [the propensity for] sympathetic identification.

The democratizing low aesthetic appears as early as the second line, when we learn that genius is not confined to learning or to "art's refinement." In line 13, the speaker offers a portrait of "low" genius with the "rough rude ploughman":

> In those low paths which poverty surrounds,
> The rough rude ploughman off his fallow grounds—
> That necessary tool of wealth and pride—
> While moiled and sweating by some pasture's side,
> Will often stoop inquisitive to trace
> The opening beauties of a daisy's face; (13-8)

The surplus of negative modifiers gives an emphatic and caustic tone to the lines. This feeling is underscored by the third line's sharp reference to enclosure and agricultural improvement. Though necessity (questioned by the speaker's mordant tone) forces the ploughman's toil, he is nonetheless surrounded by poverty. This un-georgic moment was too radical for Clare's patron, Lord Radstock, who threatened to cut him off if he did not expunge it in a later edition.

The "rough rude ploughman" is a recognizable Clare figure—that rural laborer and inhabitant who experiences pleasure and joy in noticing small details about his external

environment. Words like *trace*, *witness*, *bent*, and *pause* illustrate the fascination of the ploughman, who admires the "brook's sweet dimples" in spite of his exhaustion and exploitation. Clare's choice of the word "moiled," a regional British word, to convey the ploughman's fatigue underscores the local and native quality of this scene of genius.

The ploughman's experience also introduces ineffability. Phrases such as *magic spell*, *cannot nam*e, and *soul's perplexed* establish the irreducible yet pleasurable rapture of genius; they also attribute to it a sense of obscurity and sublimity. First, the speaker describes the ploughman's physical labor and his sensory delight in observing a daisy's face, the brook, a stone, and a shell.[248] After this physical catalog, the speaker portrays mental aspects of genius:

> Raptures the while his inward powers inflame
> And joys delight him which he cannot name,
> Ideas picture pleasing views to mind,
> For which his language can no utterance find;
> Increasing beauties, fresh'ning on his sight,
> Unfold new charms and witness more delight; (23-8)

The term *rapture* is key in Clare's conceptualization of genius and taste. Its etymology variously emphasizes poaching, rape, and abduction—all processes in which something is consumed or taken up/away. Fire, of course, has a similar effect upon its object. The speaker extends the fire conceit to the ploughman's mind. The enthusiasm he experiences "inflame[s]" his "inward powers." The mental bonfire gives off light and energy, but it does not offer names, linguistic expressions, or codified knowledge. Rather, the flame of genius works alongside ideas—"ideas [that] picture pleasing views" to the mind.

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[248] In the portrayal of the ploughman's rapture, there is no mention of his sympathetic identification with the daisy, brook, or other objects of pleasure. In fact, the physiological diction foregrounds his bodily actions and reactions to such. The mystery and perplexity prevent his identification with these objects; his relation to them is one of observation and reaction. In this sense, Clare's portrayal of genius and taste takes for granted the mental and physical separation between objects in the landscape. The ploughman displays a sensibility for such beauties, but he does not personify them or extend human sympathy to them.

Clare minutely describes the progress of the ploughman's rapture in what may be called a verse exposition of taste. The lines that follow continue the causal chain of taste reactions. Once the ploughman's fire of genius is lit, and his inward visual powers are working, "increasing beauties" freshen on his sight to "unfold new charms and witness more delight." The reappearance of the word *witness* in line 28 circles the reader back to the beginning of the ploughman section, to line 19, when the reader first learns that "[o]ft will he witness with admiring eyes." *Witness* is an important word to convey the watchful sensibility and the low (and egalitarian) aesthetic that characterizes rural taste. It imbues the ploughman's observer status with a sense of law and justice, moral conscience, corroboration (of material facts), and authority. It also implies the transactional necessity of his presence (amongst the daisy and brook) in order for these things to, in a sense, happen. The repetition of *witness* in line 28 also initiates a turn in emphasis, as the speaker introduces other elements that impact the ploughman's experience of taste: time and transience.

> So while the present please, the past decay,
> And in each other losing, melt away.
> Thus pausing wild on all he saunters by,
> He feels enraptured though he knows not why,
> And hums and mutters o'er his joys in vain
> And dwells on something which he can't explain.
> The bursts of thought with which his soul's perplexed
> Are bred one moment and are gone the next. (29-36)

In its exploration of genius and the effect of time, "Dawnings of Genius" responds to the subject of Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality": the decay of [present] experience (whether sensory, emotive, spiritual, or otherwise), particularly the experiences of youth. In the lines above, the speaker refers to the passage of time in negative terms, and as a transubstantiation. Decay, loss, and melting all describe the mutual cancellation of present and past. When enraptured, or lit by the fire of genius, the ploughman will pause so that time seems to stop. But

in conjunction with this rapt and "wild" pause is a lack of knowledge: "he feels enraptured though he knows not why." Orality is one common response in Clare's poetry, and so the ploughman "hums and mutters" in expression of his joy. But this expression is "in vain" both because it cannot produce an account of his rapture and because it cannot permanently realize or freeze the moment of rapture.

Fire and thermal phenomena are metaphors for the mind, genius, and the quick spread of inspiration. The fire metaphor resurfaces in line 37 to show that genius can withstand time and its transforming decay if the heart retains the "kindling sparks" of genius. With the flame intact, "thoughts will rise and fancy strive again." The life of this imaginative fire is described in terms of a body and its health or vitality (e.g., the single ember is "dying" and its light "faint[s]" from the speaker's sight).[249] This analogy stresses the crucial role that bodily senses play in individual genius, but it also animates the process of genius to imply its independent existence. Another association attaches to the poem's use of fire imagery—rising above. The "kindling hope" may "rise," which implies the upward motion of the fire's smoke and filmy byproducts. The imagery of rising, which entails regular air flow and a robust blaze, suggests aspiration and progress. The speaker shows aspiration in lines 5-6 when he describes his "fluttering heart" which "throbs" to communicate its "painful pleasing feelings." He is wearied by "successless sallies" and then "memory fails and fancy takes her flight."

The vital aspect of the flame underscores another aspect of the fire-genius conceit: breathing and air. The triple reference to fainting implies the weakening of the fire, due to the

[249] This calls to mind Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight," a hearth poem in which the speaker watches a film (or flakey membrane) flutter across the grate before a "thin blue flame." He perceives this film to have sympathies with him, calling it a "companionable form." It is a freakish manifestation of the "idling Spirit" or "toy of Thought" upon which the youthful speaker "with most believing mind" projects his own expectations and fantasies. Clare's poem on genius also utilizes the hearth and its thermal phenomena as a platform to address the mind and how it works under the sway of inspiration and rapture. He describes the heart as "fluttering" in line 45. The poem ends with allusions to hearth images, including: "dying ember's light," "the hearth," a "glimmering glow," "redden up," "sparks crack brightening into life," "kindling hope," "twinkle dies," and "dim burns."

smothering ashes and poor air flow. Air flow symbolizes the material and socio-political conditions surrounding genius, which can stifle or support growth. The connection between the fire of genius and breathing is strengthened in the final couplet—"The wick confined within its socket dies, / Borne down and smothered in a thousand sighs"—to suggest that inauspicious circumstances, excessive ambition, and anxiety extinguish the flame of genius. The speaker abandons the hearth for a candle, whose confined wick is easily smothered by his rapturous and frustrated sighs. These destructive sighs use the same tool—breath—so necessary to the oral recitation of poetry. This trope reflects the difficulty and precariousness of expression. Fire's curious vacillation conveys in a material and dynamic way the mystery and independent power of genius and fancy. It is a fit analogy for the artistic process, because it points to the fleeting and erratic states of mind that both inspire and disrupt fancy and creation.

"Dawnings of Genius" presents several factors of taste and artistic creation. Fire and time convey the unstable nature of the present moment of fancy; both transform the material they feed upon. The memory and the heart are held up by the speaker as alternate repositories for rapture and tasteful feeling. Clare also incorporates the low aesthetic, which in this case is somewhat politicized by references to poverty and economic exploitation. Genius is also shown to be a perplexing matter for the percipient subject; untouchable by language, it deals in visual images, feelings, and ideas. Several additional factors are associated with the progress of genius, including one's physical circumstances and native locality. It is from genius, the speaker intones, that warmth, joy, taste, sympathy, and fondness attach us to our "native place." In his emphasis upon the local application and effects of genius, Clare yokes two senses of the word *genius*. First, he alludes to the eighteenth-century psychological theories of taste (which vary from physiological to intellectual accounts), to qualify genius as the characteristic mental disposition

of specific persons (e.g., the shepherd and ploughman). But he also engages the sense of genius that refers to a specific place: "[t]he body of associations connected with, or inspirations that may be derived from it."[250] I would like to turn to the local application of genius and taste in some other poems, including "Shadows of Taste," "Autumn Robin," "The Eternity of Nature," "Helpstone," "Decay: A Ballad," and "The Progress of Rhyme." Some of these poems thematize locus and genius and offer a poetic explanation of beauty (e.g., "Shadows of Taste," "The Eternity of Nature," and "The Progress of Rhyme") while others portray the power and value of specific places and inhabitants (e.g., "Autumn Robin," "Helpstone," and "Decay: A Ballad").

"Shadows of Taste" addresses the concept of taste more explicitly. The poem personifies and reifies abstract forces and emotional or mental states. For instance, taste is gendered as a literate female being whose moods and visions filter down to all beings[251]; joy is a "birthright"; poesy's "spells" and "visions" stop the flow of time; nature, also female, flings her beauties over the soul; and wisdom is a sun-like source that radiates upon taste's moods.

This four stanza poem consists of 164 lines, or 82 couplets, that vary from four to five stresses per line. Iambs and trochees alternately dominate the flow of stress; this variation has a sound effect similar to rhetorical speech, wherein alternating stresses mimic a speaker's shifting emphases. The speaker offers an argument, and variety of examples, for the various manifestations of taste. Though the poem is physically structured into four stanzas, the speaker's methodical discussion of the different practitioners and modes of taste (e.g., birds, flowers, insects, humans, poets, scientists, rambling nature lovers, and gardeners) organizes the poem into discreet units. These exemplary taste units do not entirely coincide with the stanza structure; rather, they are framed by five topical sections which address the subject of taste more

[250] "Genius, *n*." Def. 3d. *OED Online*. June 2012. Oxford UP. 7 Aug. 2012.
[251] This personification of taste happens slowly over a series of brief references. Taste is by far the most alluded to abstract entity in the poem (14 references), with joy being the second-most.

generally.[252] What is remarkable about "Shadows of Taste" is the fact that its exemplary figures are not exclusively rustic characters. They are birds, flowers, insects, general human types (the poet, the scientist, the gardener), and specific English poets (Donne, Pope). This broad spectrum of species and tastes, which Clare unifies under the controlling image of the sun (in the poem's final lines), promotes an aesthetic that takes into account multiplicity, diversity, particularity, and context.

The speaker argues that taste is a unified value but that it manifests in many different ways in different subjects. Above all, it involves "truth to nature" (77). After conjuring up a relativistic view of taste, he carefully unifies his subject: "Thus truth to nature, as the true sublime, / Stands a Mount Atlas overpeering time" (77-8). Clare adapts the popular term *sublime*, the image of Mount Atlas, and a sense of timelessness to convey a definitive taste. The closing lines of the poem underscore this finality with a celestial image that places taste alongside the sun of wisdom and truth. Taste's "concentring rings" surround the sun-like truth, which emits "threads of light" outward to create the "shadows of taste." Phrases like *taste of joy*, *truth to nature*, and *truth of taste* convey the emotive, aesthetic, and universal qualities of nature. And the images of the mountain and the sun accentuate the consistency of nature as a source of taste and of life.

The speaker proceeds to historicize poetic taste via prosody:

> Styles may with fashions vary—tawdry, chaste,
> Have had their votaries which each fancied taste:
> From Donne's old homely gold whose broken feet
> Jostles the reader's patience from its seat
> To Pope's smooth rhymes that regularly play
> In music's stated periods all the way
> That starts and closes, starts again and chimes,
> Its tuning gamut true as minster chimes.
> From these old fashions stranger metres flow,

[252] These five topical sections are: lines 1-6, 53-6, 119-20, 147-152, and 161-4.

> Half prose, half verse, that stagger as they go;
> One line starts smooth and then for room perplexed
> Elbows along and knocks against the next
> And half its neighbour—where a pause marks time,
> There the clause ends—what follows is for rhyme. (79-92)

Clare's reflexive portrayal of poetic styles has two noticeable effects. First, it provides a tangible expression of these stylistic effects: Donne's speech-like jaggedness, Pope's mellifluousness, enjambment, caesura, and rhyme. Secondly, it establishes an arch speaker capable of superseding these styles. The speaker's reference to "fashion's foils" emphasizes a neoclassical historical sweep. The speaker also evaluates these styles (using words like *tawdry*, *homely*, and *true*) and observes how they provoke impatience or ease; the word *votaries* connotes the excessive zeal of taste's assorted adherents. Moreover, the speaker manipulates and surpasses these styles by selectively introducing his own poetic flourishes: assonance ("old homely gold"), internal rhyme ("pause" and "clause"), repetition ("starts" and "half"), alliteration ("tuning gamut true"), and identical rhyme ("chimes"). He thus displays circumspection about various English poetic styles in foregrounding their formal qualities, sway, and effects upon readers. In this self-referential micro-geneaology, Clare skillfully implies the necessity of modes in poetic taste as well as the certain passing and repurposing of these modes.

The speaker repeats the operative phrase "truth to nature" in line 93 and thus forms a miniature cycle.

> Yet truth to nature will in all remain
> As grass in winter glorifies the plain,
> And over fashion's foils rise proud and high
> As light's bright fountain in a cloudy sky. (93-6)

This repetition acts as an aural marker for the reader, sealing off this section of the poem before the speaker moves on to another "shadow" of taste. Secondly, it emphasizes the dominant motive in classical humanism and neoclassical critical conceptions of art: truth to nature. Though just

what Clare's nature comprises differs from the abstract ideal of classicism. Thirdly, the phrase collapses the stylistic details of Donne and Pope, and other models, under a universalizing rubric. The speaker characteristically resorts to natural images, and the durability they suggest, to convey the power of this aesthetic rubric. Like the inveterate winter grass and sovereign sun, "truth to nature" will "rise proud and high" over squabbles of style to spread glory and light. The passage's motif of cycles suggests that poets shall return, again and again, to a standard of taste that advocates "truth to nature."

The poem's penultimate lines present another mode of taste: the relish for landscape gardens. The speaker refers to truth once again, but not poetry's "truth to nature." Rather, he decisively links truth to taste and not art, as "art's strong impulse mars the truth of taste." This phrasing confronts the classical humanist precept that art represent "general nature." It substitutes for that abstract ideal a botanical nature—characterized by "disorder" and "wood and heath"—that emanates the "truth of taste." The contrast between art and disorder imputes a negative value to modish gardening. Human art, its ideas "spruce and delicate," misses the mark: "[w]ith such, wild nature's beauties run to waste." Rather, the seeming disorder of weeds and "a wilderness of thorns . . . so forlorn and bare," are beautiful, efficient, and valuable. Truth to nature, as an aesthetic paradigm, of necessity precludes waste, misuse, and adornment.

Though Clare upholds a paradigm for truth in art, he creates distance between the human percipient subject and that source of wisdom. The sun metaphor in lines 163-4 particularly bears this out. By locating the source of truth in the works of nature and emphasizing the strangeness of those works according to the human perspective, Clare calls attention to the human capacity for subjective relativism as he simultaneously encourages and problematizes the direct study and imitation of nature.

Putting aside the poem's neoclassical and universal allegations, it is important to note that its five topical sections explore the relative quality of taste and its many expressions. Four of these sections (1-6, 53-6, 119-20, and 161-4) explicitly address the relative nature of taste, while one addresses the topics of deracination and beauty (147-52). These sections present a topical statement about the nature of taste in contrast with the lengthier exemplary sections. They also structure the poem, create rhetorical effect, and present specific analogies that develop the notion of strata or "shadows of taste." Lines 1-6 define taste as an "instinctive mood" with "many hues," and emphasize its emotional make-up. Words like *birthright*, *heires*, and *own* assert the right and access of non-human subjects to the "truth of taste."[253] The generational drift of the concept of inheritance associates the endless and automatic reproductive cycles of nature; this heritage—inert and immutable—is further associated with joy or pleasure, the primary factor in determining taste. Lastly, the speaker emphasizes the role that choice plays in the legacy of taste, deftly adding that such choices are often "peculiar."

The second topical section (53-6) stresses the differing degrees of mind that spring up from taste, "as various as the leaves of trees." These various minds "follow taste and her sweets explore," making "Edens . . . where deserts spread before." These lines establish a sense of taste as linear and as spatial. The third topical section is a couplet that joins the diversity of taste to individual inclination and exploration: "Taste's rainbow visions own unnumbered hues / And every shade its sense of taste pursues" (119-20). The fifth section provides another natural analogy to convey the diversity of tastes:

> Such are the various moods that taste displays,
> Surrounding wisdom in concentring rays
> Where threads of light from one bright focus run
> As day's proud halo circles round the sun. (161-4)

[253] "But birds and flowers and insects are its heirs—" (4).

The concentric rings of taste suggest the rings of a tree; and though the speaker does not mention one, sections one and two do compare taste's many moods to leaves and flowers. The proximity suggested by the concentric rings figuratively links taste with truth. It is notable that the speaker does not prioritize amongst the various rays based upon their nearness to the sun of wisdom.

The fourth topical section appears after a lengthy account in stanza 4 of another sort of taste (which I would like to describe first): the "recordless rapture" of the man who finds beauty in nature (126). This rambler "love[s] to breathe / Nature's wild Eden" and finds in "common blades of grass" or the "common weed" a "world of beauty" (126-9). He infers intelligent design—his heart overflowing "with swarms of thought / To that great being who raised life from nought" (130-1). Moreover, he does not love flowers for their perfumes, or butterflies for their "painted plumes" (137). Rather, he loves them because he loves the meadow and lea—the places where they dwell (139). The basis of his love and taste is terrestrial and spatial. His rapture is "recordless" in two possible senses: it has no precedent, or he keeps no record of this rapture (in language or otherwise). The emphasis upon recordlessness mimics the anonymity and ineffability seen in poems like "Helpstone" and "Dawnings of Genius." Uncertainty about the efficacy of human language (to convey natural scenes) is a fact for Clare, and a theme in his work; his use of prosopopoeia, aurality, SLD, and spatial and temporal detail attend to this uncertainty. Clare mistrusts certain physical manifestations of nature's beauties because they can be taken out of context and appropriated for other purposes. In lines 100-6, he introduces the immorality of exploitative taste. "[V]ulgar hinds" with "clownish hearts" and "heedless eyes / Find nought in nature they as wealth can prize, / With them self-interest and the thoughts of gain / Are nature's beauties: all beside are vain." However, the rambler prefers spots that are "desolate" and "neglected"—spots which "seem in labour's hurry left forgot" (142-3).The basis

of this preference may be an innate taste for obscure and out-of-the-way subjects, with its concomitant emphasis upon immateriality or unletteredness. Another aspect of the privileging of obscurity is that same politicizing low aesthetic seen in other poems. But the rambling poet's preference is also natural. He loves such spots because they are useful according to a mysterious economy of nature, not human exigencies:

> The warped and punished trunk of stunted oak
> Freed from its bonds but by the thunder-stroke,
> As cramped by straggling ribs of ivy sere—
> There the glad bird makes home for half the year. (143-6)

Freed by destruction, this tree cannot be used in the ordinary sense. Its misshapen trunk and withered ivy make it ill-fitted even for sitting; it cannot provide wood for furniture, ships, wine barrels, or axe handles. It has no bark, and thus is useless for medicinal purposes; without boughs and leaves, it produces no acorns, and thus cannot provide flour. The speaker underscores the tree's negative value (in terms of human uses) with such words as *warped*, *punished*, *stunted*, *bonds*, *cramped*, *straggling*, and *sere.* And yet the "glad bird makes home" in this very stoven (147).

What follows this surprising revelation—spatial choice as a basis of taste—is the poem's fourth topical section about taste, which conceives a destructive image and establishes new knowledge:

> But take these several beings from their homes,
> Each beauteous thing a withered thought becomes,
> Association fades and like a dream
> They are but shadows of the things they seem;
> Torn from their homes and happiness they stand
> The poor dull captives of a foreign land. (147-152)

Beauty is activated by embeddedness, or the harmonious relation between a being and its home. The poem suggests that the perceptive faculty of taste relies upon this relation, whether it be one

of native dwelling or foreign captivity. When this terrestrial and spatial relation is ruptured, a perceptual loss results. To uproot any natural being is to make it less real, to subject it to suffering, and to imprison it in an act of political warfare.

Conversely, the choice to dwell in a particular location causes joy and constitutes a subject's meaning and value. The poem's beginning defines taste as an "instinctive mood" (3) and follows with three different examples: birds, flowers, and insects (followed by "that noble insect" man). The speaker emphasizes that all three "choose for joy in a peculiar way" (6). Birds "own it in the various spots they choose" (7). Flowers "in the wisdom of creative choice / Seem blest with feeling and a silent voice: / Some on the barren roads delight to bloom / And others haunt the melancholy tomb" (23-6). As for insects, "in wild disorder various routs they run / In water, earth, still shade and the busy sun" (41-2). All three examples of taste emphasize choice of location. Words and phrases like *peculiar*, *strange*, *man's fear*, *seem*, and *wild disorders* reveal the human perception of such choices. The fourth example of taste is "man, that noble insect, restless man":

> Whose thoughts scale heaven in its mighty span,
> Pour forth his living soul in many a shade
> And taste runs riot in her every grade.
> While the low herd, mere savages subdued,
> With nought of feeling or of taste imbued
> Pass over sweetest scenes a careless eye
> As blank as midnight in its deepest dye: (45-52)

The images suggest movement and transit, certainly not dwelling or choice. Restless and prone to "pour forth his living soul," man seems most like an insect, ever flitting about. His thoughts travel to insurmountable heights, and his eyes pass over the "sweetest scenes." Notwithstanding that, Clare sarcastically applies the dehumanizing, zoomorphic terms *insect*, *herd*, and *savages* to suggest that humans lack the careful and attentive "wisdom of creative choice" displayed by

other species. The speaker reaffirms the variability of human perception and the phenomena of imaginative transference: “oft the shepherd with unlearned ken / Finds strange eggs scribbled as if with ink and pen— / He looks with wonder on the learned marks / And calls them in his memory writing larks” (11-4).

In keeping with the emphasis upon human [mis]perception, the speaker presents emotion as a factor in variations amongst taste. Lines 15-22 contrast the birds’ choices (which are also based on love, joy, and trust) with humanity’s tasteless fear. But some humans do find joy and rapture in nature and scientific discoveries, as well as “poesy’s spells,” which are melodious, beautiful, and sweet (57-60). The speaker depicts poesy as both mimetic and inventive. For instance, “A face of beauty in a city crowd” is “In poesy’s vision more refined and fair / Taste reads o’erjoyed and greets her image there” (61, 63-4). This personification of taste, who enjoys the rendered image, accentuates the poem’s connection between poetry and taste. Clare elaborates the power of poetry to suspend time and create pleasure:

> A pleasing image to its page conferred
> In living character and breathing word
> Becomes a landscape heard and felt and seen,
> Sunshine and shade one harmonising green
> Where meads and brooks and forests basking lie,
> Lasting as truth and the eternal sky.
> Thus truth to nature, as the true sublime,
> Stands a Mount Atlas overpeering time. (71-8)

Like the fourth section mentioned above, this passage utilizes the concept of embeddedness. In this case, the native being that dwells and thrives in a spatial context is the poetic image—its home is the printed page. In this setting, the poetic image lives and breathes and flourishes in a virtual “landscape heard and felt and seen.” The landscape thus portrayed is a harmonious aggregate of diverse features—yet it is “[l]asting as truth and the eternal sky.” Clare goes so far as to suggest that tasteful poetic images—pleasurable, timeless, and true to nature—are the true

source of the sublime. The image of Mount Atlas concretizes this assertion. Interestingly, its awesome size is invoked as a temporal (not geographic or spatial) marker: the poetic sublime "overpeer[s]" time, its critical currents, or any verdict thereby attained. Again, in his reversion to a concrete natural image to portray the abstract concept of poesy, Clare holds up a notion of physical nature as an eternal, universal, ideal, and absolute source of the "truth of taste."

In "Autumn Robin," drafted as early as 1820 but not published until 1835, Clare attempts to revise the poor taste that esteems the "far famed nightingale" over the robin, a bird which sings during all seasons. This poem is an effective model of the various elements of Clarean taste, including: religious praise (via song), trifles, the contrast between levels of listening and careful attention, obscurity, animal instinct, eternity, and death. Through the poem's format of parallelism, the robin becomes an emblem of the peasant poet; moreover, the poem presents a symmetry of topics and effects that gestures toward a broader symmetry between non-humans and humans.[254] This highly structured poem begins as the speaker listens to the robin's song and it ends when the speaker sings back to the bird. This circular trajectory models a mutual responsiveness that is naturalized and salubrious. Listening to the robin is a balm to the speaker's spirit: "I love thy lonely plaintive note / & tiney whispering song to hear / . . . / The songs thy little joys repeat / My lonliness relieves" (3-4, 7-8). The bird's orality is repetitive and affective, and it spreads synecdochically to humankind ("& many are the lonely minds / That hear & welcome thee anew"). The speaker temporarily levels his running contrast of tastes to assert that the robin affects all humans who can hear, enjoy, and praise its song: "Not taste alone but humble hinds / Delight to praise & love thee too / The veriest clown biside his cart / Turns from his song with many a smile / To see thee from the hedge row start / To sing upon the stile" (11-6). This singing laborer inaugurates a vocational catalog (lines 9-48) of human listeners who

[254] Clare's repetition of the word "half" in line 75 underscores this sense of symmetry.

pause their orality to make quiet and thus hear the robin. The shepherd "chides" his barking dog who "barks & frightens" the bird away; the "boy who every songster mocks[255] / Forbears the gate to clap" (19-20, 23-4). This catalog illustrates a diversity of human subjects which is reflected in the diversity of bird species in lines 73-106.

Another structural effect that supports human/non-human symmetry is the poem's overlapping topics, which include: the robin's song, the speaker's reaction, the other human subjects' reactions, the robin's unique behaviors, other bird species, and the speaker's paean to the robin. This organization establishes a sense of interconnectedness through singing and listening. The speaker summarizes the human vocational catalog with a reference to the robin and interspecies reciprocity: "Thy simple faith in mans esteem / From every heart hath favors won" (33-4). Thus begins a winning description of the robin's virtues: its lowness, its sociability, and its constant singing. The bird's lowness and the lowness of its environment are supported by a string of humble words: its *undernotes* and *undersong* grow *unknown* in summer, injured by the nightingale's fame (89-90).[256] The bird's fearless treatment of humans illustrates its neighborly virtue. It hops upon the ditcher's spade, perches on the woodman's faggots, and prunes its wings among the "gipseys camp." The speaker "track[s]" this "[d]omestic & confiding . . . ancient friend" because it seems to invite a social exchange: "Thou comest as if thou knew the sound / & loved the sight of men" (63-4). So too does the gipsey boy imagine the possibility of interspecies communication: "He surely thinks thou knew the call" (45). In addition to its social and oral propensity, the robin is esteemable because it is so common—it can be found "in every town & crowded place" (67).

[255] Could this be Clare? This same boy takes cover in the hedge, surveys the bird, and mimics it: "Pleasd with thy song in pleasure lost / He pausing mutters scraps of praise" (27-8).
[256] In "The Eternity of Nature" and in his seventh natural history letter, Clare emphasizes and appreciates the lowness and the friendliness of the robin.

But as summer approaches, "no listening hear the shepherd lends" and the robin is "by all thy autumn friends / . . . missing & forgot" (93, 95-6). The reason for this neglect is the fact that the robin's music is drowned out by summer birdsong. At this point, the speaker switches positions with the bird in order to repay its kindness. As it had relieved his "lonliness," so shall he remedy its seasonal devaluation: "Yet then my walks thy theme *salutes* / & finds their autumn favoured *guest* / Gay piping on the hazel roots / Above thy mossy nest" (emphasis added 101-4).[257] In these lines, the speaker's walks figuratively operate as a verbal text ("salutes") and as a domicile ("guest") to honor the robin's true significance: its unconditional song. For "[t]is wrong that thou shouldst be despised / When these gay fickle birds appear / They sing when summers flowers are prized / Thou at the dull & dying year" (105-8). The word *wrong* emphasizes that taste is a moral faculty and the robin serves as a moral example; by singing during the barren season as well as during summer it demonstrates the aesthetic of the low (and sure-fire orality).

Clare contrasts the taste of the "heedless & the gay" who "[b]epraise the voice of louder lays" with the robin's simplicity. It sings merely for joy's sake, not for acclaim, and becomes a symbol of the poet's self-fashioning: "The joy thou stealest from sorrows day / Is more to thee than praise" (111-2). Like the unselfish flowers in "A Woodland Seat," this robin displays unselfconsciousness and resourcefulness; it does not solicit applause and it works amidst humble conditions. The poet's presence becomes literal at line 113, when he proposes a swap with the bird: "& could my notes win aught from thine / My words but imitate thy lay / Time would not then his charge resign / Nor throw the meanest verse away / But ever at this mellow time / He should thy autumn praise prolong / So would they share the happy prime / Of thy eternal song" (113-20). Similar moments of reciprocal exchange (between humans, non-humans, and

[257] These lines show an example of the syntactic ambiguity so common in Clare's poetry (and so productive of meanings).

allegorized forces) appear in "The Progress of Rhyme." For instance, the speaker in that poem dares to sing aloud his worship so that "beauty's self" might turn its eye of praise upon his lay (69-72); also, he expresses a desire to sing as well as a black bird, who seems pleased by this sentiment and pauses to answer him back (229-32). The speaker's notion (in both poems) that his imitation and orality might cajole some response from the non-human and abstract worlds invokes the principle of reciprocity, and it replaces a potential human audience with another audience which Clare is capable of manipulating in the space of the poem. In the final lines of "The Autumn Robin," the speaker suggests that effective documentation of the robin's lay (SLD) will counteract humanity's [autumnal] ignorance and will ensure the lay's posterity.

The posterity thus won is the central theme of another poem, "The Eternity of Nature," which presents a diversity of non-human subjects as "time's partners." Their "unwearied minstrelsy" surpasses human poetic fame. These humble subjects ("little brooks that hum a simple lay / In green unnoticed spots, from praise away") shall sing when poets are buried in "time's darkness." Time "protects" their songs because "nature is their soul, to whom all clings / Of fair or beautiful in lasting things" (40-2). And so, if that which is beautiful and eternal clings to nature, the speaker hopes to achieve a sort of permanence by joining "time's partners":

> And so I worship them in bushy spots
> And sing with them when all else notice not,
> And feel the music of their mirth agree
> With that sooth quiet that bestirs in me.
> And if I touch aright that quiet tone,
> That soothing truth that shadows forth their own,
> Then many a year shall grow in after-days
> And still find hearts to love my quiet lays. (51-8)

The poetic process outlined by the speaker involves some of the elements of taste already discussed, such as: worship, obscurity, the contrast between rapt attention and obliviousness, interspecies communication and anticipated response, posterity, and humble quietness. It also

describes the process of SLD, and holds up the songs of "time's partners" as a source of poetic power. As in "The Autumn Robin," the speaker expresses a hope in preserving nature's lay by his documentary poetic process. So too do these natural subjects model song for song's sake: "Yet cheering mirth with thoughts sung not for fame / But for the joy that with their utterance came, / That inward breath of rapture urged not loud" (59-61). This staging of poetic posterity, with its dual emphasis upon quiet softness and orality, offers a vision of taste in which careful attention and "truth to nature" are important. It also implies the reciprocity that exists (via song) between "time's partners" and the speaker (who "feel[s] the music of their mirth agree" with the "sooth quiet that bestirs" in him).

"Helpstone" rehearses the connection between quietness (unlettered obscurity), habitation, and taste. The poem's themes of *nostos* and *loco-thanatos*, as well as its personification of individual entities in Helpston, develop the idea of a personal relationship between the speaker and Helpston. This personal relationship of embeddedness supports an abiding sense of taste as spatially determined:

> How oft I've sighd at alterations made
> To see the woodmans cruel axe employ'd
> A tree beheaded or a bush destroy'd
> Nay e'en a post old standard or a stone
> Moss'd o'er by age and branded as her own
> Would in my mind a strong attachment gain
> A fond desire that there they might remain
> And all old favourites fond taste approves
> Griev'd me at heart to witness their remove[s]. (86-94)

The passage's brutal details (*cruel axe*, *beheaded*, *destroy'd*) coupled with the speaker's grief express the moral power of his embeddedness. His ironic roles, as silent witness and writer, maximize the value of testimony. The risk of a spatially determined taste and the fond

attachment to place is grief. In lines 163-78, the speaker reverts to a nostalgic, prelapsarian vision of Helpston as a means of comfort in his dying years:

> Oh happy Eden of those golden years
> Which mem'ry cherishes and use endears
> Thou dear beloved spot may it be thine
> To add comfort to my life's decline
> . . . . . .
> May it be mine to meet my end in thee
> And as reward for all my troubles past
> Find one hope true to die at home at last.

Despite the permanent loss of Helpston's bushes, hedges, trees, commons, open-field system, etc., the speaker holds to the power of memory and homecoming to inspire those same "charms of youth." The lines' reference to "use," which endears the "happy Eden" of Helpston, argues for habit and employment as a basis of place attachment and preference.

"Decay: A Ballad" appeared in *The Rural Muse* in 1835 and resembles some other poems Clare wrote in 1832 during the period of his family's move to Northborough. It particularly resembles "The Flitting" (also known as "On Leaving the Cottage of my Birth") in subject matter, diction, and imagery. Like "Helpstone" and "Shadows of Taste," "Decay: A Ballad" presents a spatial and terrestrial definition of taste. The poem's emphasis upon place presents a formula for rapture and poesy: the human subject's familiar and sustained connection with a particular place. The loss of poesy is presented as an estrangement from the land; the speaker "cannot find her [poesy's] haunts again" (50). The speaker's intense personification of poesy ("I hardly know her face") and of nature ("herself seems on the flitting") creates an impression of the friendship and conversation between the speaker and these locally rooted entities. In "The Flitting," the speaker concretizes his sense of friendship with nature, and his simultaneous sense of defeat, with the image of a lost nightingale who seems to have strayed along with him. In contrast, "Decay: A Ballad" renders loss more abstractly, as a loss of beauty and art: "O poesy is

on the wane, / For fancy's visions all unfitting" (1-2) and "Ay, poesy hath passed away / And fancy's visions undeceive us" (61-2).[258] The poem's poignant refrains ("poesy is on the wane") attest to the sense of personal loss Clare experienced during this period. His geographical uprooting is expressed in terms of an emotional and interpersonal devastation—"O could I feel her faith again" the speaker enjoins in the poem's final line—and most crucially, a loss of poetic power. "Decay: A Ballad" contrasts sharply with "The Progress of Rhyme" (also written during Clare's middle period, sometime between 1830-5), a poem which shows the positive aspects of native place attachment.

Like "The Autumn Robin" and "Helpstone," "The Progress of Rhyme" upholds the metaphoric conflation of land and poetic text. In this poem, poetry serves as a record of the rambler's tasteful engagement with his environment and vice versa. This *künstler-poem* combines an autobiographical account with individual standards of artistic taste. Clare personifies the force of "soul-enchanting poesy" as a friend and companion. He also compares it to hope, love, joy, and beauty, calling it the object of his boyhood worship. His first ambition is its praise; and though he fears its disdain, he dares to "sing aloud" his "worship" so that "beauty's self might turn its eye."[259] This figurative invocation of poesy's (and beauty's) patronage is a strong indication of Clare's desire for reciprocity and understanding—that he places this power in the abstract realm, beyond human patronage, is telling. The speaker's extreme timidity, sheltered by nature's trifles, lends itself to close observation of plants and organisms; it thus cooperates with the aesthetic of humility and lowness. Locality also prompts

[258] Though the speaker of "Decay: A Ballad" does personify poesy, to an extent, this personification is not developed at length; it is not nearly as concrete as the nightingale in "The Flitting." It might even be considered animation; his primary effect is to stress that poesy has died or vanished. He provides no specific images (animal, avian, botanical or otherwise) for poesy, though he does refer to poesy with female pronouns.

[259] This poem, as the others in this chapter, works a facile association between various aesthetic terms, including *taste*, *beauty*, *beauty's self*, *genius*, *poesy*, and even *music's self*.

his artistic development. His own experience of pleasure amidst the summer fields encourages him to use his own voice: "I felt that I'd a right to song / And sung—but in a timid strain / Of fondness for my native plain; / For everything I felt a love, / The weeds below, the birds above" (80-4). In the many beautiful trifles he encounters outdoors, he perceives the equality of "nature's love," which seems less subject to the vicissitudes of life and exigencies of political economy (104). Together, this sense of "nature's love," the portrayal of choice in "Shadows of Taste" and the prose writings about animal instinct, and the aesthetic of the low privilege the mystery of nature as a basis of value, authority, and truth.[260]

The youthful rhymer develops authority as a result of his outdoor rambles. The basis for this authority is derived by analogy with "a weed in nature's poesy" (92):

> And so it cheered me while I lay
> Among their beautiful array
> To think that I in humble dress
> Might have a right to happiness
> And sing as well as greater men,
> And then I strung the lyre again (105-110)

The weeds—the have-nots—thrive just as well as "garden flowers with all their care" (103). Clare's pivot in the analogy is his "humble dress." The external appearances of the weeds, thistles, and this rustic poetaster convey more than just a sense of "nature's love"; they also

[260] In Peterborough MSS 42 and 46, Clare writes at length about animal instinct and human attitudes towards it. In "Essay on Instinct" (A42) He observes that many admire the instinct of animals "with astonishment as a mystery of nature" but they rarely marvel at the "reasoning powers of man" (*NHP* 281). This observation illuminates Clare's aesthetic of the low and his preoccupation with non-human trifles. In the passage "Animal Instinct," (A46) he quips that we are not astonished to see children learning to walk on their own, yet when a bird builds her spring nest, "we fall into sentimentalitys" (*NHP* 91). The latter passage (A46) is longer and more philosophical. In it, Clare restates the superiority of animal instinct (over human reason). Atheists, he writes, admire it as a "great [ ] of nature" (*NHP* 91). Some consider it inferior because it does not "feel" the present nor does it involve the future. Though it may not be defined properly in words, it "seems to be a natural sympathy that comes in the world with" these animals. Clare is comfortable with the mystery of nature. Though he can furnish "thousands of strong proofs" he has "not language enough" to express them. So, he writes, "I must leave this grand existance of nature in the mystery I found it" (*NHP* 92).

imply the mean circumstances of rural poverty. Despite the weeds' physical circumstances[261], the "kindly rain" falls on them, the "tender" sky watches over them, and the "kindling smile of sunshine" graces them. The speaker then compares these elemental necessities for life—so freely meted out by nature—to the praise and encouragement of readers and critics. "Though no garden care had I," he avows, "My heart had love for poesy" (117-8). Just as nature's principle of beauty manifests in all beings "great and small" (88) so the speaker believes "beauty's self" will manifest in his lays.

The speaker is thus encouraged, both by the biological diversity and hardiness of the Helpston landscape, to honor and pursue his own individual notion of taste:

> My harp though simple was my own.
> When I was in the fields alone
> With none to help and none to hear,
> To bid me either hope or fear,
> The bird or bee its chords would sound,
> The air hummed melodies around,
> I caught with eager ear the strain
> And sung the music o'er again.
> Or love or instinct flowing strong,
> Fields were the essence of the song
> And fields and woods are still as mine,
> Real teachers that are all divine. (135-46)

The speaker constructs his own harp[262] by listening to and mimicking the chords and melodies of the fields. His "eager ear" catches the template, and he copies that template in song. Clare was exposed to the pedagogical and rhetorical methods of templatizing and repetition by his schoolmaster James Merrishaw, his skillful balladeer father, the rich oral culture in Helpston, Gypsy fiddling, his musical transcriptions, and of course, listening to many bird songs. The lines

[261] "No matter for protecting wall, / No matter though they chance to fall / Where sheep and cows and oxen lie" (93-5). Later, in lines 286-90, Clare writes: "I felt it happiness to be / Unknown, obscure, and like a tree / In woodland peace and privacy." Clare finds an ironic solution to the problems of reception and fame in privacy and physical isolation.

[262] or poetic instrument. It is a lyre in line 110.

surpass the aesthetic analogy (of nature as musician) to further suggest that the landscape is a teacher, a preacher, and a muse. His poetic inspiration correlates directly with the landscape; the very fields are "the essence of the song" (144). As a dutiful and worshipful student, Clare credits the "fields and woods" as his teachers. Nature is divine for its powers and spells, but also because of its loving constancy: "No matter how the world approved, / 'Twas nature listened—I that loved" (211-2). With the valorization of "beauty's smile" as a reward for the speaker's toils, and the personification of nature as attentive benefactor and free source of music, Clare conceptually removes the human element from the chain of poetic reception and presents a vision of taste that is distinctly non-human.

Clare's "Essay on Landscape" illustrates some of these tenets in an applied prose argument. Clare praises the landscape paintings of Dewint and Rippingille, for they are the "very copys of nature" (*Prose* 211). The essay also illustrates Clare's conception of poor taste in the visual representation of nature. He lambastes the "trickery" and "beautiful ugliness" of early nineteenth century landscape paintings, which employ "false effects" of light, shadow, and gradation to such excess that trees are made to appear a mile high, or the neighboring background a mile off (211). Truth to nature, in style and content, is privileged over artistic innovation and fancy, which is liable to imagine "mountains & rivers & cataracts where they are not" (211). He calls this "fashionable accomplishment" of his day "taste trimming" (212). Clare writes: "Art may ply fantastic anatomy but nature is always herself in her wildest moods of extravagance—Art's penalty is a beautiful vagary a vision a romance" (211). In the portrayal of Dewint as a "worshipper" of nature, Clare invokes image of a divine and equitable nature seen in "The Progress of Rhyme" and the natural history letters. The essay's critical stance provides him some distance from the subject; Clare thus speculates more freely about the relationship between

the reverent artist and divine nature. Nature "rewards the faith of her worshippers," he claims, "by revealing such beautys in her settings that the fanciful never meet with— . . . she gives him her own imagings & he makes the best use of them by reflections as true & as light as a rushy common with its summer tract of a brook" (211).

The accuracy of the faithful artist is described as "a harmony of beautys perceptions" (211). Along with the largesse of nature, harmony is a vital element of tasteful art. The imitative harmony between a painting and the landscape it represents provides pleasure for other worshippers: "we see nothing but natural objects not placed for effect or set off by other dictates of the painters fancys but there they are just as nature placed them" (212). The passage stresses that the artist's role is not to choose the items for placement, nor their locations; rather, the artist's work is to see the beauty of nature's choices and convey those peculiarities in a particular medium. The work of taste, in this context, is not selective or aggregative, but imitative and documentary. "Shadows of Taste" portrays this natural "wisdom of creative choice" at length amongst the non-human world, though the "Essay on Landscape" praises its accurate representation in Dewint's landscape paintings. In his praise, Clare demonstrates a characteristic metaphoric step: he calls Dewint's paintings nature's "autographs" (212). The reference attributes written literacy to nature. The figure also delimits Dewint's role as artist; it transforms him into a medium of expression for use by another entity. Clare uses words like *simplicity*, *naked*, and *transparent* to support the modification of artistic fancy (or annihilation of identity). The image of transparence is repeated, in a very different context[263], several paragraphs later when Clare writes of the "fate of [a] painters masterpiece—who striving to please all the world placed it in the market place for the correction of the crows who to his astonishment found fault

[263] Later in the essay, the words *absurditys*, *abortions*, *deformitys*, and *ridiculous situations* convey a biological, almost eugenic aspect to this artistic transparence.

with every excellence & made a perfect blank of his labours" (213). It is wise that spectators not be allowed to touch works of art, Clare pronounces, because erasure and blankness might result. Clare then launches a bid for an artist's "own taste" (213). Real excellence, he says:

> must be its own creation it must be the overflowings of its own mind & must make its admirers willing converts from its own powerful consceptions & not yield to win them by giving way to their opinions of excellence which turns out in time to be nothing more than mere importers of fashions mysterys of pretentions (213)

Clare's maxim, particularly his use of the word *overflowing*, sounds Wordsworthian. It stresses the primacy of the individual artist's mind as well as the notion of an excellence in taste that outlives temporary and local prejudices. What, then, is Dewint's own taste, if his paintings are nature's autographs? It seems, again, we have a conceptualization of taste as a thing that is developed and informed by an artist's direct interaction with external nature, particularly by sustained interaction with, or observation of, the inhabitants and features of one place. According to this view, the artist switches places with the unlettered subject. These spatial metaphors for substitution attest to the power of locus as a conceptual category in Clare's poetics.

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John Clare demonstrates an ethic of admitting and listening to other voices—a polyglossia of sorts, a porosity of voice. Does this openness to voices, sounds, and sensory contact lead to the elision of his ego boundaries (and to personality disorder)? Whether the codification of other voices is an act of willful imagination or otherwise, Clare's susceptibility is a significant factor in his poetics. This proclivity can be explained in terms of his experiences in the Helpston landscape, where he feels, on so many occasions, a social comfort. The repeated experience of safety, joy, and wonder causes Clare to correlate these feelings with the places themselves. His personification of, and attribution of speech to, nature's subjects is an extension

of this sympathy. The idea that "beauty's self" is alive in nature and listening to him is perhaps a necessary fiction—but one which continually prioritizes and honors the land and the environment.

For Clare, an absolute standard of taste is known and achieved not via reason, method, or rules, but by firsthand experience in a physical environment. This definition of taste liberates art and accounts for the significant influence of environment upon aesthetic creation and appreciation (and vice versa). This subject had been treated in poetic art, particularly by the georgic, pastoral, and loco-descriptive traditions[264], but such forms and modes called for aesthetic detachment and careful framing (Brownlow 23-4). Clare would have agreed with Johnson's disdain for the pastoral as witless and contrived, though he would not have shared Johnson's censure of the shepherd figure or of spatial and temporal detail.

Clare's conceptualization and practice of art and taste esteem the particular, local, and temporal. His poetry participates in the so-called Romantic compromise in the limited sense that it occasionally upholds an ideal wisdom and accompanying ethical mandate. He is less heir to empiricism than he is to a communal, open-field culture and an ecological way of life that esteems all the particulars in a whole. He is uniquely Romantic because his sensory particularism and imaginary strength are the outgrowths of his native connection to Helpston, his love of communal texts and history, and the effects of enclosure. Clare shows us that there is a local path to Romantic sensibility. For him, the Edenic fall can be rectified by an art which is truthful to nature.

Clare's locally-inspired aesthetic overcomes the pervasive Enlightenment opposition between nature and culture. His poems and prose use his personal experiences to show how nature and culture interweave. Nature is produced by culture, and vice versa. Both propagate

[264] And by the Picturesque, in gardening.

endlessly and provide a useful paradigm for Clare's poetics.[265] For an aspiring poet, the taproot of poetic success is production, growth, and development. Thus Clare appropriates the fitness and beauty of Helpston's ecosystem to his poetic practice. In this appropriation, Clare's work reminds us of the interconnections of nature and culture, and the fact that these two "mix . . . as a function of specific elements in each historical era" (Nichols, Rev. par.10).

Clare conjures a readership and reception amidst the familiar spots and species of Helpston. Taste, poesy, and genius: all these forces provide Clare with an explanatory and comprehensive account for beauty in art and nature. Thus, Clare's appreciation and reading of nature uses the same language and standards of evaluation that he hopes his audience will apply to his songs. The personification of nature and other abstract entities—in a relationship of co-evaluation with the rambling poet—allows Clare to imagine his career as a poet and to practice poetry.

The elements of Clare's notion of taste are varied and distinctive. The judgment of taste in art or nature is not a relative operation, but is based upon real principles. Taste has a moral and ethical valence, as well as a physical one. That taste is not a relative matter is illustrated by Clare's descriptions of heedless clowns and his more pointed cracks (in poems like "The Moors") at the vulgar taste of tyrants who hang the sign of enclosure. Taste lives in, and beyond, the human realm of ideas and commerce. It is spatial and local; nativity and dwelling provide ample education for the artist. It is then a matter of habitation and habituation. Pleasure, curiosity, sympathy, and identification help the subject bind to the environment and express beauty, just as the choice of animals to dwell in particular locations binds them to their environments (and expresses beauty). Clarean taste demonstrates the mutual dependency between culture and environment.

[265] For Buell, this paradigm is the environment, which is both natural and human-built.

There are many elements that make up Clare's complex and multifaceted conception of taste, including his belief that nature is the source and soul of beauty (and poesy and art), and the metaphoric conflation of land and text. "[T]ruth to nature" and place-embeddedness serve as criteria of aesthetic creation and response. Another version of this premise alternately portrays nature as teacher, preacher and patron. Also, the vital practices of witnessing, listening, and walking help to introduce the operative contrast between the man of taste and the heedless passenger. The unique fusion of relative and universal impulses, represented by Clare's focus on the eternal and diachronic alongside his concentration on temporal particulars, also characterizes his aesthetic sensibility. Perhaps most significant, though, is Clare's estimation of nature's trifles and rural life as a basis of beauty and pleasure. His bottom-up approach revises the tradition of pastoral and it imagines according to the position of the non-human other. The trifling aesthetic also seeks to expose and document those "unlettered" subjects which have lain in poetic obscurity. There are many more elements represented in Clare's aesthetic, including: animal instinct and choice; physical isolation and quietude; reciprocity, interspecies (or transubjective) communication and responsiveness; location and environment; and vocation.

Above all, Clare shows us that experiential knowledge of, and connection with, a locality is cause sufficient for a theory of art. He applies traditional literary devices to this cause of art, including allusion, imitation, and verisimilitude; and he applies this conception of art to traditional poetic subjects, including childhood, memory, the loss of Eden, amatory desire, and mourning. Clare's innovation is the trifle, which bespeaks of the equality of natural and poetic taste. In his poetry he exhibits a profound respect for the ineffable, mysterious, and culturally obscure. His poems relate moments of rapture in terms of a cognitive pause (or break) and they

highlight, as they dramatize (via the amanuensis trope), the irreducible and untranslatable strangeness of nature.

Taken together, Clare poems present a standard of taste that is locally derived. Like Reynolds's earnest student, he studies and imitates—but he does this by his personal engagement with a locality and its sounds, inhabitants, physical features, folk tales, songs, and customs. As a result of this interaction a set of ideals emerges as well as a corresponding principle of taste that is local and moral. The more programmatic poems make this aesthetic plain while others employ the conceits of reciprocity, conversation, and the land-text analogy. Yet Clare's documentary aesthetic does not call for such theorizing in all cases. Many poems refrain from accounting for taste, beauty or art and prioritize natural details and scenic description. Still other poems confess ignorance about nature's "wisdom of creative choice[266]," accentuating the speaker's confusion and wonder. Clare's phenomenology of listening to and documenting the sounds and voices of the birds, animals, plants, people, and scenes of Helpston is a poetic innovation. It compromises what we might call the implied poet[267] to reveal the implied authorship of nature's many subjects.

[266] "Shadows of Taste," line 23.
[267] I am here adapting Wayne Booth's concept of the implied author, "the unique and pervasive human presence that the reader senses is the driving force behind a literary work and the source of its ethical norms and value" (Murfin and Ray 242).

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