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THE ITINERANT “I”: JOHN CLARE’S LYRIC DEFIANCE

BY MICHAEL NICHOLSON

’Tis not gone for ever,
The light of the soul;
It flows like the river,
When it meets with controul! —
It rolls like the ocean,
Over mountain and glen,
Till past the commotion,
And the sun smiles again.
The valleys may tremble,
The mountains may move,
But I can’t dissemble, —
In the soul of love.

—John Clare, “Hope of Home”¹

The poetry of the late Romantic writer John Clare (1793–1864) presents an array of speakers whose enigmatic “I”s challenge the conventional critical identification of lyric with an intentional, meditative, and embodied first person subject. In typical accounts of the genre, an individual voice speaks in an intensely personal manner about a single experience in a timeless yet present moment.² Yet today’s lyric theorists have begun to contest this narrative by calling attention to the genre’s outwardly turned energies of address and apostrophe.³ In addition, historicist critics such as Virginia Jackson, Paul Alpers, and Yopie Prins have emphasized how the genre’s definitions have shifted over time; in Jackson’s view, the notion that lyric is “thought to require as its context only the occasion of its reading” is a critical abstraction whose origins can be traced to the nineteenth century.⁴ Today’s scholarly revisions of what counts as lyric help to illuminate how the historical neglect of Clare’s poetry relates to his challenging of the genre’s long established definitions. Because they describe a lost local history and a future “Hope of Home,” Clare’s poems neither support the idea that lyric is the quintessential literary mode of containment, presentness, and presence nor uphold the notion that the genre requires an authoritative poetic “I” who addresses an auditor from an identifiable and grounded position in the immediate moment. To be sure, the genealogy of lyric

stretches back to antiquity and encompasses the concerns and conceits of the songs, odes, and sonnets of mid seventeenth-century religious, metaphysical, and amorous verse. During the Romantic period, it is a historical contingency that the lyric “I” preoccupied British poets more strongly than it had in previous parts of the eighteenth century, which in the main adopted a neoclassical focus that more explicitly rooted lyric in history and celebrated epic, epistolary, and occasional verse forms.⁵ Clare’s poetry, I argue, constitutes a historical revision of first person lyric whose illegibility in relation to what were long the genre’s standard critical conventions has caused it to remain marginal to both critical theories of lyric and of Romanticism.

As we can see in “Hope of Home,” Clare was a poet with a keen sense of how the lyric “I” could embrace and embody the “rolls” and “flows” of immaterial “souls” that refuse to remain singular, immediate, and circumscribed in time and space. In this poem, which remained unpublished during Clare’s life, the speaker describes a meeting between “the light of the soul” and “controul.” The poem encircles “controul” rather than the soul: two lines that portray active, defiant waters, “like the river” and “like the ocean,” form a double simile around the line that depicts the soul’s encounter with “controul.” The poetic voice then envisions another enclosure: the lyric “I” resides “[i]n the soul of love.” Such an “I” looks tautological. On the one hand, it simultaneously asserts the lyric rhetoric of the confined speaker through the preposition “in.” On the other hand, it rejects the materialism and solitude that makes his confinement possible. The “I” is enclosed “in the soul of love,” a spiritual community that the poetic voice has previously connected to an itinerancy that resists “controul.” What the speaker’s use of “in” therefore suggests is not a narrowed life lived “within” the self but a broadened vision of life spent “in” love. The poem’s expansive voice both wanders in an extended simile that erases his immediacy and explores the distant temporalities of the future, “[h]ope,” and the past, “[t]is not gone for ever.” “Hope of Home” provides a representative example of the especially defiant manner in which Clare’s lyric “I” roves through space and time.

The itinerant lyric “I” that we find here belies common assumptions about lyric subjectivity and its relationship to nature in the Romantic era. One way to understand why Clare’s poetic voices reject a contained and present lyric “I” is to consider them as formal responses to the larger historical transformation of landscape enclosure that took place within the very environment that Clare inhabited. Clare’s vagrant lyric subjects work against the critical genealogy of the contained lyric “I”

that finds its roots in the moments within Romantic poetics that express the zeitgeist of an era when Britain saw itself as an enclosed island of enclosed estates. As a field-worker, Clare's relationship to the historical upheavals of landscape enclosure was clearly different from those of William Wordsworth, John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Yet embracing Clare's resistance to lyric enclosure does not mean flattening out and jettisoning the prominent works of the Romantic poets. Instead, attending to Clare's work allows us to recognize that the theory of the Romantic lyric's self-containment overemphasizes the extent to which formal enclosure defines the poetry of the Big Six: William Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lord Byron, Shelley, and Keats. Moreover, as Michael Macovski and Susan J. Wolfson note, the Big Six themselves formally contested enclosure, solitude, and egotism in complex ways through their oftentimes conversational, dialogic, and apostrophic poetics.⁶

It nevertheless remains the case that Clare's sustained critique of landscape enclosure produces a poetry that reads somewhat differently from many of the more canonical works of the period upon which theories of the modern lyric as an enclosed and contemplative form were built. Coleridge's "Dejection: An Ode" (1802), to take a very well known example, expresses a conception of the "soul" that is antithetical to the one that "Hope of Home" communicates:

I may not hope from outward forms to win
 The passion and the life, whose fountains are within . . .
 Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth,
 A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
 Enveloping the Earth—⁷

In contrast to the ways in which Coleridge's speaker envisions the "I," both as an embodied container (one in which passion and life reside "within") and a spiritual force of containment ("soul itself must issue forth," a "cloud / Enveloping the Earth"), Clare's poetic subjects offer an alternative vision of the "I" as migratory point of communal identification that refuses to restrain or be restrained. Certainly, my approach here engages the foundational scholarship on Romantic lyric by critics such as Charles Rzepka and Macovski who discover moments of community in even what appear to be such prototypical Big Six moments of lyric individuation.⁸ Yet the irrepressible "I"s of Clare's poetic voices are filled with an untamable sympathetic energy that flows outward toward other things and people. As "Hope of Home" makes evident, these energetic "I"s are in continual

motion, though they must constantly negotiate ostensible obstacles and limits. In "Hope of Home," Clare gives voice to an itinerant lyric "I" whose unstoppable momentum defies the loss of his home to the sublime force of landscape enclosure that "moves" mountains and makes valleys "tremble." Although Clare's speakers view their travels in relation to "home," their "I"s resituate home from its usual location in the present to one in both the future and the past. When the present moment displaces them, they move to new landscapes where they can reimagine "home" in the face of immense dispossession.

Born in 1793, Clare writes primarily after the landscape had been enclosed around Helpston, the village in Northampton where he spent his childhood.⁹ As a result, one of the main points of inquiry for Clare's critics has been his personification of Helpston's local terrain. John Barrell, for example, argues that Clare "opposed the ideology of enclosure, which sought to de-localise, to take away the individuality of a place."¹⁰ Helpston was therefore part of a national movement of enclosure that absorbed local particularity by regularizing and homogenizing rural landscapes and cultures. An understanding of the attachment of Clare's identity to Helpston's once unenclosed topography helps to illuminate how the Enclosure Acts dislocated him by radically altering his local landscape.

Clare's experiences as an observer and inhabitant of a local landscape that The Act for the Enclosure of Helpston (1809) radically altered resonate with his emotional sufferings as a semi-literate subject who experienced mental illness over many years and was confined to institutions that he could not leave for much of his life. Although the connections between Clare's biographical enclosure in an asylum and the enclosure of the British landscape are coincidental, Clare nevertheless capitalized upon them. His lyrics exploit the distressing details of his incarcerated life in order to construct a metaphorical critique of enclosure as a force that imprisons the landscape and the laboring-class. His acute awareness of the scrutiny that took place within his carceral spaces caused him to focus on the liberation of his speakers and their transportation to open spaces. The voices of Clare's lyric subjects express his profound sensitivity to the efforts of the popular press to cast him as a lunatic poet who was institutionalized, eccentric, and close to death. As "Hope of Home" intimates, Clare reacts to such stigmas by creating revisionary speakers who depict themselves as overflowing the boundaries put in place to control them. Yet Clare's lyric "I"s also move from highly recognized landscapes to a spiritual realm that allows them to more perfectly voice their resistance and grief.

While his poetic works intimate that enclosure might have succeeded in destroying these imperiled subjectivities, they also make it clear that their lyric voices can never be annihilated. Clare's first person speakers thus take on an otherworldly endurance, in the sense that they transform their deaths into highly animated forms of haunting.

Clare's sense that he had been displaced, forgotten, and superseded resulted from his brief experience of poetic fame following the publication of *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (1820), a volume that even the conservative *Quarterly Review* assessed favorably, if patronizingly, as the work of a "patient and persevering talent existing and enduring in the most forlorn and seemingly hopeless condition, that literature has at any time exhibited."¹¹ Clare's instant celebrity as the "Northamptonshire peasant poet" was evanescent, however. His momentary celebrity gave way to a long and diverse poetic career that extended well into the 1860s, and which includes a vast body of poetry that was mostly unpublished and unnoticed during his lifetime. As a result of the contrast between the brevity of his fame and the length of his subsequent career, Clare himself is a difficult poet to periodize or place; although today's critics commonly characterize him as a Romantic, he attempted to publish much of his work during the Victorian era. The majority of Clare's poetry therefore contends with the Victorian moment that, according to Jackson, solidified the connections between formal enclosure and lyric that would make possible the "twentieth century . . . idea of the lyric as temporally self-present and unmediated."¹²

In equal response to his lack of audience as to his horror of enclosure, Clare figures his first person speakers as dead but still defiant and in search of an addressee. These metaphorically spectral poetic subjects express a strong sense of belatedness in relation to the poetic "I" as they attempt to recover a sense of meaningful address and move beyond self-contained immediacy. Through his haunting "I"s, Clare reanimates the superannuated role of the eighteenth-century peasant poet that had been associated with field laborers such as Stephen Duck. Clare desired to create lyric "I"s that could sustain for the future both the outdated "peasant poet" tradition and the local landscapes, subjectivities, and rural customs that were connected to it. The paradoxical power of these "I"s stems from Clare's status as a leftover individual who transmits knowledge of Britain's communal past despite the fact that the Landscape Enclosure Acts had apparently made that knowledge unsustainable, atavistic, and otherwise unhistorical.

Together, Clare's intense struggles against the historical and personal pressures of enclosure positioned his work as a response to the chronologies and concerns of nineteenth-century modernity. In other words, he transformed the lyric "I" into a strategic anachronism, an untimely vehicle capable of unsettling complacent accounts of poetic subjectivity that confined the speaker to personal experiences in the present moment. Clare's poetic "I"s reject lyric immediacy as restrictive, problematic, and altogether too connected to an enclosed present landscape and a public who no longer reads peasant poetry; untimely rather than timeless, they insist that the invincible forces of a past prior to enclosure and a future "Hope of Home" promise what Helen Vendler terms an "invisible listener," someone who can appreciate an address from a speaker who departs from the ideologies that govern his present moment.¹³

I. THE LANDSCAPE OF THE ROMANTIC LYRIC "I"

While materialist critics such as Barrell, Timothy Morton, Mark Storey, James McKusick, and Jonathan Bate have embraced Clare for his empathetic connection to landscape, scholars have only rarely recognized the potential that his reconfigured poetic "I" has to revise ideas about lyric subjectivity.¹⁴ Sarah M. Zimmerman convincingly argues that Clare undermines the Romantic lyric's "poetics of privacy by demonstrating how two key features long deemed to foster the mode's insulation from social concerns may instead comprise a poem's social content: the poet's turn to nature and a concern with subjectivity."¹⁵ Yet even Zimmerman's astute analysis does not specifically discuss the lyric "I." Despite the fact that 206 poems in the volumes of Clare's collected works under Eric Robinson's general editorship begin with the pronoun "I," and the fact that the lyric "I" has always been a fundamental critical entry point in Romantic studies, no systematic inquiry into the implications and interplays of Clare's poetic "I"s has ever been undertaken.¹⁶ An 1830 letter to Eliza Emmerson, in which Clare directly critiques both the "I" and the present tense, provides a starting point:

that little personal pronoun 'I' is such a presumption [*sic*] ambitious swaggering little fellow that he thinks himself qualified for all company all places . . . he is a sort of Deity over the rest of the alphabet . . . I <therefore hope to get rid of his company for> wish there he is agen

— for variety's sake the English language like some of the oriental ones had no present tense.¹⁷

Yet in order to understand the precise manner in which Clare rethinks the poetic “I,” we must explore the literary history of Romanticism that constructs the formal taxonomies that even today ground many discussions of what counts as lyric. The traditional Big Six Romantic poets often stressed the poetic expression of the spiritual and natural in relation to the individual; moreover, their works appeared during an era of lyric redefinition that reacted to the relative neglect of the lyric “I” in the eighteenth century. As a result of the emphasis that these poets placed on the “I,” Victorian-era critics such as John Stuart Mill routinely used their poems to develop totalizing theories of lyric presence and containment. For Mill, lyric utterance is “*overheard*” speech: “the peculiarity of poetry appears to us to lie in the poet’s utter unconsciousness of a listener. Poetry is feeling confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude.”¹⁸ According to Jackson, Modernist texts such as T. S. Eliot’s “The Three Voices of Poetry” (1957) would “define lyric in Mill’s terms, as ‘the voice of the poet talking to himself.’”¹⁹ As the twentieth century unfolded, the critical tradition that Mill and Eliot helped to establish continued in the New Critics’ portrayals of the special responsiveness of Romantic lyric to “close reading”; for the New Critics, Romantic poets and close readers valued the same qualities: textual density, meditation, ambiguity, containment, and self-reflexivity.²⁰ In his oft-cited 1965 essay, “Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric,” M. H. Abrams memorably defines the “Greater Romantic Lyric” as a univocal form that maintains “lyric magnitude and a serious subject, feelingfully meditated”; such poems:²¹

[P]resent a determinate speaker in a particularized, and usually a localized, outdoor setting, whom we overhear as he carries on, in a fluent vernacular which rises easily to a more formal speech, a sustained colloquy, sometimes with himself or with the outer scene, but more frequently with a silent human auditor, present or absent.²²

While Abrams complicates his argument through an emphasis on the colloquial, many subsequent critiques of Romantic lyric have focused on his powerful portrayal of the genre’s “overheard” and “meditative” speakers whose auditors usually remain “silent” and unacknowledged. A number of deconstructionist critics have questioned the methods and ethics of the Romantic lyric, for example, by representing the

genre as a closeted and solipsistic form. Many feminist critics too have redescribed the traditional account of the Romantic lyric as an egocentric form of “masculine” narcissism.²³ Yet perhaps because formalist accounts of Romantic poetry such as Abrams’s often emphasized the mind of the poet over the speaker’s body, until recently few inquiries into the class of first person lyric speakers during the Romantic epoch of enclosure had been carried out.²⁴

Contrasting themselves to Abrams and his critics, Paul de Man and Jonathan Culler associate lyric voice in the Romantic era with apostrophic address. Culler contends that “[c]lassic essays such as M. H. Abrams’s ‘Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric’ do not discuss apostrophe, though it is a feature of most of the poems mentioned.”²⁵ Although Culler depicts lyric as the genre that apostrophe defines, it is important to note that he echoes Abrams’s critics when he describes how, despite its apostrophic nature, lyric implies a self-contained, immediate, and “timeless” presence.²⁶ In a reading of Wordsworth’s “Immortality Ode,” Culler reflects upon “[t]he fact that apostrophe involves a drama of ‘the one mind’s’ modifications more than a relationship between an *I* and a *you*.”²⁷ According to Culler, the very figure of apostrophe, “which seems to establish relations between the self and the other[,]” can in fact be read as an act of radical interiorization and solipsism.²⁸ In dialogue with Culler, de Man makes a more appreciative case for apostrophic address as the definitive figure of lyric: “the figure of address is recurrent in lyric poetry, to the point of constituting the generic definition of . . . the ode (which can, in its turn, be seen as paradigmatic for poetry).”²⁹ For de Man, since critics have termed lyric “the instance of represented voice,” characterizations of lyric should stress “the grammatical transformation of the declarative into the vocative modes . . . the tropological transformation of analogy into apostrophe.”³⁰ In a more explicit critique of the links that Culler establishes between solipsism, lyric, and apostrophe, Mary Jacobus argues that apostrophe’s lyric significance derives from the fact that it allows Romantic poets such as Wordsworth to participate in a transhistorical poetic community that transcends the individual voice and material representation; in her view, apostrophe “permit[s] Wordsworth himself to join the ranks of Homer, the great thunderer, and the Bible.”³¹

Yet in order to account adequately for what the lyric “I” could do in the hands of a peasant poet such as Clare who crafts speakers who are synonymous with local nature and the laboring-class body, it is not enough to dismiss Abrams, Eliot, and Mill and concur with their

subsequent critics. Any attempt to locate Clare's poems firmly within a critical camp that defines lyric as a genre of vocative address, or one that defines it as overheard speech, fails. As his career unfolded, Clare gave voice to impoverished, isolated, and displaced poetic "I"s. His lyric subjects continually express their sense of alienation from an industrial age that was uninterested in being addressed by peasant poets about common greens. Clare's speakers respond to the fact that their local traditions and landscapes have vanished through the adoption of a voice that moves, searches, and reaches out in time and space in order to discover more sympathetic settings and listeners. While such poetic "I"s admit that the efficacy of apostrophe may be lost in the present moment in which they speak, they simultaneously embrace the alternative landscapes and cultures of the past and the future.

While today's theorists of lyric have disagreed about whether the genre is defined by apostrophe, enclosure, presence, address, or some combination of these terms—and although close attention to Romantic poets such as Clare exposes the limitations of unitary theories of lyric—almost all studies of Romanticism have treated the lyric "I" as co-terminous with the natural landscape. Abrams argues that the form of the "Greater Romantic Lyric" maintains an "out-in-out" structure in which the speaker's initial report of a natural landscape provides "the occasion for a meditation which turns out to constitute the *raison d'être* of the poem."³² For this reason, scholars have long stressed the locodescriptive and pastoral nature of high Romantic lyric. Moreover, they have concentrated on the ways in which this genre negotiates and replicates the concerns of the aesthetic theories and visual cultures of the period, especially those articulated by Edmund Burke and William Gilpin.³³ More recently, ecocritics have reclaimed the Romantic lyric's common association with nature poetry for modern environmental activism.³⁴

Yet what such scholarship has studied less often, and what Clare's writing enables us to understand, is that by the 1820s the Romantic lyric "I," which frequently addresses nature, was embedded in a completely enclosed landscape. The enclosure of estates and erasure of common greens significantly redefined the British countryside as the domain of private property and firmly defined borders.³⁵ These changes were remarked upon by a litany of British pastoral poets, the foremost of whom, Oliver Goldsmith (*The Deserted Village* [1770]), and William Wordsworth ("Preface" to the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*), eulogized the death of rural life as the direct result of the commercial and industrial revolutions that drove men out of villages

and concentrated them in cities. British agricultural historian Mark Overton has identified enclosure as a major part of the ongoing agricultural revolution during which an open-fields system of agriculture transitioned into an enclosed one that supported the British class system. Ad hoc communal farms gave way to large-scale industrial ones that traded internationally in goods and seeds and instituted strip farming, new fertilization methods, “new fodder crops and crop rotations, convertible husbandry . . . animal breeding, field drainage, and new machinery and implements.”³⁶

In order to understand Clare’s special sensitivity to the effects of enclosure on the lyric “I,” it is important to recognize that in the early nineteenth century, Britain’s geographical isolationism not coincidentally developed a nationalistic rhetoric of self-enclosure. Arthur Young’s *Political Essays Concerning the Present State of the British Empire* traces the roots of this isolationist discourse to the Enlightenment association of British insularity with nationalistic immunity; according to Young, Britain’s security, happiness, and commercial prosperity were contingent on her separation from the Continent:

What a striking advantage therefore is the insular situation! Without even the defence of a navy, a neighbor’s power by land cannot offend the happy inhabitants of an island . . . If we combine in one view the several circumstances of situation, such as security, national character, convenience of government, commerce, &c., we shall find that no people upon earth enjoy such advantages as the British nation.³⁷

In the wake of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars that closed off Britain’s access to the Continent, this connection between national identity and island geography further solidified in the reactionary British imaginary.³⁸ In 1808, for example, British farmer and diplomat Gould Francis Leckie advocated an expanded British empire of proximate island states:

We have seen that Buonaparte has brought under French influence all the western part of Europe, that Russia extends over the greater part of the remainder, and threatens the falling empire of the Turks; we must therefore determine to *Britannize* every part of insular Europe which suits our purpose, and, . . . to establish as much as lies in our power our laws and government.³⁹

Echoing Leckie’s argument, Patrick Colquhoun would espouse a similar logic of containment in *A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis* (1797)

and *A Treatise on the Wealth, Power, and Resources of the British Empire* (1814). Perhaps because the creation of the first regularized British police force did not become a permanent reality until the passage of the 1829 Metropolitan Police Act, Colquhoun expanded upon *Treatise on the Police's* ideas about domestic enclosure in *Treatise on the Empire's* depiction of the navy as the international police force that protects Britain's borders and property: "an insular situation and a powerful navy [have] rendered this country invulnerable."⁴⁰ During this period, radical French polemicists such as the Anglo-French journalist Lewis Goldsmith attacked British nationalism by condemning the values that Britain's archipelagic geography produces: "The security which the English owe to their insular situation, instead of producing an inclination for peace . . . has had quite the contrary effect . . . it is from this source that their arrogant pride, their insolence, and their *prepotenze*, towards other nations spring."⁴¹

By the 1820s, the notion of Britain as an enclosed island comprised of enclosed estates produced a strikingly unified cultural narrative of British space as secured, protected, and regularized. The 1815 Corn Law, which restricted cereal imports in the wake of the many agricultural depressions of the Romantic era, was but one of the many controversial protectionist tariffs instituted in the era to shield British landowners from the competition of foreign goods. In addition, this age marks the moment when nativist fears of "Little Britain" began to compete with the expansive optimism of imperial Britain. As the inwardly-turned worries of reverse colonization, economic competition, radical revolt, and imperial invasion began to take hold, the discourse of Britain as an isolated, enclosed archipelago increasingly resonated with those interested in the defense of the nation's borders.⁴²

II. CLARE'S LYRIC AND BIOGRAPHICAL AFTERLIVES

In response to these changes, Clare focuses on the creation of lyric "I"s that recall what the landscape previously was, and envisions what that now-enclosed environment might become. These "I"s address the significance of rural afterimages whose legibility enclosure has compromised. In the extended lyric "Remembrances" (c. 1832), a poem intended to be part of Clare's unpublished volume *The Midsummer Cushion*, the speaker remembers the loss of Helpston's local nature and at the same time insists upon its aftereffects: "By Langley bush I roam but the bush hath left its hill / On cowper green I stray tis a desert strange & chill."⁴³ The voice of "Remembrances" intimates that

no matter how irredeemably the nation ravages the local landscape of Helpston, he will nonetheless continue to conceptualize his “I” as providing a sustained vision of his environment in its pre-enclosed “green” state; his defiant “I” will perpetually “roam,” “stray,” and overcome obstructions. This speaker argues that his “I” will always be “By Langley bush” whether or not the bush is still to be found there.⁴⁴ The particular phrasing of the speaker leaves room for nature’s autonomy and agency—even the rooted “bush” has not necessarily been forced out since it is possible that it too has left, wandered, and escaped.

Nevertheless, at the same time as he envisions himself and nature as resistant wanderers, this poetic voice recognizes that if “the bush hath left its hill,” then the unenclosed lyric “I” connected to it must also have passed away. The speaker effectively possesses an identity rooted in a locality that no longer exists. When enclosure lays waste to the common sites of local nature, Clare’s poetic “I” actively understands its loss of place in the present. In a way that marks a clear difference from more familiar Romantic appeals to rural settings such as the hedgerows of “Tintern Abbey,” where, as Ian Baucom points out, national sites of memory store, situate, and solidify constructs such as Britishness, the speaker of “Remembrances” images regional sites of memory such as the “cowper green” that sustain his unenclosed subjectivity.⁴⁵

The straying speaker of “Remembrances” defies the era’s new economies of privacy by connecting the poetic “I” to something other than individuality. Clare’s speaker reanimates the entirety of a past local culture and way of life and reaches beyond it to highlight the solidarity of all agricultural laborers. In “Remembrances,” the singular lyric “I” transforms into the plural “our” and signifies collectivism: “When beneath old lea close oak I the bottom branches broke / To make our harvest cart like so many working folk” (*MP*, 131). Clare’s speaker links nature, labor, and community—“oak,” “broke,” and “folk”—through assonance and rhyme. The poetic voice first envisions how his act of natural construction, “I the bottom branches broke,” resonates with the constructive labor of his co-workers, “To make our harvest cart.” His second expansionary move is to render the communal labor of his local co-workers continuous with that of the entire agricultural laboring class, “like so many working folk.” The common labor of the working class makes possible the communal “I” of the working-class poet. Thus while Clare’s lyric “I”s resist the destruction of the local and the common, in the wake of enclosure they also embrace an itinerancy that allows them to accumulate multiple perspectives and comprehend the relationships between local and global ecologies and cultures.

Such a poetic voice implicitly departs from Wordsworthian lyrics such as “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” (1807) that represent themselves as self-contained in so far as they focus on a single individual whose mature adulthood serves as a funeral urn for his rural childhood. As common as are Clare’s expansions of the Romantic lyric “I,” he also splits and divides the poetic “I” in order to contest its self-contained certainty.⁴⁶ The striking implications of the opening phrase of his unpublished sonnet “I am” (c. 1844), “I feel I am” (*LP*, 397), are that the lyric “I” can undo its singularity through self-redundant loops. The circular idea that Clare’s “I” can “feel I am” radically undermines the authority of the lyric “I.” If the “I” serves as the poem’s subject and object, “I feel I,” then the poem effectively posits the “I” as a de-individuated term that discovers the multiplicity and openness of self-reflexivity.

While Clare engaged a multiplicity of poetic images, forms, and linguistic modalities over his career, this thematic thread of the speaker’s de-individuation unifies his post-enclosure nature lyrics. Collectively, his many re-imaginings of the lyric “I” as something astray, intangible, expansive, and irrepressible work toward the representation of a first-person poetic voice that refuses to be contained in a present body or a singular subjectivity. In the post-enclosure world he imagines, Clare sees himself, the British landscape, and the Romantic lyric as dead but not inert bodies. Despite the deaths of these entities, he defiantly represents the persistence of the traditions and ecologies of Helpston’s past. In order to empower the open past to contest the enclosed present, Clare translates outdated ecologies into eternal futures; he applies the spiritual imagery of the afterlife to the subjectivities, landscapes, and lyrics of the past.

In Clare’s post-enclosure lyrics, his metaphorically “dead” speakers exist beyond the materiality of the corpse, the containment of the tomb, and what de Man terms the notion of “the mind as a hollow container, box, or grave”; the immaterial “I”s of these poems relate to afterlives rather than to the rooted certainty of present bodies.⁴⁷ A survey of Clare’s post-enclosure lyrics finds that their speakers often arrive at twilight to wander, lose themselves, take leave, or escape; their poetic voices materialize in first lines such as “I’ve been roaming in the gloaming” (*LP*, 464), “In the gloaming o’ moonlight so soft and so dreary” (*LP*, 661), and “I’ll come to thee at even tide” (*LP*, 248). Clare manifests restive speakers in lyric “I”s that haunt the present with the uncanny historicity of the pre-enclosed British landscape. If enclosure thins out the peasantry, then Clare reclaims this thinness

so as to construct ghastly, “chilling” speakers who match what Alan Bewell has identified as Clare’s haunting poetic landscapes: “Clare’s nature-poetry verges on ghost-writing, for the present is seen as being haunted by the natures it has displaced, natures that have been violently uprooted yet refuse to leave.”⁴⁸ Early in “Remembrances,” the enclosure of the commons “chills” the speaker: “O it turns my bosom chill / When I think of old ‘sneap green’ puddocks nook & hilly snow” (*MP*, 132). Yet later in the poem the brook onto which the speaker projects himself also “runs a naker [*sic*] brook cold & chill” (*MP*, 133). In Clare’s sonnet “I am,” the speaker similarly portrays his “chilled” body: “Earth’s prison chilled my body with its dram” (*LP*, 397).

The voice of the brook in Clare’s 196-line elegiac lyric, “The Lamentations of Round-Oak Waters” (c. 1818) also provides a natural “chill” to sympathize with the speaker’s affect: “The wind between the north and East / Blow’d very chill and cold / Or coldly blow’d to me at least / My clo’hs were thin and old.”⁴⁹ The first half of the “cold” chiasmus of “Lamentations” connects the speaker’s resistant voice to the blowing of nature’s “very chill and cold” wind. Low temperatures signify his sympathy with the special invincibility of the untamable and unchangeable elements of Helpston—the frigid local winds and waters that cannot be held in, domesticated, or suppressed. Yet the speaker’s qualifying phrase, “to me at least,” also suggests that he maintains a certain self-awareness of the way in which he interprets the climate of his present landscape through the lens of a local history that is no longer common knowledge.

While the speaker initially claims that his spectral essence is linked to the cool waters and airs that are the aspects of the local nature that he portrays, he then implies that his chill is tied to the poverty that the punishing effects of enclosure have produced. After he depicts a series of cold images, the lyric subject directly transitions to a representation of himself: “My clo’hs were thin and old.” In a poem that describes nature as “naked” four times, the speaker’s worn clothing fails to warm his body. He blends his tears with the “dropping” dew to suggest “low bent” nature’s sympathy with the “lowly” peasantry: “The grass all dropping wet wi’ dew / Low bent their tiney spears / The lowly daise’ bended too / More lowly wi my tears.”⁵⁰ The speaker’s clothes, tears, and cold body resonate with the many depictions of the poor in the wake of the 1815 Corn Law as starved, “thin,” “old,” weepy, and close to death. Radical poet Ebenezer Elliott’s hugely popular *Corn Law Rhymes* (1834), for example, paints a portrait of a disabled beggar:

STRUCK blind in youth, Platt ask'd the proud for bread;

 I saw him weep—"Hail holy light!" he cried;
 But living darkness heard him, and he died.
 Oh, by the light that left too soon his eyes,
 And bade him starve on ice-cold charities.⁵¹

In dialogue with the connections between poverty and national enclosure that Clare's speaker subtly suggests, Elliott's first person speaker more explicitly argues that "death," "starvation," and "ice-cold charities" are the direct results of the protectionist tariffs that enclosed the British wheat market. Here the metaphorical iciness of enclosure chills the bodies of Britain's most vulnerable subjects. Clare's poetry reclaims the chilled and chilling, the "old," poor, and "thin," as the imagery of the irrepressible; out of this imagery he creates ghostly, ranging speakers that refuse to be grounded. The speaker of "I Am" (c. 1844, published in the *Bedford Times* on 1 January 1848), a three-stanza lyric that shares its name with the aforementioned sonnet "I am," begins with a sketch of his evanescence, "My friends forsake me like a memory lost" (*LP*, 396), that he follows with a description of his dispersal into an ethereal and vaporous "I": "I am, and live — like vapours tost" (*LP*, 396). Clare's poem formulates a rhetoric that differs from the one that appears in the theories of the role of the Romantic poet, such as Coleridge's in *Biographia Literaria* (1817), that critics often cite when they connect the Romantic lyric to a vital, enclosed, and self-creating "I am" that echoes the divinity of the "infinite I am."⁵² The ghostly, decidedly non-godlike "I am" that Clare's poem occasions floats not only as a "shipwreck"—"Into the living sea of waking dreams, / the vast shipwreck of my lifes esteems" (*LP*, 396–97)—but also as dispersed and dislocated "vapours" that become part of the atmosphere. In fact this floating speaker suggests that he has abandoned the idea of self-enclosure so fully that he discovers a dizzying openness in the prepositional language of containment: "Into the nothingness of scorn and noise,— / Into the living sea of waking dreams" (*LP*, 396). The preposition "into," a word that ordinarily suggests the idea of containment—though it can also signify irruption—does not enclose the speaker's "I" but rather opens up the endless and otherworldly sonic landscapes of "the nothingness of scorn and noise" and the "living sea of waking dreams."

"I am" concludes with a vision of death as an escape to the unenclosed "grass" of "childhood": "And sleep as I in childhood, sweetly slept / Untroubling, and untroubled where I lie, / The grass below

— above the vaulted sky” (*LP*, 397). These concluding lines undermine the lyric convention of the epitaphic ending by imaginatively transforming the speaker’s present moment of enclosure into nothing but the open air of the lofty “vaulted sky” that he juxtaposes with the lowly common green of his childhood. By contrast, in the final four lines of “Lamentations,” Clare’s poetic voice revels in the way in which death will force the British elites who are responsible for landscape enclosure to experience their afterlives not as a joyous return to the mobility and fluidity of the unenclosed past, but as a needy, restless state: “Poor greedy souls . . . / . . . / Will riches keep ’em from the grave? / Or buy them rest in heaven?”⁵³ According to the speaker’s sharp irony, “riches” both make “greedy souls” “poor” and lack the power “to buy them rest” from their earthly guilt. The poetic voice portrays their sleep as impossible in heaven as it would require their enclosure in rooted locations and bodies.

Clare’s descriptions of his poetic “I”s as dead, entombed, and yet breaking free of their containment draw significantly from his own biography, especially his institutionalization.⁵⁴ His method is as strikingly ironic as it is tautological; while the “I”s of his speakers dispense with their own individual concerns and ground themselves in those of the community of Helpston, they also refer to the details of Clare’s individual life. Yet Clare’s lyric “I”s do not individuate themselves so much as they allow the captive, disciplined, and forgotten life of Clare the poet and his lost community of Helpston to stand in for one another. Locked up for madness in 1841 in the Northampton General Lunatic asylum, Clare inserted himself into his lyric “I”s.⁵⁵ Although the titles of poems from this period, such as the undated late lyric, “Enslaved in Bonds — Acrostic,” often suggest the institutional repression of the speaker, their lines also imply his resistant endurance: “I felt a feeling nothing can subdue / Endurable as nature no decay [*sic*]” (*LP*, 1092).

The self-addressed epistolary sonnet, “To John Clare,” written in February 1860 and published in June 1861, even rethinks as emancipatory the identity of the mad poet who remains out of sight and, in a very different sense than either Mill’s or Eliot’s lyric voice, talks to himself. As Zimmerman argues, the speaker of this poem makes use of an epistolary tautology to address the poet Clare as if he were still living in the vibrant “spring” of a pre-enclosed Helpston: “Well honest John how fare you now at home / The spring is come & birds are building nests” (*LP*, 1102).⁵⁶ While this speaker writes “To John Clare” from the enclosed present, he also represents the poet that authors him as surrounded by an unenclosed past landscape. Moreover, since the

speaker writes to the poet at the same time that the poet composes the speaker, “To John Clare” creates a circular subject-object loop that destabilizes the borders of the real and the literary, the living and the dead, and the present and the past. This poem, which fittingly emphasizes “home” and dislocates poetic speech from its originary author, suggests that Clare’s lyrics present multiple Clares: the embodied Clare of the enclosed present and the disembodied one of the unenclosed past. Clare’s “mad” speakers obstruct the unity of the first person lyric “I”; they are at once here and not here.

While critics such as Storey describe how “[f]or twenty-three years Clare rotted away” in the Northampton General Lunatic asylum (1841–64) after his time in Dr. Matthew Allen’s private asylum in the Epping Forest (1837–41), it is equally true that Clare creates a lyric narrative of bodily rot in which he depicts himself as slowly decaying in asylums from 1837 to his death in 1864.⁵⁷ Such a narrative allows him the freedom that comes with the ability to represent himself and his speakers as posthuman spirits that have untethered themselves from their restrictive and immobile presents. These immaterial speakers transform the traumatic loss of Helpston into the cathartic release of their enclosed and metaphorically dead bodies. Such imaginative exercises of bodily loss make possible the temporal itinerancy of Clare and his poetic voices. In his sonnet “I am,” Clare absents his speaker’s body in order to refuse the enclosure of his voice. This speaker rephrases “I am” into “I was” (*LP*, 398); such a reconstructed “I” allows him to travel out of his present self: “I was a being created in the race / Of men disdain[ing] bounds of place and time: — / A spirit that could travel o’er the space / Of earth and heaven, — like a thought sublime” (*LP*, 398). The speaker is able to move *outside* the present and the enclosed British isles to discover an eerie state in which men “travel” and disdain the “bounds of place and time.” In defiance against the idea that he—as a working-class man—can be settled in a specific place, Clare creates a speaker that insists that he can travel the globe as a free “spirit” in an era in which tourism had only recently become a bourgeois affair.⁵⁸ Clare’s poetic voice asserts a working-class “sublime” that is occasioned by free “thought” rather than expensive excursions to imposing landscapes.

In his asylum years, Clare imagines his identity as void of temporal and physical presence—as an unchanged but disembodied voice that drifts spiritually and imaginatively across time and space in search of a lost Eden. In this period of his life, he asserted that he had traveled to places that he had never actually been and met people that he

had never actually met; an American named Dean Dudley describes a meeting with Clare at the Northampton asylum in which Clare represents his literary relationships with American and Scottish writers as authentic, real-life encounters: “He said he had been in America, at a place called Albania, on the Hudson river, and saw Irving and Bryant there. . . . He spoke of Burns as of a brother, assuring me he had been in Scotland and seen his grave.”⁵⁹ As Dudley makes clear, Clare’s statements trouble the links between poetic vision and transnational travel that so-called high Romanticism privileges. Clare reimagines himself—a local, institutionalized, laboring-class poet—as able to access the foreign landscapes and personalities that his class station and incarceration bar him from physically visiting. Ironically, he could not accomplish this imaginative liberation from the asylum without poetic license; Bate details how Clare transforms the freedom and community of the asylum—a term that can signify either a refuge or a mental institution—into the restraint and isolation of a prison.⁶⁰ He remakes the actual conditions of his asylum into a more perfect poetic metaphor for the hemmed in landscape in order to more completely align his personal and political protests of enclosure.

III. THE UNTIMELY CLARE: POET PAST AND FUTURE

By converting the many discourses of death that surround him and his works into a lyric methodology of untimely speech, Clare manifests elements of what Edward Said termed “late style,” that peculiarly non-normative and estranged sort of vision that results from the situation of an identity in relation to death as always “coming after it, and surviving beyond it.”⁶¹ As the nineteenth century progressed, Clare and his poems became living relics. Dr. Allen published a corrective letter to the *Times* dated 23 June 1840 in order to discount its report of Clare’s death: “Sir,—I observe in *The Times* of yesterday that it is stated in the *Halifax Express* that the poet Clare died some months ago in the Lunatic Asylum at York. The Northamptonshire peasant poet, John Clare, is a patient in my establishment at Highbeach, and has been so since July, 1837.”⁶² Bate speculates about the ongoing nature of these literal “deaths” of Clare when he remarks that Clare’s prolonged poetic and personal silences during his residence in various asylums would have caused even his family to anxiously “wonder whether he was dead.”⁶³

As a poet who lived longer than he remained in fashion, Clare survived many cultural deaths; his ability to translate material aspects

of the present moment into the immaterial afterlife therefore also draws upon his poetic career's resistance to the closure of death. Clare is what de Man terms a "poet of death" not because he reveals "the discontinuity between the personal self and the voice that speaks in the poetry from the other bank of the river, beyond death," but because his haunting lyric "I" foregrounds his metaphorical death as an institutionalized writer who has lost his audience.⁶⁴ In his account of an 1841 visit to the private asylum of Dr. Allen, the journalist and editor Cyrus Redding envisages Clare's "volumes" as dead, neglected monuments covered in "dust": "There will some day be a return to the simply beautiful, when the love of Truth and Nature will again cause the dust to be blown off the volumes of such poets as Clare."⁶⁵ For Redding and others, Clare's cultural image as a "simply beautiful" poet of "Truth and Nature" was no longer consonant with the literary tastes of the era of Tennyson and Browning—though that could change "some day" in the future. Clare's poetic renown, and even his existence, had become impossible in the industrial present of the mid-nineteenth century because they were tied to the rural ways of life that enclosure had erased. Yet Redding calls attention to the way in which Clare's lyric belatedness relates to his descriptive style as much as to his content and subject matter; not only does Clare depict a bygone Helpston landscape and community, but he also focuses on recording its most passed by, unnoticed, "insignificant," and "inferior" details: "The simple subjects upon which CLARE delights to dwell most persons pass by, or have deemed beneath their notice, as inferior in the order of Nature, and wonder how such charming things can be said of what appears to them insignificant."⁶⁶

It is impossible to disconnect Clare's poetic reinventions of dead images, details, personae, settings, and subjects from the obsolescence, neglect, lowliness, and invisibility that defined him as a laboring-class poet. Throughout the nineteenth century he remained a so-called minor poet.⁶⁷ Rather than making use of the common lyric argument that poetry immortalizes dead poets, Clare's speakers simultaneously express the transhistorical endurance of both their distress and their desire to survive, unsettle, and touch the British empire.⁶⁸ Clare's poetic subjects continually represent their self-awareness of the minor nature of their own marginalized voices; they reflect Clare's recognition that history preserves and records the privileged.⁶⁹ After first portraying how "nature hides her face where they're sweeing [swinging] in their chains / & in a silent murmuring complains" (*MP*, 132), the speaker of "Remembrances" couples the "decay" of "love" to the failed

preservation of the rural pleasures of his “poesys”: “gave her heart my poesys all cropt in a sunny hour / As keepsakes & pledges all to never fade away / But love never heeded to treasure up the may / So it went the common road with decay” (*MP*, 134).

Yet Clare’s speakers commonly represent their minorness as a hardy and patient position that awaits the transformative arrival of an audience. The poetic voice of “I am,” for example, begins by imagining himself as a seemingly estranged and irrelevant speaker who, although he has lost his cultural capital and his human and nonhuman “friends,” still survives and refuses to be silenced: “My friends forsake me like a memory lost” (*LP*, 396); “Even the dearest, that I love the best / Are strange — nay, rather stranger than the rest” (*LP*, 397). By the poem’s conclusion, however, this speaker describes an afterlife capable of replacing his sense of alienation with communion: “I long for scenes, where man hath never trod / . . . / There to abide with my Creator, God” (*LP*, 397). This unenclosed spiritual realm both remains outside human development, “where man hath never trod,” and offers the speaker solace from the isolation that he suffers in the present.

In the years just prior to his death in 1864, Clare even suggests that his lively verbal freedom is a function of his spectral status as a culturally dead but nevertheless still speaking “minor poet.”⁷⁰ In his 1860 correspondence with James Hipkins, which Storey identifies as “Clare’s last extant letter,” Clare considers the relation between being “shut up”—enclosed—and “shut up”—silenced: “I am in a Madhouse & quite forget your Name or who you are you must excuse me for I have nothing to commu[n]icate or tell of & why I am shut up I dont know I have nothing to say so I conclude.”⁷¹ It is possible that the dead, meaningless prose that Clare uses to assert his enclosed “conclusion” contains two extended blank spaces in order to suggest unenclosed gaps. His last known letter could suggest his awareness of how to transform the seemingly enclosed, minor voice into one that embraces the mobility that open space allows. His declaration that he has “nothing to commu[n]icate” and “nothing to say” both displays the ghastly spectacle of his metaphorically posthumous voice and hints of a reclamation of his class status as a liberatory position of invisibility; while he repeats “I” four times, his “I” always seems to be elsewhere.

While Culler identifies apostrophe with what is “most radical . . . and mystificatory in the lyric” and Eliot associates the genre with a voice that “talks to himself,” Clare’s poetic voices often attempt to “forget” so as to move outside the reality of their enclosure in the present moment; their resistance to their containment involves losing

track of names and whom they might be in correspondence with—and even failing to recall why they are “shut up.”⁷² To free them from their restriction in the immediate present, Clare represents his living speakers as dead. Thus what Barbara Johnson describes as apostrophe’s ability to “reanimate” the absent in the present—“[t]he absent, dead, or inanimate entity addressed is thereby made present, animate, and anthropomorphic”—makes apostrophe an inefficacious vehicle for the poetic resistance of Clare’s lyric voices.⁷³ Nor does Clare’s poetry find its power in the kind of apostrophic reversal that de Man refers to as a type of prosopopoeia which “by making the death speak [*sic*] . . . implies, by the same token, that the living are struck dumb, frozen in their own death.”⁷⁴ What the institutionalized Clare’s lyric defiance involves is in fact a rhetorical motion that reverses the momentum of apostrophe. Rather than representing present speakers whose apostrophic invocations aspire to move absent objects of address toward themselves, Clare imagines poetic voices that absent themselves from the present moment so as to travel toward the audiences that they seek to address.

While Clare may have come to embrace aspects of his minoriness by the end of his life, Victorian critics marginalized both him and his poetry as disconnected from what these commentators understood to be the “modern” middle-class concerns of the London metropolis. Such readers viewed the industrial revolution as having rendered his collectivist model of subjectivity obsolete in Britain; they found solace in the creation of a myth of the Romantic lyric that tied originality to individualism. For many of the mostly metropolitan critics in the Victorian era who defined the Romantic lyric, Clare’s rural model of peasant subjectivity no longer existed as an inhabitable psychological category; in their view, Clare was an odd leftover, a remainder from a bygone era. In an 1847 letter, Thomas Inskip, the Bedfordshire watchmaker whose advice and assistance allowed Clare to publish in the *Bedford Times* from 1847 to 1849, articulates the foreignness of Clare’s lyric voices: “there is in fact hardly such a thing left as an English peasantry.”⁷⁵ Echoing Inskip, Redding depicts Clare unable to “identify” or maintain “community” with Britain’s metropolitan readers: “the mass of the people in middling circumstances have little community with the productions of imagination of a simple and natural character, particularly the inhabitants of large cities, who . . . seek their reading in writers of more congenial feeling with their own.”⁷⁶ Redding perceptively details the ways in which Clare would have maintained celebrity had he been born a generation before; according to his view,

Clare lives a belated existence that is out of sync with the progress of time. According to “modern” and “middling” men such as Redding and Inskip, Clare’s peasant subjectivity was a primitive, distressed, and outdated British worldview.

As the peasant vanished from Britain’s literary and cultural view, so too did the generic label of the “peasant poet” that had originated in the ballad revival of the early eighteenth century.⁷⁷ This term was broad enough to incorporate both the ideas of the rude, plebian poet-aester and the spontaneous, untutored genius. As the last of the British peasant poets writing in an expired and exhausted genre commonly associated with the mid-eighteenth century, Clare conjures up the resistant ghosts of Britain’s working-class poetic traditions, such as Stephen Duck, Ann Yearsley, William Cobbett, Mary Collier, Mary Leapor, James Hogg, and George Crabbe, who once denounced the exploitation of the people and the enclosure of the land. The longer Clare lived—the more distant in time he became from these local voices and the audiences to which they addressed their protests—the less acclaimed were his volumes of poetry. Clare’s first collection of poetry, *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (1820), would remain his most popular over the course of his career.

By the end of the Romantic era, even the processes of landscape enclosure to which Clare’s lyrics responded had become outdated. Edward Edwards, writing for the Tory-leaning *Quarterly Review* in 1827, published a chart that calculated the specific yearly number of both British Acts of Enclosure and enclosed acres of British land (Figure 1).

Reign.	No. of acts.	Extent of land inclosed.
Queen Anne	2	1,438
George I.	16	17,660
George II.	226	318,778
George III.	3554	5,686,400
George IV. (up to 1827)	188	300,800
	<hr/> 3986	<hr/> 6,325,076

Figure 1. Edward Edwards, “On Agriculture and Rent,” *The Quarterly Review* 36 (1827): 401.

Edwards uses this table to demonstrate “that spirit of improvement which, for the last seventy years, has been spreading with constantly increasing rapidity throughout the empire.”⁷⁸ According to his analysis, enclosure had participated in a long narrative of British progress:

[S]ince the commencement of the last century, upwards of six millions of acres of land have been inclosed and brought into a state of tillage . . . no less than eleven parts in twelve were inclosed in one reign—that of George III., the steady and constant patron of agriculture. If we suppose that one-third of this quantity was already under some sort of tillage, as common land, still the waste surface reclaimed will amount to four millions of acres.⁷⁹

Edwards’ work exhibits how by the end of the Romantic period, the once new landscape forms that enclosure had instituted were becoming old and nearing completion. The extended eighteenth-century history of enclosure meant that by 1830 the public had long been habituated to the national work of disciplining the countryside. If enclosure names the political force of Clare’s work over the course of his career, and if the process of enclosure was mostly finished by 1830, then the 34 years of his writing that follow 1830 can be viewed as a historical anachronism. In other words, commentators such as Redding may have been correct to read Clare elegiacally, as a vestige of a former world.

Yet the fact that the local enclosure of Helpston happened “late” (1809 to 1820) in the history of British landscape enclosure—and long after the conclusion of the last major peasant protests against it—means that even the lyric excoriations of enclosure that Clare penned prior to 1830 were inherently belated. Lines such as “How pleasures lately flourish’d here” imply a twofold belatedness; unenclosed Helpston exists as a place whose common “pleasures” have both passed away and survived enclosure longer than most other parts of rural Britain.⁸⁰ The lateness that applies to Helpston, Clare, and his speakers simultaneously ties together the activity of the recently departed (“of late”) and the passivity of the long since dead (the “late” John Clare).

In addition to establishing the belatedness of Clare’s resistance to enclosure, Edwards’s polemic demonstrates how the apologists of agricultural capitalism sought to retroactively expunge all value from the unenclosed landscapes that Clare’s poetry celebrated. In the reactionary imaginaries of men such as Edwards, the open landscapes of the past were merely unproductive “waste surface[s]” that enclosure had “reclaimed” for the nation as productive. The more that such accounts circulated and gained sway, the more that Clare’s

lyric descriptions of Britain's pre-enclosed ecologies became elegiac and anachronistic. Moreover, since Clare bound the identities of his speakers to the common greens of Britain's past, characterizations of such landscapes as dead and unproductive wastes could be applied to his first person poetic voices.

Clare responds by representing wasteful belatedness—in which “waste” signifies both open landscape and cultural outdatedness—as a position of strength that allows the refusal of enclosure's permanence. His lyric subjects commonly insist on their untimely ability to outlast or even reverse their present moment. “Remembrances” ironically describes what the Tories asserted was the quintessentially British process of enclosure as the arch usurper and foreign devil, Napoleon: “Inclosure like a Buonaparte let not a thing remain / It levelled every bush & tree & levelled every hill / & hung the moles for traitors—though the brook is running still / It runs a naker brook cold & chill” (*MP*, 133).⁸¹ Through a striking simile, the speaker personifies the invasive force of enclosure as a Napoleon who levels “every hill.” Yet this personified image of enclosure itself becomes leveled through the history of Napoleon's fall that readers of the poem, which Clare published in 1832, could not help but visualize. By this time, Napoleon himself was securely contained. The British press of the era commonly portrayed him as a melancholic, fallen, and ruined figure who had wasted away in isolation on St. Helena. Eleven years after his death on the mid-Atlantic island, Napoleon could no longer be imagined as the imperial maelstrom that closed Britain off from the Continent; he had long since ravaged Europe and threatened Britain's shores. The exiled figure of Napoleon creates cognitive dissonance in readers as he represents both an expired force of desolation and a self-imprisoning impotency. Clare's lyric imaginary allows the historical fate of Bonapartist despotism to speak to what might be the future fate of Tory land policies. “Remembrances” subtly suggests that enclosure might someday dissipate into a weak and tautological force that is itself enclosed.⁸² After his general statement that Napoleon (enclosure) categorically “let not a thing remain,” the speaker signals his own haunting survival as he elaborates on his memories of the specific traumas that his local landscape has experienced, “every bush & tree & . . . every hill.” Yet the most important symbol of his continued resistance comes in the fluid brook onto which he projects himself. The poem's brook both remains audible and relentlessly “runs” on in a line that enjambment quickens and an em-dash extends: “& hung the moles for traitors—though the brook is running still / It runs a naker brook cold & chill.”

As Clare's critics have recently begun to demonstrate, the particular way in which he exploits his seemingly irrelevant status as a displaced and untimely peasant poet who lacks a present audience makes him a proleptic writer whose lyrics are better addressed to the diasporic and environmental concerns of readers from the twentieth century to the present.⁸³ Clare's jaded, estranged speakers have much in common with postcolonial voices; both attempt to resituate aesthetics and identity outside of imperial Britain's strong, confident, and unitary interiority. In addition, Clare's "I"s express the values that today's green culture advocates: sustainability, conservation, and environmental ethics. Viewed holistically, his post-enclosure lyrics participate in a resistant genre of local lyric whose radical critique of the development and improvement of the British Isles manifests many of the devices that twenty-first century writers have returned to as they have wrestled with both the legacy of the British Empire and the rise of globalization.⁸⁴

As a local peasant poet whose revisionary speakers haunt and menace the critical myths of compression and isolation that long defined the Romantic lyric "I," Clare reminds us of what we have lost to the neoliberal narratives of progress and development. Although Clare was by no means the only Romantic poet who resisted containment, he uniquely coordinated his refusals of the nation's ontological, spatial, and temporal discourses of enclosure into a theory of the lyric "I" that still maintains revisionist potential today. In our present age of continued imperial and ecological depredation, we have much to learn from the descriptive lyric "I"s through which Clare reimagined lost histories as future alternatives to the dominant natures and cultures of the Romantic era. His visionary first person lyric speakers skillfully balance elegy and protest; at the same time that they admit that their search for a listener is futile in their present instant, they take on a surprisingly prophetic relevance when we think of them as addressing us today: "My friends forsake me like a memory lost: — / I am the self-consumer of my woes" (*LP*, 396). Such uprooted and anachronistic "I"s deserve fresh consideration in the context of literary criticism's recent turn toward queer temporality and diasporic, postcolonial, cosmopolitan, and transnational voices. The twenty-first century condition resonates with that of Clare's mutable and self-transforming speakers who simultaneously break their bounds and retain their local connections. As the untimely speaker of "An Invite to Eternity" (1847) suggests, Clare and his counter-cultural speakers *move*; homeless and wretched in the present, they either speak of the past—or for the future:

Say maiden wilt thou go with me
In this strange death of life to be
To live in death and be the same
Without this life, or home, or name
At once to be, & not to be
That was, and is not — yet to see
(LP, 349)

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NOTES

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¹ John Clare, “Hope of Home,” in *The Later Poems of John Clare: 1837–1864*, ed. Eric Robinson, David Powell, and Margaret Grainger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 402. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number and abbreviated LP.

² Virginia Jackson’s entry on “Lyric” in the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th ed. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2012) describes the rise of “J. W. Goethe’s idea of the three ‘natural forms of poetry’: lyric, epic, and drama” (826). According to Jackson, from the later eighteenth century onward lyric was linked to “concentrated,” indirect, and “personal” qualities: “Since the 18th c., brevity, subjectivity, passion, and sensuality have been the qualities associated with poems called *lyric*; thus, in modernity, the term is used for a kind of poetry that expresses personal feelings (G. W. F. Hegel) in a concentrated and harmoniously arranged form (E. A. Poe, S. T. Coleridge) and that is indirectly addressed to the private reader (William Wordsworth, John Stuart Mill)” (826). See Sharon Cameron, *Lyric Time: Dickinson and the Limits of Genre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1979), 23, where she identifies lyric with such narratives of interiority and containment. Próspero Saíz traces the connections that critics have drawn between the lyric “I,” presence, containment, and authority back to Plato and the idea that “[i]n lyric voice there is . . . the idea of proper authority and truth” (“Deconstruction and the Lyric,” in *Ode to Anthem: Problems of Lyric Poetry*, ed. Reinhold Grimm and Jost Hermand [Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1989], 221).

³ Although William Waters stresses that critics have historically represented lyric as the prototypical genre of the self-enclosed and “meditative” “I” (*Poetry’s Touch: On Lyric Address* [Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2003], 18) and Mutlu Konuk Blasing connects the genre to a substantial “I” with the “power” (*Lyric Poetry: The Pain and the Pleasure of Words* [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2007], 62) to determine its fate, both critics’ works emphasize how lyric address undermines narratives of the self-contained lyric “I.” For deconstructive readings of lyric as a fundamentally apostrophic genre, see Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1981), 135–54; Barbara Johnson, “Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion,” *Diacritics* 16.1 (1986): 28–47; and Paul de Man, “Lyrical Voice in Contemporary Theory: Riffaterre and Jauss,” in *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism*, ed. Chavina Hosek and Patricia Parker (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985), 55–72.

⁴ Jackson, *Dickinson’s Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading*, (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2005), 7. Here Jackson argues that “the poetry that comes to be understood as

lyric after the eighteenth century is thought to require as its context only the occasion of its reading . . . [poems] considered lyrical in the Western tradition before the early nineteenth century were lyric in a very different sense” (7). Jackson and Prins have stressed that today’s conception of lyric is a critical abstraction that consolidated from the Romantic period to the present and does not accurately describe what writers prior to the nineteenth century would identify as lyric. For these readings, see the collection of essays entitled *The New Lyric Studies* in *PMLA* 123 (2008): 181–234, which includes essays by Jackson and Prins. Paul Alpers has issued a similar call to historicize lyric and its formal devices such as apostrophe (see “Apostrophe and the Rhetoric of Renaissance Lyric,” *Representations* 122 [2013]: 1–22). On the indeterminacy of lyric’s definition today as either isolated and unitary or performative and historical, see Scott Brewster, *Lyric: The New Critical Idiom* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 6, 12–13. While it is beyond the scope of this study to entirely redefine lyric, the present essay speaks to how fetishizations of the Romantic lyric ‘I’ must continue to be challenged so that we can appreciate the historical engagements of the Big Six, and so-called minor poets such as Clare.

⁵ Jackson, “Lyric,” 830. Jackson dissents from the common critical notion that the lyric genre itself went out of fashion in the eighteenth century; her work highlights how this period emphasized the lyric qualities of songs and odes.

⁶ On the dialogic and communal nature of Romantic lyric discourse, see Michael Macovski, *Dialogue and Literature: Apostrophe, Auditors, and the Collapse of Romantic Discourse* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994) and Mary Jacobus, “Apostrophe and Lyric Voice in *The Prelude*,” in Hosek and Parker, 167–81. For Macovski’s critique of the insularity of the Romantic “I,” see *Dialogue and Literature*, 5–6, 34–35. In accord with Macovski and Jacobus, Susan Wolfson claims that Wordsworth “is not the sure, secure figure of logocentric performance and egocentric confidence ascribed to him in some feminist (and older masculinist) readings of Romanticism” (“Individual in Community: Dorothy Wordsworth in Conversation with William,” in *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. Anne K. Mellor [Bloomington: Univ. of Indiana Press, 1988], 146).

⁷ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “Dejection: An Ode,” in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 16 vol., ed. J. C. C. Mays (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971–2001), 16:699.

⁸ Charles Rzepka points out that “self-consciousness requires the presence, real or imagined, explicit or implied, of another” (*The Self as Mind: Vision and Identity in Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats* [Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986], 6, quoted in Macovski, *Dialogue and Literature*, 34). Macovski draws upon Mikhail Bakhtin to argue that we might read such ostensibly enclosed and contemplative poems as “interior dialogues” (*Dialogue and Literature*, 5). Helen Vendler contends that “Although in the usual lyric the speaker is alone, this solitude does not mean that he is without a social ambience” (*Invisible Listeners: Lyric Intimacy in Herbert, Whitman, and Ashbery* [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2005], 5).

⁹ John Barrell traces how the enclosure of Helpston began with The Act for the Enclosure of Helpston in 1809 and ended in 1820 with the publication of the last Award. According to Barrell, enclosure incorporated Helpston into the spatial logic of a much larger region: “The Act was a very comprehensive one, and provided for the enclosure not only of Helpston but of Maxey to the north, and of Etton, Glington, Northborough and Peakirk to the east, and this allowed the commissioners to think of these six parishes as forming together one large area of land” (*The Idea of Landscape and*

the Sense of Place: 1730–1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1972], 106).

¹⁰ Barrell, 120.

¹¹ Review of *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery*, by John Clare, *The Quarterly Review* 23 (1820): 166. In *Romanticism, Lyricism, and History* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1999), Sarah Zimmerman points out that four editions of Clare's first volume were published in a year, but "subsequent volumes . . . declined in sales" (160).

¹² Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery*, 9.

¹³ Vendler, *Invisible Listeners*, 1; see also, 4–5.

¹⁴ Most historicist accounts of Clare's poetry have connected his descriptive poetics to the local history of Helpston's enclosure. See Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape* and Mark Storey, *The Poetry of John Clare: A Critical Introduction* (London: Macmillan Press, 1974). Ecocritical scholars have read Clare's descriptive verse as both ecological and visionary. See Jonathan Bate, *John Clare: A Biography* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003); James McKusick, *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology*; and Timothy Morton, "John Clare's Dark Ecology," *Studies in Romanticism* 47 (2008): 179–93.

¹⁵ Zimmerman, 148.

¹⁶ Simon Kövesi comes closest in his claim that Clare critiques "the ordering first-person subject," adopting a rhizomatic poetic vision that stresses ecological interdependency ("John Clare & . . . & . . . & . . . Deleuze and Guattari's Rhizome," in *Ecology and the Literature of the British Left: The Red and the Green*, ed. John Rignall, H. Gustav Klaus, and Valentine Cunningham [Burlington: Ashgate, 2012], 87). On the "I" in Romantic poetry, see Stuart Curran, "Romantic Poetry: The I Altered," in *Romanticism and Feminism*, 185–207. John Henriksen argues that the Romantic lyric "repressed its own addressing" ("Poem as Song: The Role of the Lyric Audience," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 21 [2001]: 80). In *Wordsworth's Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984), James Chandler defines Wordsworth's lyric method as a Burkean retreat into the self and the Lake District. Following Chandler, Alan Liu has read Wordsworth's lyrics as escapes from history into the "individuation" of a strong "I." See *Wordsworth: The Sense of History* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1989), 23, 51.

¹⁷ Clare, *The Letters of John Clare*, ed. Storey (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985), 504, quoted in Kövesi, "John Clare's 'I' and 'Eye': Egotism and Ecologism," in *Green and Pleasant Land: English Culture and the Romantic Countryside*, ed. Amanda Gilroy (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 82. I am indebted to Kövesi for providing me with this reference, and for his identification of Clare's "less egotistical" poetry with his "ecological consciousness" (73).

¹⁸ John Stuart Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties" (1833), in *Autobiography and Literary Essays*, vol. 1 of *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1981), 348. For a reading of Mill and his critics, see Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery*, 9.

¹⁹ Jackson, "Lyric," 833. Jackson here describes the influence that Eliot's lyric theory had on the work of the New Critics: "In different ways, Am. Critics such as Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren in the late 1930s, W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley in the 1940s, and Reuben Brower in the 1950s assumed Eliot's definition of the personal lyric and used I. A. Richards's focus on individual poems . . . to forge a model of all poems as essentially lyric" (833).

²⁰ See, for example, Brooks, *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1939) and *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (1947). On the ways in which the New Critics' quest to detach the text from its historical context reflected Romantic ideologies of enclosure, see Henriksen, "Poem as Song," 77–78.

²¹ M. H. Abrams, "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric" (1965), in *The Correspondent Breeze: Essays on English Romanticism* (New York: Norton, 1984), 76. This essay draws upon the arguments that Abrams earlier articulated in *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1953)—especially the idea that the Romantic poets moved away from the so-called realistic narratives of natural imitation toward a lyric discourse of originary expressivity (see 84–99).

²² Abrams, "Greater Romantic Lyric," 76–77.

²³ Mark Jeffreys catalogues how Victor Lee's and Saiz's deconstructionist critiques of lyric base themselves almost exclusively on Romantic lyric and the ideas of the "assertion of self, the programmatic exclusion of otherness or difference, and the logocentric quest for presence" ("Ideologies of Lyric: A Problem of Genre in Contemporary Anglophone Poetics," *PMLA* 110.2 [1995]: 197). De Man, in a more appreciative account of the Romantic lyric, connects the genre to both a retreat from the "ontological priority of the sensory object" and an embrace of the "possibility for consciousness to exist entirely by and for itself" (*The Rhetoric of Romanticism* [New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1984], 16). Feminist critics, such as Anne K. Mellor, have associated the traditional account of the Romantic lyric with "the concept of an autonomous and self-conscious 'I' that exists independently of the Other" (*Romanticism and Gender* [New York: Routledge, 1993], 6).

²⁴ While Anne Janowitz's *Lyric and Labor in the Romantic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998) provides a notable exception, most of the scholarly works on the relations between lyric, labor, and class in the Romantic era have been published quite recently. See, for example, the three-volume *Nineteenth-Century English Laboring-Class Poets*, ed. John Goodridge (Pickering & Chatto: London, 2006), as well as *Robert Bloomfield: Lyric, Class, and the Romantic Canon*, ed. Simon J. White, John Goodridge, and Bridget Keegan (Lewisburg: Bucknell Univ. Press, 2006).

²⁵ Culler, 136.

²⁶ Culler, 149.

²⁷ Culler, 148.

²⁸ Culler, 146.

²⁹ de Man, "Lyrical Voice," 61.

³⁰ de Man, *Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 261.

³¹ Jacobus, 181.

³² Abrams, "Greater Romantic Lyric," 77–78.

³³ For a theorization of locodescriptive poetry, see John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problems of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993), 89. Guillory recalls Samuel Johnson's view that local poetry takes a "particular landscape" as its subject and embellishes it "by historical retrospection" (89). On the pastoral forms of Romantic poetry, see Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986), 85–127.

³⁴ For ecocritical studies of Romantic "nature poetry" that emphasize the period's literary encounters with the nonhuman, the natural, and the green, see Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (New York: Routledge,

1991); Scott Hess, *William Wordsworth and the Ecology of Authorship: The Roots of Environmentalism in Nineteenth-Century Culture* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2012); and Paul H. Fry, *Wordsworth and the Poetry of What We Are* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2008).

³⁵ Rachel Crawford points out that during the Romantic era, “contained” spaces such as the “cottage-garden, the homes and hearths of ordinary people, and, in literature, the minor lyric” became “productive of Englishness” (*Poetry, Enclosure, and the Vernacular Landscape: 1700–1830* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002], 5). Such spaces replaced the sprawling ones, such as the landed estate, the expansive green, and the epic georgic, that dominated during the eighteenth century. Judith Rowbotham traces the roots of this new privileging of the fenced-in to Evangelical valorizations of interiority and self-regulation: “landowners surveying their lands had moral, as well as aesthetic, grounds for not wishing to bump into any of the hoi polloi, and for building walls and fences and restricting free access” (“An Exercise in Nostalgia?: John Clare and Enclosure,” in *The Independent Spirit: John Clare and the Self-Taught Tradition*, ed. John Goodridge [Helpston: John Clare Society, 1994], 168, 169).

³⁶ Mark Overton, *Agricultural Revolution in England: The Transformation of the Agrarian Economy, 1500–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 4. Overton here argues that British culture viewed enclosure as a “prerequisite for selective animal breeding in that it prevented the promiscuous mingling of livestock on the commons” (4).

³⁷ Arthur Young, *Political Essays Concerning the Present State of the British Empire*, (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1772), 5.

³⁸ In addition to appearing in a diverse array of Romantic era reviews, from *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* to the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, this nationalistic notion of British insularity circulated in both the parliamentary debates and naval, military, and political histories of the era: see *Inquiry into the Present State of the British Navy* (London: C. Chapple, 1818), 155–56; Edward Baines, *History of the Reign of George III*, 3 vol. (Leeds: Longman, Hurst, & Co., 1820), 1:5; and *History of the Wars of the French Revolution*, 2 vol. (London, 1818), 2:513.

³⁹ Gould Francis Leckie, *An Historical Survey of the Foreign Affairs of Great Britain* (London: J. Bell, 1808), 115.

⁴⁰ Patrick Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Wealth, Power, and Resources of the British Empire* (London: Joseph Mawman, 1814), 424.

⁴¹ Lewis Goldsmith, *The Secret History of the Cabinet of Bonaparte*, 5th ed. (London: J. M. Richardson and J. Hatchard, 1811), 494.

⁴² In *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1999), Ian Baucom argues that place conveyed Englishness in the nineteenth century. For Baucom, Englishness became synonymous with the idea of warding off an “imperial invasion” in this period (24). Richard Helgerson traces the roots of such a nationalistic discourse of enclosure to early modern English conflicts with the Spanish. According to Helgerson, these conflicts cultivated “a postcolonial/colonializing dynamic, a dynamic in which the English came to think of themselves and their language both as having been colonized and as potentially colonizing others” (“Language Lessons: Linguistic Colonialism, Linguistic Postcolonialism, and the Early Modern English Nation,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 11 [1998]: 289).

⁴³ Clare, “Remembrances,” in *John Clare: Poems of the Middle Period, 1822–1837*, ed. Eric Robinson, David Powell, and P. M. S. Dawson, 5 vol. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 4:133. Hereafter abbreviated *MP* and cited parenthetically by page number.

⁴⁴ Alan Bewell reads “Remembrances” as a revisionary “form of ordnance mapping” that tells “a counter-history of the Helpston countryside” (“John Clare and the Ghosts of Natures Past,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 65 [2011]: 575).

⁴⁵ See Baucom, *Out of Place*, 19 for a reading of Pierre Nora’s *Rethinking France: Les Lieux de Mémoire*, 4 vol., trans. Mary Trouille and David P. Jordan. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2001–10) in the context of nineteenth-century British attitudes toward place.

⁴⁶ For a parallel reading of how the speaker of Clare’s “I am” perceives otherness as “intrinsic to the self,” see Morton, “John Clare’s Dark Ecology,” 191.

⁴⁷ de Man, “Lyrical Voice,” 71.

⁴⁸ Bewell, “Ghosts of Natures Past,” 576. Bewell then reminds us that “Ghosts make themselves visible for many reasons, but often it is because they are seeking justice for a crime committed against them” (577). With Bewell’s argument in mind, we can read Harold Bloom’s description of Clare as “the Wordsworthian shadow” against the grain as an image of haunting resistance rather than secondary derivativeness (*The Visionary Company* [Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1961], 444). On Clare, rural superstitions, and ghost stories, see Paul Chirico, *John Clare and the Imagination of the Reader* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 107–137.

⁴⁹ Clare, “The Lamentations of Round Oak Waters,” in *The Early Poems of John Clare: 1804–1822*, ed. Eric Robinson, David Powell, and Margaret Grainger, 2 vol. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 1:228. Zimmerman calls attention to how the poem’s title “heightens the identification of speaker and stream . . . making it unclear whose lamentations the poem records” (169).

⁵⁰ Clare, “Lamentations,” 228.

⁵¹ Ebenezer Elliott, *The Splendid Village: Corn Law Rhymes, and Other Poems*, 3 vol. (London: Benjamin Steille, 1834), 1:111.

⁵² Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, in *Collected Works*, 16 vol. ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 7:304.

⁵³ Clare, “Lamentations,” 234.

⁵⁴ Bate recounts how Dr. Nesbitt, the superintendent of Clare’s asylum from 1845 to 1858, describes Clare as having “lost his own personal identity” (P. R. Nesbitt to Frederick Martin, 15 April 1865, in *Northampton Manuscript*, 58, quoted in Bate, *John Clare: A Biography*, 518). Edward Strickland similarly terms Clare’s “sense of identity . . . extraordinarily fluid” (“Approaching ‘A Vision,’” *Victorian Poetry* 22 [1984]: 235).

⁵⁵ Clare’s critics have commonly read his poetry through his biography. Zimmerman reminds us that Clare’s “biography has in general been better known” than his poetry (174).

⁵⁶ Zimmerman, 175.

⁵⁷ Storey, *Poetry of John Clare*, 1.

⁵⁸ On the rise of middle-class tourism in the nineteenth century, see James Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Literature, Tourism, and the Ways to ‘Culture’ 1800–1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 19 and Tim Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2013), 54.

⁵⁹ Dean Dudley, “John Clare, the Peasant Poet,” in *Pictures of Life in England and America: Prose and Poetry* (Boston: James French, 1851), 118. See also, Bate, *John Clare: A Biography*, 483–84.

⁶⁰ In *John Clare: A Biography*, Bate explains that the Northampton Lunatic Asylum offered its inmates ubiquitous “sports in the grounds, rural walks in summer, board games in winter (bagatelle, chess, dominoes), country dancing and ‘occasional musical

parties in the centre of the house.” According to Bate, “Clare was allowed to walk the mile into Northampton alone. He quickly became a well-known figure in the town, sitting for hours at a time in the portico of All Saints’ Church” (469).

⁶¹ Edward Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (New York: Pantheon, 2006), 16.

⁶² Matthew Allen to the Editor of *The Times*, 23 June 1840, quoted in Bate, *John Clare: A Biography*, 429.

⁶³ Bate, *John Clare: A Biography*, 511. Bate’s analysis resonates with Storey’s depiction of Clare’s death: when Clare “died on 20 May 1864, no one in the outside world could really care less (to most people he was already dead); even when his body was taken back to his native village, Helpstone, there was nobody to receive it” (*Poetry of John Clare*, 2).

⁶⁴ de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen & Co., 1983), 181.

⁶⁵ Cyrus Redding, “John Clare,” in *The English Journal: A Miscellany of Literature, Science, and the Fine Arts* 1 (London: How and Parsons, 1841), 340.

⁶⁶ Redding, 342. Goodridge echoes Redding’s assessment that Clare recuperated and recycled the dead and minor. See “Pastoral and Popular Modes in Clare’s ‘Enclosure Elegies,’” in *The Independent Spirit*, 139.

⁶⁷ On Clare’s “minorism,” see Alan D. Vardy, *John Clare, Politics and Poetry* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 3. Vardy argues that the anthologization history of Clare’s poetry has seen the inclusion of poems that display a “relationship to other Romantic writing” (3). Philip W. Martin critiques readings of Clare as a “failed Romantic” who lacks decorum. According to Martin, Clare’s status as a “minor” poet is the result of the “‘historical repression’ of class and regionality” (“Problems of Placement and Displacement in Romantic Critical Practice,” in *Placing and Displacing Romanticism*, ed. Peter J. Kitson [Burlington: Ashgate, 2001], 50). On Clare, class, and reception, see Goodridge, “Clare’s ‘Enclosure Elegies,’” 144. For a postcolonial reading of the minor in the Romantic era, see David Lloyd, *Nationalism and Minor Literature: James Clarence Mangan and the Emergence of Irish Cultural Nationalism* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1987).

⁶⁸ Andrew Bennett identifies the Romantic poets with a “culture of posterity” whose adherents interested themselves in their cultural legacies (*Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999], 7). For B. Johnson, Keats in particular saw death as “the mother of poetry” (36).

⁶⁹ Zimmerman reads Clare’s critiques of enclosure as expressions of both his “anxieties about his own disappearance on the literary scene” and his institutionalization (175–76). See Tim Chilcott, “A Real World & Doubting Mind”: A Critical Study of the Poetry of John Clare (Hull: Hull Univ. Press, 1985) for a reading of Clare’s poetry as “evolving into a poetry of absence” (118).

⁷⁰ McKusick, “John Clare and the Tyranny of Grammar,” *Studies in Romanticism* 33 (1994): 277. McKusick here argues that Clare’s experimental asylum verse results from his freedom from externally imposed constraints such as grammar.

⁷¹ Storey, *John Clare: Selected Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 223; Clare to James Hopkins, 8 March 1860, in *John Clare: Selected Letters*, 223.

⁷² Culler, 137.

⁷³ B. Johnson, 30–32.

⁷⁴ de Man, *Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 78. On apostrophe and prosopopoeia, see de Man, “Lyrical Voice,” 62.

⁷⁵Thomas Inskip to Clare, 29 April 1847, in *Northampton Manuscripts* 52, quoted in Bate, *John Clare: A Biography*, 490; see also 489. David Simpson explores an argument similar to Inskip's in the context of the identity politics of the modern academy. See "Is the Academy Ready for John Clare?" *The John Clare Society Journal* 18 (1999): 70–78.

⁷⁶Redding, 306.

⁷⁷On Clare's use of the "peasant poet" label, see Mina Gorji, *John Clare and the Place of Poetry* (Liverpool: Liverpool Univ. Press, 2008), 15–31; see also Zimmerman, 151–52. Linked to the "peasant poet" was the poetic category of the untutored "natural genius." On the mythic nature of Clare's unschooled rural genius, see Bate, *John Clare: A Biography*, 12–13. On Clare and the defense of the uneducated classes, see Johanne Clare, *John Clare and the Bounds of Circumstance* (Montreal: McGill Univ. Press, 1987), 112.

⁷⁸Edward Edwards, "On Agriculture and Rent," *The Quarterly Review* 36 (1827): 400.

⁷⁹Edwards, 401.

⁸⁰Clare, "Lamentations," 229.

⁸¹For the astute reading of these lines that I build upon here, see Zimmerman, 162.

⁸²Long after Napoleon's decline, Clare would present himself as Nelson and Wellington and claim "that he had fought and won the battle of Waterloo, that he had had his head shot off at this battle, whilst he was totally unable to explain the process by which it had again been affixed to his body" (Nesbitt to Martin, *Northampton Manuscript* 58, quoted in Bate, *John Clare: A Biography*, 518).

⁸³Bewell connects Clare's poetic preoccupation with his loss of place to today's concerns about the displacing power of colonization ("Ghosts of Nature's Past," 549). On Clare's exiled voices and those of Lord Byron, see Bewell, 550. Bate's discussion of Clare's common delusion that "he was Lord Byron" further connects these two poets (*John Clare: A Biography*, 5). While class disrupts Clare's perfect alignment with Byron, even M. H. Abrams admits in his definition of the "Greater Romantic Lyric" that "[o]nly Byron, among the major poets, did not write in this mode at all" ("Structure and Style," 76).

⁸⁴Although he writes from within Britain, Clare reinforces Vendler's claim that local poets must negotiate how "to make a literature" and resist the externally imposed stereotype of the "peasant bard" ("Anxiety of Innocence," *The New Republic* 209 [1993]: 28).