

“I think I have been here long enough”: John Clare and the Poetry of His Asylum Years

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Abstract

The paper seeks to explore the condition of a so called mad poet John Clare, (1793-1864) who occupies a marginal place in the history of English literature despite the fact that he was a noted figure in the literary canon when his first book of poems was published. Clare was noted for his rural poetry but strangely enough he gradually went out of fashion. In an age which apotheosized poets and identified them as immensely powerful entities, Clare suffered in silence for twenty seven years in an asylum where he ultimately met with his death. During his confinement he wrote more than 300 poems which survive as glimpses of his traumatic life. Pain sharpened his voice and refined his vision although most of his poems remained unpublished until his death. Modern critics are trying to analyse the asylum poems of Clare which hardly appear as works of a mind out of control. In their structural integrity and coherence of thought they leave us in doubt about notions of sanity and insanity.

[**Keywords:** mad poet, marginal, asylum, confinement, pain, control, insanity]

John Clare was introduced to the literary world as a native genius. In the year 1820, the publisher, John Taylor launched Clare into the world as a young Northamptonshire peasant poet a young peasant, a day labourer in husbandry, who has no advantages of education beyond others of his class. In critical investigation of John Clare’s place in the literary canon it is his identity and background that has often acquired greater prominence than his poetry.¹

It was his rural background, the fact that he was a farm labourer and poet that evoked curiosity and sympathy and granted him a place of prominence. Clare became a noted figure in the literary canon after his first book of poems entitled *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* was published in 1820. Yet, strangely enough, when he died on 20th May 1864, in Northampton General Asylum, he had almost become a forgotten figure.

John Clare has either been treated with pity for being a displaced and marginalized voice or he has been subjected to neglect, indifference and omission. His position in the literary canon has always been fraught with doubts and debates. According to David Simpson, ‘Clare has not been admitted as either a major Romantic or a major Victorian poet. It is difficult to categorise him into a definite single class.’² He is either ignored or severely neglected in accounts of the history of English literature. M.H Abrams’s *The Mirror and the Lamp* and *Natural*

Supernaturalism, which deal with the philosophical aspects of Romanticism, do not mention Clare. Clare is minimally present in popular as well as scholarly anthologies. Duncan Wu's *Romanticism* includes some short poems and extracts of Clare; otherwise his poems are mostly ignored as the creative output of a minor and marginalized voice of the age. As Hugh Haughton notes, 'two hundred years after Clare's birth, Clare still speaks to us with something of the exemplary perplexity of the displaced person, of an exile within his own country.'³ According to Eric Robinson and David Powell,

Clare's place in the tradition of English literature cannot be established by simple chronology or solely by reference to the leading writers of his age, though he was born just one year later than Shelley and lived until a year before Yeats was born. Since Clare continued to write from his adolescence until a few years before his death, he belongs chronologically to the age of Blake, Bloomfield, Scott, Crabbe, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats and Wordsworth.⁴

The poet was too literate to be identified as a primitive rural voice and perhaps too psychologically complex to be regarded as a passive victim of repression. In Haughton's words,

Unlike his contemporaries such as Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats, Clare's works have never been monumentalized in the form of a canonical *Collected Poems*. It is as if he had never been accorded the status of an established poet in his own right, or acknowledged to have an oeuvre in the way that other Romantic and Victorian poets have. The posthumous history of John Clare's texts is also haunted by social, linguistic and economic obstacles——obstacles, which thwarted him during his life.⁵

Harold Bloom in his *The Visionary Company* identified him as a 'Wordsworthian Shadow'. Bloom claimed that Clare's destiny was similar to minor poets of all ages who had to live and write under the shadows of influential predecessors.

A close look at the life of John Clare shows a distressing co-existence of pain and creativity and provides another instance in support of the assertion made by Wordsworth about Chatterton and Burns in the poem *Resolution and Independence*,

We poets in our youth begin in gladness;
But thereof comes in the end despondency and madness'
(William Wordsworth, *Resolution and Independence*, 1802)

While simplicity was a hallmark of Clare's identity, it was a quality that he shared with the prophet and the visionary. His critics and editors created an image of the poet as a self-taught genius which deeply influenced the way his poetry was perceived and read. As Merryn and Raymond Williams observes,

it was taken for granted that a peasant poet was uneducated in a deliberate and specializing sense. Being uneducated implied a lack of the knowledge of formal grammar, yet at the same time it ensured a power to break through established conventions, a freshness and a spontaneity of observation and feeling, the qualities that had supposedly been lost in the movement to a more artificial way of life and culture.⁶

Clare tried to transcend the limitation of the label but failed. He desperately wanted the world to identify and acknowledge him on the basis of his poems and not adjudge his position in the canon on the basis of his origin. But he could not erase the label of being the Northamptonshire peasant poet during his lifetime which was his claim to fame. When he was confined in the asylum due to his mental illness, Clare was identified as a mad poet in confinement. Clare tried his best to transcend the burden of the imposed identities during his lifetime, yet he is still remembered as a minor poet who began his literary career as a labourer poet until he became a lunatic.

Diagnosed with mental illness Clare was admitted in Mathew Allen's asylum in 1837 on the authority of his wife. According to his recent biographer Jonathan Bate Clare's condition was more a 'nervous breakdown rather than an eruption of lunacy'.⁷ He complained of lethargy, insomnia, body aches and depression. Local medical practitioners diagnosed the poet with depression, trauma and anxiety syndrome. After the initial success and instant fame he received with his first book of poems, he was suddenly pushed into the margins. It was as if the taste for pastoral and rural poetry of self-taught genius had suddenly declined. This sudden transition of fame and fortune affected his nerves adversely. The poet began to have apprehensions about his own future— 'my future prospects seem to be no sleep—a general debility—a stupid and stunning apathy or lingering madness...'⁸

Studying Clare's mania in retrospect, several medical practitioners have claimed that he was probably a victim of schizophrenia or manic-depressive disorder who suffered from frequent mood disorders and depressive streaks. Several causes undermined him and led him to his eventual mental breakdown. Besides the probability of the existence of a genetic element, there were also a variety of possible natural and environmental causes that ushered his mental breakdown. A book entitled *On Nervous and Mental Conditions*, written by William Willis Moseley and published in 1838, during Clare's stay in Dr. Allen's asylum at High Beach, listed the following among the many possible causes of madness: 'domestic disturbances and quarrels, disappointed love, sexual indulgence, love of admiration, fear of loss, blows on the head, witnessing of a sudden death, sudden and unexpected change in fortune. Clare suffered from all these.'⁹ Looking at his clinical syndromes it is difficult to ascertain whether Clare's mania was a form of schizophrenia or not. Medical science was not adequately developed during Clare's lifetime and in many respects categorization and institutionalization of insanity was random and arbitrary during Victorian period.

It is true that Clare's eccentric behaviour reveal some clinical symptoms of madness. He suffered from acute depression due to several reasons and often failed to identify his own family and children, but one cannot be certain whether his condition was completely beyond cure or not. It is true that Clare met with utter neglect and indifference from his publishers after his initial success; it could be one of the principal causes of his mental trauma. Several other forces also added to his ordeal. On the one hand there were the pressure of poverty and growing family, repeated failures along with his ailing health, and on the other were the socio-political and economic forces that slowly undermined him. Clare lamented the effect of brutal enclosure laws which altered the topography of his familiar landscape which was integral to his poetic identity. Oppressed by poverty, uprooted by the enclosure, neglected by critics and ignored by readers, Clare's condition became exceedingly miserable.

Clare's madness was treated with sympathy and compassion in Mathew Allen's asylum for the Victorian age asylums believed that 'moral management technique' was the best means to deal with insanity. Clare showed no visible signs of lunacy except occasional reports of hallucinations and body aches. Although he suffered from anguish in his isolation, the poet continued to write and pour out his lament through his poems. Pain sharpened his voice and the poet expressed his anger, hatred and anguish to the world. During the twenty seven years that he remained confined, Clare wrote more than three hundred poems which are better in merit and quality than the rural verses which established his identity as a self-taught rustic bard. Although we often tend to read the poems of his asylum years as creative outputs of an insane poet confined in a mental hospital, emphasizing the psychological condition of the poet rather than the inherent value of the poems, yet on close scrutiny we can find that many of his asylum poems hardly show any evidence of his mental disturbance and insanity, and, in fact, some of them leave us in serious doubts about the prevalent notions of madness and sanity.

The poems of the Northborough period, which were written during the years preceding his confinement in the asylum are less sunny than the early poems of his life and betray signs of anxiety and gloom generated by his sense of displacement, his concern for the fact of enclosure and the burden of financial problems and publication difficulties. These misgivings intensified by the time he was admitted to the asylum. The poems written during his stay in the asylum reveal the tensions that haunted him. The world of pain and misery to which he was confined intensified his sense of alienation, but never affected his linguistic touch. His poetry came from brief bursts of poetic inspiration. He wrote several short lyrics like 'A Vision', 'Recollections of Home', 'Boys and Spring', 'Clifford Hill', 'The Humble Bee', 'The Swallow', 'The Ladybird,' 'Autumn', 'The Peartree Lane', 'The Maple Tree', 'Evening', 'The Bean Field' and 'The Chiming Bells'. The poems deal with marginalized and outcast figures and vividly represent the image of a man forsaken by family and friends, left alone in agony and isolation. The

tumultuous years yielded some of his best poems and lyrics. He re-wrote two famous Byronic poems namely *Child Harold* and *Don Juan* during his stay in the asylum. The poems written during his early life were pastoral and idyllic in tone. Most of his asylum poems are introspective and personal. The poems written between 1838 and 1840 in the asylum were chiefly lyrical in vein. They almost come as a lull before the storm that rages through his Byronic verses. Poems like 'Badger', 'Eternity of Nature', 'An Invite to Eternity', 'Bird Nests', 'I lost the love of heaven above', 'John Clare', 'I Am', 'Little Trotty Wagtail', 'Love of Nature', 'Stanzas' and 'The Vixen' offer glimpses into his traumatic condition in the asylum. He craved for escape from the asylum for he felt that it was no better than Prison of Bastille. He was imprisoned along with stone merchants, bakers, drapers, iron mongers, farmers and hardly had any visitors or family members coming to see him. He knew that he was a misfit among the others and failed to communicate with them.

Poetry became therapeutic for Clare. He lamented about his loss of childhood and innocence and craved for his long-lost childhood love, Mary Joyce. Clare's insanity, according to Dr. Nesbitt, the superintendent who was in charge of the asylum from 1845 to 1858 was also characterized by obsessional ideas and hallucinations. He often quoted from Shakespeare and Byron and claimed that the lines were his own. When G. J. de Wilde, the editor of the *Northampton Mercury*, a visitor to the asylum, tried to rectify his mistake, the mentally disturbed poet replied calmly, 'It's all the same. I'm John Clare now. I was Byron and Shakespeare formerly. I'm the same man...but sometimes they called me Shakespeare sometimes Byron and sometimes Clare'.¹⁰ In his moments of calm Clare dreamt and longed for peace and redemption for his soul, but one can still trace a tormented sense of loss in his poems.

I am —yet what I am, none cares or knows;
My friends forsake me like a memory lost:—
I am the self-consumer of my woes;—
They rise and vanish in oblivion's host,
Like shadows in love's frenzied, stifled throes:—
And yet I am, and live— like vapors tossed
Into the nothingness of scorn and noise,—
Into the living sea of waking dreams,
Where there is neither sense of life or joys,
But the vast shipwreck of my life's esteems;
Even the dearest, that I love the best
Are strange—nay, rather stranger than the rest.
I long for scenes, where man hath never trod
A place where woman never smiled or wept
There to abide with my Creator, God,
And sleep as I in childhood, sweetly slept,
Untroubling, and untroubled where I lie,

The grass below—above the vaulted sky.
(‘I Am’, lines 1-18)

The poem “I Am” tries to wring out a positive essence out of the nothingness to which it alludes. It is the voice of pain and anger expressing its bitterness against the world. It was the world which Clare sought to disregard, but could not. Clare claimed that he was consumed by woes and lived like a shadow of nothingness. Isolation appears as a dominant theme in Clare’s asylum poems. His asylum poems are surviving documents of his turbulent years offering glimpses of his trouble torn life in which fame, neglect, displacement, marginalization and imprisonment formed a unique pattern. Clare lived to see it all.

Like other inmates Clare too suffered from severe agony and depression during his stay in the asylum. During his stay in the asylum Clare rewrote two of the most famous poems of Byron under the delusion that he was the Romantic poet himself. He identified himself with the adventurous and cavalier Byronic hero who was a dark, brooding, mysterious and enigmatic figure. He also found an oneness with Byron’s fate for both met with sudden fame which was followed by indifference and critical neglect. Byron had achieved instant fame with the publication of his *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, but thereafter met with hostile criticism and ostracism from society. Byron left England and never returned from his self-imposed exile. Clare in his asylum was left with nothing but frustration and bitterness. In his isolated fancy he adopted the travel narrative of Byron to write a poem about spiritual growth and self-discovery. Impersonating himself as Lord Byron he rewrote the *Childe Harold*, lamenting in grief:

My Mind Is Dark and Fathomless And Wears
The Hues Of Hopeless Agony And Hell
No Plummet Ever Sounds The Souls Affairs
There Death Eternal Never Sounds The Knell
There Love Imprisoned Sighs The Long Farewell
And Still May Sigh In Thoughts No Heart Hath Penned
Alone In Loneliness Where Sorrows Dwell
And Hopeless Hopes On And Meets No End
Wastes Without Springs And Homes Without A Friend.
(*Child Harold*, lines 1011-1019)

It is ironical that the poet who had hardly travelled more than three miles during his lifetime chose to rewrite a travel narrative. It could be that the Byronic hero and life of adventure fascinated him and rewriting the Byron poems was a means of wish fulfillment for the poet or an expression of his dormant and repressed desires. Clare’s *Child Harold* does not possess any definite composite structure and is rather a collection of lyrics based on themes of love, loss, despair, frustration, dejection and longing written over a long period of time. The long incomplete work recounts a prolonged spiritual journey.

Love for his childhood friend Mary Joyce constituted an integral aspect of his existence and creativity. Clare wrote poems in love, despair, anger, agony, anguish, frustration, hope and joy. In some of his lyrics he praised and pined for Mary, whereas in some others he complained in despair about how love had cheated him. The poet could never meet Mary in person for despite the fact that he escaped from the asylum in 1841 to meet her; Mary was long since dead by then. He never stopped admiring her and worshipping her and lived under the hallucination that she was his first wife while Patty was the second one. For Clare, love was a promise rather than a fulfillment. It was a craving rather than an attainment. It was a love that developed in retrospect and enabled him to survive his loneliness.

The Rose Of The World Was Dear Mary To Me
 In The Days Of My Boyhood And Youth
 I Told Her In Songs Where My Heart Wished To Be
 And My Songs Where The Language Of Truth
 I Told Her In Looks When I Gazed In Her Eyes
 That Mary Was Dearest To Me
 I Told Her In Words And The Language Of Sighs
 Where My Whole Hearts Affections Would Be

(*Child Harold*, lines 1139-1146)

As the poem advances, the love for Mary Joyce undergoes a metamorphosis in the poet's mind. She transcends the limits of ordinary mortality to emerge as a divine symbol of nature, an ideal of love, beauty, freedom and honesty. In some of his poems included in the *Child Harold*, there exists no definite sequence of stanzas and in some, like the one quoted above, all the words of the poem begin in capital letters. These reflect a restless and tormented mind suffering from lack of balance, haunted by fear and insecurity lack of certainty and tranquility. Clare's manuscripts often created immense problems for the editors and publishers for his handwriting became barely legible at times. Marked with minimal punctuations, ambiguity, replete with grammatical errors and sudden interpolations of irrelevant and unrelated material, Clare's works were unique in several aspects, bearing signs of his distraught mind.

Written in imitation of Byron's satirical epic narrative, Clare's *Don Juan* on the other hand is bitter and sarcastic in tone and content. Clare composed his poem to expose the shallowness of Victorian society. Confined within the walls of the asylum, John Clare fantasized a life of adventure like that of Lord Byron. The poem expresses Clare's discontent with the hypocrisies and the repressive attitudes of the age which denied and suppressed sexuality under the façade of prudish morality. Dormant desire, repressed passion, frustrated emotions, the trauma of

failure and the agony of loneliness gave birth to Clare's bitter poem. Clare felt that in the Victorian society the art of poetic recognition was like the vocation of prostitution, associated with ideas of marketability and shifting loyalties. Acquiring literary fame through poetic creativity was subjected to chance and coincidence, since the poet had to depend on the discretion of his publishers. In his poem Clare expresses his apathy against the doctors of mental asylums who confined and isolated insane patients and denied them all forms of pleasure and entertainment. The Byronic mask gave him the opportunity to expose the emptiness and superficial morality of the society where sex was viewed with reservation and publishers determined the identity of a poet.

Incarcerated within the walls of the asylum, John enjoyed forbidden pleasures vicariously by identifying himself with the imagined persona. His brief London experience had enabled the naïve rural poet to get acquainted with the glamorous life lying beyond his familiar pastoral world. Memories of the cavalier experiences with his poet friend Rippingale and the raffish charm of London life which had appealed to him in his youth continued to haunt Clare's consciousness, and reappeared in his Byronic poem *Don Juan*. The scandalous tone of the poem comes as a shock from the poet who wrote about birds and bees of nature. The poem is marked with an intensity of longing and charged with bitterness and a sense of having been deceived.

A hell incarnate is a woman-mate
 The knot is tied—and then we lost the honey
 A wife is just the prototype to hate
 Commons for stock and warrens for the coney
 Are not more trespassed over in rights plan
 Then this incumbrance on the rights of man
 There's much said about love and more of women
 I wish they were as modest as they seem
 Some borrow husbands till their cheeks are blooming
 Not like the red rose blush—but yellow cream.

(*Don Juan*, lines 35-44)

Clare denounced women and scoffed at sexuality in his poem. *Don Juan* is spiteful, vindictive and malicious in tone and temper and seems to reveal the darker aspects of Clare's personality. In his cynical pose and furious denunciation of women, politicians, aristocrats, critics, publishers and humanity in general, Clare almost resembles Jonathan Swift. It seems that he adopted the mask of the Byronic persona to express his scathing criticism of the world which had pushed him towards his doom. The poem includes some shocking lines like 'Marriage is nothing but a driveling hoax,' and 'A wife is just the prototype to hate,' which can be also read as affected, conceited and melodramatic observations of a mind plagued by intense frustration. Clare assumed the voice of a chauvinist in the poem. The label of insanity offered him the power to debunk existing social structures and raise questions against the confines and margins of conventional

identities. The poet felt that, since biblical times, women had always been responsible for destroying men.

Milton sung of Eden and the fall of man
Not woman for the name implies a wh—
(*Don Juan*, lines 9-10)

Clare felt that Victorian society was essentially repressive about sex and for a marginalized figure like him the subject was taboo. The poem becomes a projection of his subversive sexual desires and intense disappointment.

Children are fond of sucking sugar candy
And maids of sausages—the larger the better
Shopmen are fond of good sigars and brandy
And I of the blunt—and if you change th letter
To C or K it would be quite as handy
And throw the next away—but I'm your debtor
For modesty—yet wishing nought between us
I'd hawl close to a she as vulcan did to venus
I really cant tell what this poem will be
About—nor yet what trade I am to follow
(*Don Juan*, lines 65-74)

Unlike Byron, whose blatant outrage against society and desire for sexual satisfaction was rewarded with triumph and gratification, Clare was left with nothing but mere delusions and fantasy. Sometimes he sought to draw a contrast between himself and Byron, 'Though laurel wreaths my brows did ne'er environ/I think myself as great a bard as Byron'.¹¹

Negotiating the complex relationships between poverty, literary fame and financial security, Clare's *Don Juan* was aimed as a criticism against the shallow and insincere politeness of English society and its vain manners. The poem denounces the canon and critical practice since Clare felt that critical acclamation was severely biased and opinionated which made it difficult for a lesser known creative individual to find a place for himself. Clare's reworking of Byron's *Don Juan* bears within it the signs of his own fraught relations with the reviewers, for Clare wanted to resist the identification of being 'the Northamptonshire Peasant poet'. The identity of a peasant poet was a stigma that Clare had to bear and deal with throughout his life. He was always frustrated by this oxymoronic reputation of being a 'peasant poet', which, according to him, was an explicitly non-canonical category. The diagnosis of madness further endangered his status. Though it allowed him the privilege to enter the tradition of inspired genius, yet clinical madness was a different order of difficulty. The poet's trauma was born out of a sense of being a misfit in the world in which he was placed. He sought to defy the fact that a poet's fame depended upon his critics and reviewers. His relationship with his publishers was severely strained. Clare suffered considerable mental agony after he was rejected by critics. He had soared to great heights following the

publication of his first book of poems. Thereafter, the taste in popular pastoral dwindled and the transience of fame affected his mind. He became severely marginalised. There were times when he wrote to his publishers about how he had written several good poems which he felt would be ‘appreciated by the world. But nothing ever came out of it.’¹² After the failure of his three consecutive books of poems—*The Village Minstrel and other Poems* (1821), *The Shepherd’s Calendar* (1827) and *The Rural Muse* (1835), publishers were not much interested in him. The confinement of the asylum appeared like the prison of Bastille to him and he longed for escape. In a letter to his wife Patty he wrote, ‘I am very weary of being here. You might come and fetch me away for I think I have been here long enough...’¹³ But no one came to his rescue.

These moments of intense and violent agony were followed by phases of resignation and tranquility when the confinement became comforting to him offering him solace and solitude. Clare was apathetic towards the curiosity that his identity evoked; he felt that his condition was like that of a prize-fighter in the ring, a man who was ‘petted and nourished’, only to be put on display. Tormented by frustration and despair, craving for home and family and tired of waiting in vain Clare wrote, during his stay at the Northampton Asylum,

Why, I’m very well, and stout, but I’m getting tired of waiting here so long and want to be off home. They won’t let me go, however; for, you see, they’re feeding me up for a fight; but they can get nobody able to strip me; so they might as well have done with it, and let me go.¹⁴

There were times when he lamented about how, ‘literature has destroyed my head and brought me here.’¹⁵ Yet, ironically enough, the painful asylum years were also the times when he wrote some of his best poems. Ironically enough the most difficult, agonizing and tormented phases of Clare’s life were also the most fruitfully creative years. It was in the asylum that the lonely poet found a new voice of his own. Removed from friends and family, Clare engaged himself in profound literary creativity and wrote some of his most evocative poems.

Clare’s apparent confusion of identity, when he imagined himself to be Byron, could be due to some personality disorder or it could be a conscious effort on the poet’s part to belong to the elite canon. Clare suffered from insecurity about his place, class, company and aspirations. The poet avidly wished to stand on his ‘own bottom as a poet’ and transcend the identity of that of a rural genius which had been his claim to fame.

In spite of some evidences of aberrant behaviour, Clare’s poetry written during his asylum years hardly bears any signs of his confused brain. Looking at the coherence and unity of thought in short lyrics like ‘I Am’, ‘A Vision’ or ‘An Invite to Eternity’ one is left in doubt about the fact that a so-called mad poet composed them. There exists, in his poems beneath their structural unity and coherence of thought, an undeniable undercurrent of loss and lament. It was as if Clare tried to forget, but could not. Clare, like Cowper, ‘was at times a madman,’

and, as Norman Nicholson notes, he was one whose poetry was still essentially 'the poetry of the sane'¹⁶

Kelvin Everest has observed in his *English Romantic Poetry*, 'Clare still remains an underrated and relatively neglected figure.'¹⁷ Edmund Blunden too remarked about John Clare, the Northamptonshire Peasant poet, that 'he is too little known and perhaps is one of the few English writers most difficult to estimate.'¹⁸ Although Clare's life was marked with distress and failure, yet undoubtedly he was a real poet, for he struggled through difficult conditions to survive. His poetry bears evidence of his mental turmoil. As Merryn and Raymond Williams have observed,

By any ordinary comparative standard, Clare was a remarkably productive poet, for all the difficult and changing circumstances of his life. Through all the phases of physical and mental illness, the poet went on doing what was always most important to him: writing poems. Through all the neglect and the suffering, Clare's works mark a special kind of triumph. His achievement ought not to be reduced to the label of a victim. Against all the odds, Clare made his way in his most essential activity, however much he and others might see his life as a failure.¹⁹

Clare's asylum poems often appear as conscious efforts on his part to find anchor for his disordered self. It could be that he wrote poems to keep himself occupied, or it could be that he wrote poems because he was fractured and fragmented in pain. In both ways the poems become records of his prolonged mental turbulence. It is true that Clare was a victim of circumstances, but it can also be asserted that it was his mental trauma, that rendered him a mature poetic vision. It was the experience of mental agony that intensified the tone of anguish in his poetry and endowed it with new life, vigour and vitality. It was his deprivation and loss that made Clare a true genius.

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- ⁹ Op. Cit. Bate, p 412.
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- ¹³ J.W. and Anne Tibble, ed.s, *The Letters of John Clare, The Letters of John Clare* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951), p 289
- ¹⁴ Op. Cit. Bate, p 471.
- ¹⁵ Op. Cit. E. Storey, p 295.
- ¹⁶ Norman Nicholson, *William Cowper* (London: Lehman, 1951), pp 7-8.
- ¹⁷ Hugh Haughton, Hugh, Adam Philips and George Summerfield ed.s, *John Clare in Context* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p 212.
- ¹⁸ Ibid, p 11.
- ¹⁹ Op. Cit., Williams, pp 12-13.

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