Forms of Health in John Clare's Poetics

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Contents

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Abstract

This thesis is the first sustained study of the poet John Clare and his relationship to health. It considers health as an under-explored physical and mental state evoked across his poetry and prose that has heretofore been overshadowed by a critical preoccupation with his supposed madness. Under the banner of the Medical Humanities, I angle a critical lens on Clare and health beyond biographical readings of his mental deterioration and onto his written responses to the medical, cultural, and social understandings of health by which he was surrounded. Specifically, I argue that Clare articulates both his comprehension and also experience of health through poetic form. I take a thematic approach to the reach of Clare's works composed between 1804-1864, and focus on what I argue to be the most predominant 'forms' that health takes across his poetics: voice, breath, and place. The chapters unfold the poet's engagement with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century medical contexts such as nosology and theories of insanity, speech and elocution, climatic and atmospheric medicine, phrenology, and botany, in order to consider how the local formal techniques of his poems (metre and prosody, rhyme and other sonic devices, caesura, enjambment, and line-endings) shape and re-work the ideas of mental and physical health that these contexts put forward. Throughout the thesis I bring together formal and historical methodologies with modern phenomenological and cultural theories in order to draw out how Clare's exploration of health is both facilitated by the thinking of his own period, and also speaks to current research into health and illness as subjective experiences. Ultimately, I read health across Clare's poetry at the level of form in order to reveal how health inspires a textual mode that defies determinacy and unsettles distinctions between the healthy and the pathological.

Note on the Texts

All references to Clare's poetry are, unless stated otherwise, from the nine-volume Oxford edition: *The Early Poems of John Clare, 1804-1822*, ed. Eric Robinson, David Powell and Margaret Grainger, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); *Poems of the Middle Period, 1822-1837*, ed. Eric Robinson, David Powell and P. M. S. Dawson, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996-2003); *The Later Poems of John Clare, 1837-1864*, ed. Eric Robinson, David Powell and Margaret Grainger, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); all dates of composition, spelling and punctuation are quoted as they appear in these sources, and all poetic quotations are cited by volume, line and page number.

All references to Clare's letters (outgoing correspondence) are from *The Letters of John Clare*, ed. Mark Storey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); all dates, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and spacing are quoted as they appear in this source.

References to Clare's prose are from *John Clare By Himself*, ed. Eric Robinson and David Powell (Manchester: Carcanet, 1996), and from *The Natural History Prose Writings of John Clare*, ed. Margaret Grainger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983); all grammar, spelling, punctuation, and spacing are quoted as they appear in these sources.

All references to the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* are from the online edition www.oed.com.

Abbreviations

EP	*The Early Poems of John Clare, 1804-1822*, ed. Eric Robinson, David Powell and Margaret Grainger, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).
MP	*Poems of the Middle Period, 1822-1837*, ed. Eric Robinson, David Powell and P. M. S. Dawson, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996-2003).
LP	*The Later Poems of John Clare, 1837-1864*, ed. Eric Robinson, David Powell and Margaret Grainger, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).
Letters	*The Letters of John Clare*, ed. Mark Storey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).
By Himself	*John Clare By Himself*, ed. Eric Robinson and David Powell (Manchester: Carcanet, 1996).
Natural History	*The Natural History Prose Writings of John Clare*, ed. Margaret Grainger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).
Critical Heritage	*Clare: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Mark Storey (London: Routledge, 1995).
Eg.	Correspondence of John Clare (letters to Clare): British Library, Egerton Manuscripts 2245-50; cited by manuscript and folio number.
Nor.	Northampton Manuscript, as listed in David Powell, *Catalogue of the John Clare Collection in the Northampton Public Library*

(Northampton: County Borough of Northampton Public Libraries, Museums and Art Gallery Committee, 1964).

Pet. Peterborough Manuscript, as listed in Margaret Grainger, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the John Clare Collection in the Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery* (Peterborough: Peterborough Museum Society, 1973).

In Context *John Clare in Context*, ed. Hugh Haughton, Adam Phillips and Geoffrey Summerfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

New Approaches *John Clare: New Approaches*, ed. John Goodridge and Simon Kövesi (Peterborough: The John Clare Society, 2000).

New Essays *New Essays on John Clare: Poetry, Culture, Community*, ed. Simon Kövesi and Scott McEathron (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

Introduction

Health Known and Unknown

'Mild health I seek thee wither art thou found'

(Clare, *MP*, II, l. 1, p. 250)

This thesis offers an appraisal of health and its forms across John Clare's writings. For a poet whose letters and journals document recurring mental and bodily symptoms as well as periods of recovery, whose mental and physical suffering resulted in access to a range of medical practitioners, and whose poems reveal an idiosyncratic intensity of interest in aspects of health in comparison to other poets of the period, the absence of any sustained focus on what Clare might be able to tell us about the state and experience of health is curious.[1] Although these quantifying measures can only tell critics so much, they offer an initial and revealing glimpse of Clare's usage of 'health' as more consistently prolific than some of his key Romantic contemporaries and earlier influential figures. This thesis aims to explore such usages in order to redress the critical neglect of health in Clare studies, and in doing so casts necessarily a wider net than previous criticism. Scholarship surrounding his work continues to grow into a wealth of approaches as Clare's poetry speaks to an ever-widening circle of literary critics, yet he retains his notoriety as the labouring-class poet who was certified insane and spent the last twenty-seven years of his life in High Beach and, later, Northampton General Asylum. Whilst the nature, and even the existence, of Clare's mental disorder remains continually up for debate, it is the poet's supposed madness that has heretofore driven considerations of his work from a medical or health-oriented perspective. In some of these cases, the focus is therefore not on health as a state in itself, but on specific

[1] A search for 'health' and its variant forms on *Literature Online* generates 132 instances across Clare's works. To put this into perspective, the same search for Wordsworth generates 26 instances; for Coleridge, 23; for Keats, 5; for Byron, 24; for Shelley, 14; for Blake, 10; for Charlotte Smith, 7; for James Thomson, 14. See http://literature.proquest.com.

symptoms or potential conditions, and the task at hand becomes a form of medical biography whereby the state of Clare's physical and mental health and the condition he suffered from are read through diagnostic investigations.[2] As a consequence of this style of approach, health also becomes conceived as something lost repeatedly to Clare at specific times of his life, with both the critical and clinical narratives presenting a course of chronological deterioration.

As a counter to this critical preoccupation with physical and mental decline and failing health, publications have arisen recently that seek to turn away from his suffering and to reclaim Clare as a more eudemonic poet, such as the selected volumes *This Happy Spirit* (2013) and *The Wood is Sweet* (2015).[3] Recovering him as a poet with a 'wonderful capacity' for joy and pleasure, these volumes aim to reassert the prevalence of wellbeing and more 'positive' mental and physical states across Clare's work.[4] However, they neglect to name health explicitly as another possible counter-feeling to illness and disorder, and lack a critical framework or context in which to locate their suggestion that Clare is occupied by more reparative states and experiences. This thesis therefore aims to offer a timely contribution to the field of Clare scholarship under the banner of the Medical Humanities, by advocating for his significance as a poet invested deeply in both the pursuit of health and in the forms that health might take. This is not to pitch madness and health against each other as divergent states or experiences, but rather to suggest that attending to the recurring presence of health in his work provides an opportunity to take a more inclusive view of the mind and the body, and the medical, cultural, social, and formal structures that shape them across Clare's poetics.

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[2] Some key diagnostic approaches to Clare's madness and its relationship to his poetics are J. W. and Anne Tibble, *John Clare: A Life*, 2nd edition (London: Michael Joseph, 1972); Jonathan Bate, *John Clare: A Biography* (London: Picador, 2003); Geoffrey Grigson, *Poems of John Clare's Madness* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949); Evan Blackmore, 'John Clare's Psychiatric Disorder and Its Influence on His Poetry', *Victorian Poetry* 24.3 (1986), pp. 209-228; Arthur Foss and Kerith Trick, *St Andrew's Hospital Northampton The First 150 Years (1838-1988)* (Cambridge: Granta, 1989); Sean Haldane, 'John Clare's Madness', *PN Review* 30.6 (2004), pp. 42-46.

[3] John Clare, *This Happy Spirit: Poems*, ed. R. K. R Thornton and Carry Akroyd (Peterborough: John Clare Society, 2013); John Clare, *The Wood is Sweet: Poems of Clare*, ed. David Powell (Ruddington: John Clare Society, 2015).

[4] *This Happy Spirit*, p. 4.

The lack of focus on health as opposed to pathology within Clare's poetics also opens up a wider epistemological problem: namely, what *is* health? How can we undertake a study of health if we do not know how to describe or define it? Contemporary perspectives within the Medical Humanities and philosophy of medicine often conceive health as a physical and mental state that eludes recognition and classification.[5] Pathological symptoms, by comparison, offer a rich diagnostic schema and descriptive language for illness, even if they do not always communicate the specific type of illness or disorder from which they stem. Episodes of illness were frequently mystifying for Clare, as often expressed in his letters to his publishers and other acquaintances: 'what it is I cant tell but I must be better after a bit'; 'I can scarcely tell you how I am, for I keep getting a little better and a little worse, and remaining at last just as I were'; 'I am getting worse & worse & what my complaint is I cannot tell'.[6] Illness throws up a crisis of narrative and representation in these instances. Scholarship in the Medical Humanities, and in literature and medicine especially, has claimed narrative medicine and the 'illness narrative' as fundamental tools available to both suffering individuals and to clinicians. Personal narratives and the adoption of a 'literary' language of metaphors and imagery are seen to 'reclaim patients' voices from the biomedical narratives imposed on them', as Ann Jurecic suggests, as well as to 'encourage medical practitioners to respond to the stories of suffering people with attention, respect, and understanding'. [7] Narrative also plays a more constitutive role as a means of representation for the individual in illness. Rita Charon defines the ability to narrate, or image, one's illness as 'the representational act' that gives 'the formless experience a form'.[8] When Clare claims that he 'cannot tell' what his complaint is, he vocalises a need not just for a diagnosis, but for a form or language that will enable him to express and 'tell' how he feels. He is alert to the desire for

[5] See, for example, S. K. Toombs, *The Meaning of Illness: A Phenomenological Account of the Different Perspectives of Physician and Patient* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1992), p. 12.
[6] Clare, *Letters*, p. 235, pp. 303-04.
[7] Ann Jurecic, *Illness as Narrative* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), p. 3.
[8] Rita Charon, 'Narrative Medicine: Attention, Representation, Affiliation', *Narrative* 13.3 (2005), pp. 261-270 (p. 266).

answers on the one hand, and for his own adequate form of representation and meaning-making on the other, two different concerns which bring the medical and the literary together.

Charon argues that illness is the state that most calls us to require the figurative, and this can be seen in Clare's frustrated, yet highly detailed, attempts to describe his state of body and mind in his letters. In 1822, he wrote to James Hessey alarmed by the sensations that the melancholy 'blue devils' seemed to bring with them: 'flutterings run from my head to my knees as if somthing was alive in my veins'.[9] To Thomas Inskip in 1824, he described how 'a numbing pain lies constantly about my head & an acking void at the pit of my stomach keeps sinking me away weaker & weaker'.[10] This form of sensation was to return in 1825, when he complained to Taylor of 'fresh symtoms of that numbness & stupidness in the head & tightness of the skull as if it was hooped round like a barrel'.[11] Even when Clare cannot pin down the cause of his sufferings, he can describe them vividly; even before they are named, symptoms have a presence. The numerous headaches, stomach aches, fevers, chills, coughs, feelings of numbness, fits, rashes, and 'blue devils' that populate the poet's letters may confuse him in relation to what they indicate or why they persist, but they are locatable within the bounds of his body and mind. Illness may need to be narrated into order to liberate a person from 'formless' suffering and to foster communication with others, but it also has its own physical prompts and signals, its own 'forms' that direct the attention of the individual.

Health, on the other hand, has come to be conceived not so much as a definable physical or mental presence as a state of being free from symptoms, defined only by the absence of something else or known only when one is without it. This is particularly true of contemporary phenomenological approaches to health and illness that seek to move beyond biomedical definitions and towards a framework that can account for the importance of subjective experience

[9] Letter to James Augustus Hessey, 2 April 1822, *Letters*, p. 235.
[10] Letter to Thomas Inskip, 10 August 1824, *Letters*, p. 300.
[11] Letter to John Taylor, 15 September 1825, *Letters*, p. 347.

in the understanding of these mental and physical states.[12] Havi Carel's phenomenological account of illness, for example, understands health as a 'transparent' state, where 'well-being is the invisible context enabling us to pursue possibilities'.[13] Health is 'invisible', unverifiable, and yet at the same time crucial for an untroubled participation in daily life. Amidst the attention bestowed upon the importance of illness narratives, there has been little consideration of what form a 'health narrative' might take. This is due partly to the argument that illness and the alleviation of suffering are more urgent objects of scrutiny, but also to a sense of health as a state that resists narrative in the first place. Clare's own attempts to discuss his health foreshadow this approach. In a journal entry from 1828, he writes:

> Greatly distressed today and uncommonly ill O what a blessing is health we know not how to prize it till we loose it Dr Darling restored me to health but my foolish follys has compelled her to leave me again and I fear for ever[14]

The representation of health as an unknown, precarious state outside of Clare's control, but still treasured and coveted, goes some way to representing its troublesome yet vital nature as explored in this thesis. Health is subject to an interesting slippage in agency in this passage. 'Dr Darling' refers to George Darling, the London-based physician well-known for his treatment of both Clare and Keats as well as other literary figures being published by Taylor. Here, he is represented as the guardian of health and as possessing the ability to restore it, whereas Clare by contrast represents himself as irresponsible or incapable of maintaining his own wellbeing. Chastising himself for his 'foolish follys', in a manner that seems to personify health as a wronged

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[12] For examples of approaches to health in this field, see R. M. Zaner, *The Context of Self: A Phenomenological Enquiry Using Medicine as a Clue* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1981); S. K. Toombs, *The Meaning of Illness: A Phenomenological Account of the Different Perspectives of Physician and Patient* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1992); Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Havi Carel, *Illness: The Cry of the Flesh* (Durham: Acumen, 2008); Fredrik Svenaeus, *The Hermeneutics of Medicine and the Phenomenology of Health* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001).
[13] Havi Carel, *Illness: The Cry of the Flesh* (Durham: Acumen, 2008), p. 53.
[14] *By Himself*, p. 243.

companion, the poet admits culpability for his current state at the same time as he places it beyond his control. If illness belongs to the individual who endures and tells it, then health belongs in the hands of others, never really ours to know fully but maintained from a distance by medical professionals. By claiming 'we know not how to prize it till we loose it', Clare gestures not only towards health understood as an illusory and even unknowable state, but also towards his poetic endeavour of trying to form a language through which he might come to know and prize it.

The task of trying to 'know' health captures Clare's poetic imagination early on in his career. 'To Health', a poem to which I return throughout this thesis, is one of his earliest works and was composed alongside other pieces being produced for *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (1820) and *The Village Minstrel* (1821) in 1819.[15] It invokes health as a ubiquitous, all-encompassing force that manifests as natural phenomena:

Hail soothing balm – ye breezes blow
    Ransack the flower and blossom'd tree
All, all your stolen gifts bestow
    For health has granted all to me

And may this blessing long be mine
    May I thy favour still enjoy
Then never shall my heart repine
    Nor yet thy long continuance cloy

And tho I cannot boast, - O! health
    Of nothing else, - but only thee
I would not change this bliss for wealth
    No not for all the eye can see

[…]

Ah well may they who do posess
    Sweet health thy joy-inspiring balm
Lavish thy praise in such excess

[15] All further references to these volumes are indicated by the short titles *Poems Descriptive* and *Village Minstrel*. For an explanation of the composition date of 'To Health' see 'Explanatory Notes', *EP*, II, pp. 783-800 (p. 783).

'Hail hail, wild woodlands native charm!'

Thy voice I hear, thy form I see
In silence, Echo, stream or cloud
Now that strong voice belongs to thee
Which woods and hills repeat so loud

The leaf the flower the spirey blade
The hanging drops of pearley dew
The russet heath the woodland shade
All all can bring thee in my view
(*EP*, II, ll. 1-36, pp. 24-25)

The forms of address permitted by the ode here bring poetic utterance into play as a means through which Clare can feel around for health. Apostrophe not only personifies health, but assumes it as a presence that is remote from the speaker and needs to be addressed in order to be invoked. Presence, absence, distance, and proximity all interact in this poem, where emphatic claims of health's potential abundance ('All all can bring thee in my view') also belie its diffuse and uncontrollable nature, as though it were everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Helen Vendler's notion of 'vertical address', where 'the speaker's apostrophe is directed to a person or thing inhabiting a physically inaccessible realm existing "above" the speaker', is detectable in the tone of this poem if not in the circumstances it evokes.[16] Rooted in the world of natural elements and phenomena, health is made material and accessible but, at the same time, its overwhelming ubiquity troubles the subject's ability to pin it down. Invocation and apostrophe take on the sense of the conditional: 'may', 'shall', 'would', and 'can' construct an approach to health as an abundant possibility rather than a state that has actually been achieved by the speaker. Vendler argues that the 'intrinsic and constitutive ability of the lyric to create intimacy is perhaps most striking when the object of intimacy can never be humanly seen or known, yet can be humanly

[16] Helen Vendler, *Invisible Listeners: Lyric Intimacy in Herbert, Whitman, and Ashbery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 2.

addressed'.[17] With the progression of each stanza, a new constitutive exercise unfolds that perhaps enacts the dialectic of 'prizing' and 'losing' found in Clare's later journal entry. Each subsequent stanza is a new attempt to grasp health and to invoke it before it shifts into a different guise.

'To Health' is therefore revealing of Clare's exploratory interest in health and his desire to experience it, and also of the importance of form as a means of interrogating what health is. Angela Leighton's exegesis of form suggests that 'although it looks like a fixed shape, a permanent configuration or ideal, whether in eternity, in the mind, or on the page, in fact form is mobile, versatile. It remains open to distant senses, distortions, to the push-and-pull of opposites or cognates'.[18] Clare's sense of health as a shifting 'form' not only brings this potential for mobility and distortion to bear on health itself, but also suggests that form is the very medium through which to capture health's protean character. Stephanie Kuduk Weiner is alert to how Clare's critics need to attend to his formal sophistication, moving beyond the assumption that his works were composed impulsively in order to attend to the 'growing appreciation of Clare as a craftsman'.[19] This thesis seeks to contribute to this movement within Clare scholarship by placing form at the forefront of its enquiry into his understanding and representation of health. By form I mean primarily the variety of techniques that Clare employs across his works that organise (and disorganise) language, sound, and image. Whilst the thesis takes in the wide range of poetic forms that he composed in, such as odes, sonnets, ballads, and longer narrative poems, its primary focus is on the local formal techniques at work within those poems, such as metre and prosody, rhyme

[17] Vendler, *Invisible Listeners*, p. 4.
[18] Angela Leighton, *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 3.
[19] Stephanie Kuduk Weiner, *Clare's Lyric: John Clare and Three Modern Poets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 16. For another discussion of Clare's poetry that seeks to re-investigate assumptions about his compulsive artlessness, see Andrew Hodgson, 'Clare's Lyric Impulse', *The Cambridge Quarterly* 45 (2016), pp. 103-118.

and other sonic devices, caesura, enjambment and line-endings, and on how this variety of techniques put pressure on the definitions and cognates of health at work in Clare's poems.

By making health the subject of repeated intimate address, Clare approaches it as both knowable and unknowable, a shifting 'form' that poetic enquiry might help him to grasp momentarily at the same time as it bears witness to health's formlessness. The act of representation also reveals it as a state or feeling that might require modes other than medical enquiry in order to define it. Health emerges as a distributed phenomenon, conceived in relation to a sense of self and the mind-body relationship with place and environment, to sound and poetic utterance, to questions of value, and to the expression of individual experience both against and in relation to collective purpose. Across the rest of this introduction and three chapters that also draw on the medical and medicalised knowledge by which Clare would have been surrounded, this thesis will trace health as the nexus of these interactions. My enquiry throughout is driven by these research questions: how far can the medical and cultural theories and understandings of health by which Clare was surrounded be seen to influence his own representation of health across his works? How does he challenge or develop these definitions and ideas in his poetry and prose? What kind of relationship does Clare envisage between poetry and health? Is poetry always figured as curative, or does its relationship to wellbeing complicate understanding of this mental and physical state? Most significantly, how does Clare's exploration and representation of health influence his poetic form, and, conversely, how far does form become his primary vehicle for thinking about what it means to be in a state of health? My approach to these questions unites a formal and historical methodology supplemented by more contemporary phenomenological and cultural theories, in order to draw out how Clare's exploration of health is both shaped by the thinking of his own period and speaks to more recent attempts to consider health and illness as subjective experiences.

‘A health to pain’: Moving Beyond Madness

In order to attend to health, it is first helpful to take Clare’s madness into account as a context that has shaped scholarship surrounding his work and that offers a way into my core argument and methodology. In terms of specific diagnoses, Clare’s various biographies have been the primary sources of speculation. Anne and John Tibble suggest that he ‘was most likely of manic-depressive temperament. His bursts of creative work were followed by periods of exhaustion, and these were often prolonged by pecuniary worry and under-nourishment’.[20] Thomas Tennent shared this opinion, deducing that Clare must have suffered from a ‘cyclothymic disorder’, and Jonathan Bate agrees that manic-depression is one of the most convincing assessments even whilst he remains cautious of the traps within retroactive diagnosis.[21] Bate also offers a host of other explanations: schizophrenia is dismissed, but post-traumatic stress disorder, malaria (‘fen fever’), and seasonal affective disorder are considered possibilities, as are the dementia and simply ‘extreme poverty and over-exertion of body and mind’ that Dr Edwin Wing (superintendent at Northampton General Asylum) and Dr Matthew Allen (who ran High Beach asylum) suggested.[22] Sean Haldane calls for attention to the potential ‘organic’ as well as ‘functional’ causes of Clare’s complaint and takes seriously the poet’s own frequent fears that he had contracted venereal disease, claiming ‘chronic meningovascular syphilis’ as a likely source of his mental and physical suffering.[23] This speculation is also found in Arthur Foss and Kerith Trick’s account of Clare’s time spent in Northampton General Asylum, where they argue for schizophrenia over manic depression before finally selecting ‘cerebral syphilis’ as the most compelling cause.[24]

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[20] Tibble and Tibble, *John Clare: A Life*, 2nd edn, p. 201.
[21] Thomas Tennent, ‘Reflections on Genius’, *The Journal of Mental Science* 99 (1953), pp. 1-7 (p. 5); Bate, *John Clare,* p. 412.
[22] Bate, *John Clare,* pp. 408-418; for Dr Edwin Wing’s casebook report on Clare, see Arthur Foss and K. L. K. Trick, *St Andrew’s Hospital,* pp. 137-39; Dr Matthew Allen to the editor of *The Times*, 23rd June 1840 (see Bate, *John Clare,* pp. 429-430).
[23] Haldane, ‘John Clare’s Madness’, p. 44.
[24] Foss and Trick, *St Andrew’s Hospital,* pp. 143-44.

Meanwhile, Frederick Burwick avoids medical diagnosis as he approaches madness within the tradition of its relationship to 'creativity', paying attention to Clare's 'intertextual strategies' (his re-workings of Byron in particular) as self-conscious literary performances that utilise moments of delusion at the same time as serving a therapeutic purpose.[25] Roger Sales echoes this argument with his suggestion of the 'theatrical' role of madness within asylum culture.[26] Roy Porter also argues for the importance of attending to Clare's agency over his mental disorder and its representation, whilst at the same time gesturing towards madness as an unhelpful paradigm through which to read his poetic innovation and output: 'behaviour which, in the wider world, would be read as socially acceptable, becomes, in the context of the asylum, further confirmation of psychosis'.[27] John Burnside develops this line of thinking to propose a suggestive turn towards madness as a form of refuge from the material changes and socioeconomic 'improvement' surrounding Clare outside of the asylum: 'in a real sense, this performed madness is an attempt to live according to some improvised, but meaningful, law in a social milieu where even the most fundamental laws have become corrupt'.[28]

Whether taken as an element of the complex of Romantic 'genius', as part of a Foucauldian episteme of clinical power, as a subject of retrospective diagnoses, as the inevitable result of socioeconomic pressures placed upon a 'peasant poet', or as a self-conscious mode and identity that Clare played with deliberately, there have been many attempts to approach and form a nuanced critical language for discussing Clare's madness. However, there have also been many attempts to steer attention away from the subject, or at least to consider mental disorder in dialogue with other contexts and perspectives. The recent collection *New Essays on John Clare*: *Poetry, Culture and Community* (2015) sees him as a key figure in debates about contemporaneous

[25] Frederick Burwick, *Poetic Madness and the Romantic Imagination* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), p. 65.
[26] Roger Sales, *John Clare: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 104.
[27] Roy Porter, '"All madness for writing": John Clare and the asylum', *In Context*, pp. 259-278.
[28] John Burnside, 'John Clare and the new varieties of enclosure: a polemic', *New Essays*, pp. 79-96 (p. 88).

politics and class-consciousness, print culture, religion, ecology and environmentalism, natural history, enclosure, and aesthetic theory. Yet it remains telling that the volume offers no essay devoted to a discussion of the poet's psychological problems or interactions with nineteenth-century paradigms of insanity. Madness is instead a diffuse topic, no longer an isolated element of Clare's biography, but woven into other aspects of the social and cultural makeup of his work. This in part stems from a desire to move on to fresh debate, to progress from a fetishised view of Clare as the 'mad peasant poet' towards an appreciation of his intellectual complexity and innovation. Whilst an enriching development, this perceptible turn away from Clare's madness as a critical concern in its own right has also led to a neglect of its counterpart: the importance of health as an idea or aspiration that pervades his poetry and prose. Noticeably, there is also little sustained discussion of other aspects of nineteenth-century medicine or healthcare as a key cultural and social context out of which Clare writes. This thesis therefore seeks, in part, to refocus and reframe attention towards the medical paradigms surrounding his moment of writing. I hope to expand the knowledge of the range of medical, as well as cultural and social, fields that shape and influence his work beyond psychological theories of insanity, with the intention of bringing together in one place the strands of Clare's medical frames of reference in order to assert health as a self-conscious and vital concern.

Of course, madness is not excluded from this project. In turning towards health, my intention is not to ignore or to recuperate completely suggestions of the pathological in Clare's work, but rather to explore how the pathological and the healthy might interplay in his thinking, especially with regards to the role of poetics. His admission papers for Northampton General Asylum are now notorious for stating that, whilst the cause of insanity was 'hereditary', it had been inflamed by 'years addicted to poetical prosing'.[29] Framed as an addiction, poetry becomes a

[29] Bate, *John Clare*, p. 292.

source of pathology, less a consciously therapeutic means of expression or distraction from suffering than a chronic compulsion.

Clare's discussions of his writing practice sometimes attest to this sense of composition as harmful or mentally and physically draining. He writes of how he is 'teribly plagued with the muses', and on more than one occasion describes productive periods as being 'in the fit' of writing, a convulsive-sounding state that conflates the more controlled stanzaic 'fit' of verse with the throws of seizure: 'when I am in the fit I write as much in one week as woud knock ye up a fair size Vol - & when I lay down the pen I lay it down for a good long while'.[30] Such fitful episodes of composition echo Clare's description of a distressing event from his childhood that he claims is where his 'week constitution' originated:

> my indisposition […] origionated in fainting fits, the cause of which I always imagined came from seeing when I was younger a man name Thomas Drake after he had fell off a load of hay and broke his neck […] in my fits I swooned away without a struggle and felt nothing more then if I'd been in a dreamless sleep after I came to my self but I was always warnd of their coming by a chillness and dithering that seemd to creep from ones toe ends till it got up to ones head […] these fits was stopt by a Mr Arnold M. D. of Stamford […] tho I have had but one or two swoonings since they first left me[31]

Another vivid description of one of these attacks can be found in a letter to Markham E. Sherwill from 1820:

> besure dont say nothing to none of my friends respecting my alarm of the fit or rather swooning I tell you & you only […] it was in the fields & wether I lay down or fell down I cant tell but when I came to myself my hat was lying at a distance from me & my coat was rather dirtied my throat was rather sore & as if suddenly attracted with a cold […] I have made the best of it by fancying it was only a strong drowsiness that came upon me.[32]

[30] Letter to John Taylor, 19 April 1820, *Letters*, p. 47; Letter to John Taylor, 20 May 1820, *Letters*, p. 70.
[31] *By Himself*, pp. 18-19.
[32] Letter to Markham E. Sherwill, 6 April 1820, *Letters*, pp. 45-46.

What are here portrayed as distressing and confusing experiences that Clare is ashamed to admit, become reclaimed as a creative impulse through the term 'in the fit'. It nevertheless retains a sense of the lack of self-control that the fit inflicts in these passages. Clare's body undergoes an experience of which he is not wholly conscious and he is estranged from himself temporarily, waking up to find his clothes and faculties altered without understanding why. His frantic fits of writing are therefore coloured with this alarming lack of agency, represented as outside of Clare's volition and as physically and mentally alienating. Perhaps there is an element of his 'making the best of it' in relation to the compositional process, just as he attempts to reassure himself that his attack of 'swooning' was merely 'drowsiness'. If being 'in the fit' is a potentially alarming or even painful experience, then the end result – an abundance of poems – reclaims the ordeal as not wholly pathological, or attempts to recover some good from it.

At other times, however, illness is cast as an impediment to creative work rather than a prolific, albeit potentially harmful, flurry of production: 'I am scarcely able to write' and 'I am scarcely able to do anything' come to be familiar phrases to anyone who tries to pursue Clare's accounts of his condition in his letters.[33] Yet alongside these moments of profound inactivity are also occasions where his work gives rise to a confident assertion of poetry's curative properties. The opening lines of 'The Progress of Ryhme' (1824-32) invoke 'poesy' as a reparative force: 'when sick thy visions give me health' (*MP*, III, l. 4, p. 492). He returns later to this therapeutic mode of writing when in High Beach asylum, drafting a letter to his illusory wife, Mary Joyce: 'I have been rather poorly I might say ill for 8 or 9 days before haymakeing & to get myself better I went a few evenings on Fern hill & wrote a new canto of "Child Harold" & now I am better'.[34] Poetry is neither always pathological, nor always curative, but possesses both qualities simultaneously. Susan Sontag proposes that our participation in 'the kingdom of the well' and

[33] See, for example, Letter to Henry Francis Cary, 18th September 1824; Letter to John Taylor, 10th July 1834; Letter to Henry Behnes Burlowe, 12th November 1834; Letter to James F. Clarke, 10th November 1835; Letter to George Reid, 8th April 1837; *Letters*, pp. 304, 616, 617, 629, 639.
[34] Letter to Mary Joyce, May 1841, *Letters*, p. 646.

'the kingdom of the sick' is a kind of 'dual citizenship'; she does not divide them into two states so much as suggest a permeable boundary between them. Trying to navigate the nature of the relationship between health, illness, and poetry for Clare calls this permeability into account.[35]

Derrida's reading of Plato's *pharmakon* figures the medical opposites of remedy and poison as revealing writing itself as founded on ambivalence and indeterminacies.[36] Writing within his own grammatology and theory of deconstruction that conceives of texts as sites of multiplicity and subtext, the relationship between 'remedy' and 'poison' is just one example amongst a wealth of binaries that texts might complicate or revise. Nevertheless, Derrida's concept of the *pharmakon* still offers a helpful framework for considering what a poetics of health and illness might look like. It opens up an approach that can consider how these physical and mental states are embedded and constituted in language and form, and can attend to the kinds of interplay, coalition, and indeterminacy this formal emphasis might foster. Clare's prose marks constant fluctuations between health and illness, but the work of poetics allows for a more entangled relation between the two. Take, for example, a stanza from 'The Meadow Grass' (1832):

> Theres somthing more to fill the mind
> Then words can paint to ears & eyes
> A calmness quiet loves to find
> In these green summer reveries
> A freshness giving youth to age
> A health to pain & troubles dear
> The world has nought but wars to wage
> Peace comes & makes her dwelling here
>
> (*MP*, III, ll. 65-72, p. 557)

[35] Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and Aids and its Metaphors* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 3.
[36] Jacques Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy', *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: The Athlone Press, 1981), pp. 61-172.

Whilst invoking a feeling or state beyond the reach of 'words', these lines reveal a language of exchange that rests on the weighing of contraries. What 'words can paint' here is a kind of dialectic, where 'youth to age' and 'health to pain' do not mark sequential transitions but evoke a reciprocal mode. The iambic tetrameter illustrates this sense of balance, placing equal stress on 'health' and 'pain' in their respective feet; metre works as a local expression of a more general sense of equilibrium here. The lines conduct their own recurring moments of balance that are guided by the word 'to'. The repetition of this word is made less noticeable by its location in either the middle or towards the end of the lines where it occurs; it is less obtrusive than anaphora, only perceptible by taking as much care over the syllables that are unstressed as those that are stressed. Each 'to' moves its line along, ushering in each new action whilst also maintaining a form of continuum whereby everything Clare introduces coexists with what came before it. This technique is suggestive of the poet's attitude towards his subject, too, as he writes himself into a position where contraries need not be resolved. In being given 'to' pain, health does not necessarily eradicate or undo it, but exists alongside it.

Whilst Derrida's approach to 'remedy' and 'poison' as markers of textual play is helpful for drawing attention to the relationship between health and illness in Clare's thought and work, such flexibility is also to be found in publications circulating in his contemporary moment. One significant example is the article 'On Ill Health and its Consolations', published in the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1833. Clare had poems published in the *New Monthly* in 1820 and 1828, as well as reviews of his work, and remained interested in subsequent volumes. In this article, the author seeks to reassess the pursuit of health as 'the greatest of earthly goods' and instead probe the consolatory consequences of illness.[37] The result is a rumination on illness and the forms of withdrawal it incurs as more conducive to the imaginative faculties ('the mind acquires the habit

[37] 'On Ill Health and its Consolations', *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* 37.145 (Jan 1833), pp. 26-30 (p. 27).

of making to itself a thousand sources of interest'), to affective relations with others and their suffering ('that impetuous and reckless buoyancy of spirit which mostly accompanies a hardy and iron frame, is not made to enter into the emotions of others'), and to the impressions of 'intellectual objects' ('Books become more eloquent of language, and their aspect grows welcome as the face of some dear consoler').[38] Illness emerges in this article as a state as crucial to a person's moral development as health, and, furthermore, as imperative to an appreciation of the value of health that we would otherwise lack:

> […] rude health, which having never waned from its vigour, is unconscious of the treasure it inherits […] With what gratitude we feel the first return of health – the first budding forth of the new spring that has dawned within us! Or, if our disease admit not that blessed regeneration, still it has intervals and reprieves […] So that our state may be of habitual tranquillity, and yet not dumb to raptures which have no parallel in the monotony of more envied lives.[39]

Health and illness are conceived here, not as opposites, but as relational and mutually affirming. Illness is offered as a 'counterbalancing' gift to health, a phrase that supplements Clare's metrical balancing of the two states in 'The Meadow Grass'. The two states are brought into further relationship in a section of the article that speaks to Derrida's own apprehension of the false distinction between remedy and poison: 'God made the human heart weak, but elastic; - it hath a strange power of turning poison into nutriment'.[40] Clare, I suggest, is highly attuned to this 'strange power' through his willingness to bring 'health to pain', and to put pressure on the boundaries set up between them.

Clare's attention to health as a feeling that might encompass or be brought into relationship with more painful states and experiences is crucial to my argument that health is a mode that

[38] 'On Ill Health and its Consolations', pp. 27-29.
[39] 'On Ill Health and its Consolations', p. 30.
[40] 'On Ill Health and its Consolations', p. 27.

shapes his poetics as much as a condition toward which he aspires. It permits a methodology that seeks to account for both textual and conceptual incertitude, in order to address not only the poet's points of contact with certain medical contexts and ideas, but also to examine how poetry and its formal qualities might complicate these contexts and the models of health they proffer. This thesis is not, therefore, about disambiguation – trying to define exactly what health *is* – but rather about asking what questions and complexities it opens up when treated poetically. Such an approach also challenges the idea of health defined simply as the absence of illness. Martin Wallen argues that 'such tautologies […] reinforce the absoluteness of this polarity, tacitly affirming that we all know what each state is because we have experienced its opposite'.[41] When that opposite (illness, pain, disease, pathology) is made instead to form a possible continuum, the definition of health is both enriched and troubled. It becomes a more expansive or distributed term that can contain multitudinous states or feelings, but still lacks its own singular defining quality. Counter to this ineffable quality of health are the numerous eighteenth- and nineteenth-century endeavours to find the right terms to describe and materialise it. Physicians, philosophers, periodicals, and the general public did not shy away from the task of trying to pin down what the definition of health might be. The following section will therefore introduce the cognates of health that were circulating in the period, whilst also addressing Clare's position amongst this wealth of information in relation to his labouring-class status.

'Medicine from Below': The Case of the Northamptonshire Peasant Poet

Roy Porter has drawn attention to the need for a cultural materialist approach to medical history, or a medicine 'from below'. Seeking to revise the hierarchical structures of medical knowledge

[41] Martin Wallen, *City of Health, Fields of Disease: Revolutions in the Poetry, Medicine, and Philosophy of Romanticism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. 1.

and its production, he argues for the need to recover how 'in medicine's history, the initiatives have often come from, and power has frequently rested with, the sufferer, or with lay people in general, rather than with the individual physician or the medical profession at large'.[42] Resonating with the aims of E. P. Thompson's 'history from below', Porter addresses and elevates the perspective of the patient (especially when that patient is a lay person or 'Everyman Sick') as an overlooked index of the experience and understanding of health and illness.[43] He consolidates a methodology whereby the records and documents of those who have written about their own health or medical treatments form a crucial extension of the knowledges of health that circulate in a given period. At the centre of this approach is the patient, or the sufferer: the individual who claims the authoritative voice over his own experience. The figure of the sufferer is also at the heart of the illness narrative discussed earlier. The 'wounded storyteller' is, for Arthur Frank, an assertion of bodily and mental disruptions as necessitating 'self-stories' and imaginative responses.[44] Whereas for Porter the patient's perspective is a vital means of gathering information about how people defined and experienced their own health or illness, for Frank, the illness narrative is more of a reparative exercise. He suggests that 'the self-story is not told for the sake of description, though description may be its ostensible content. The self is being *formed* in what is told'.[45] Both the patient perspective and the illness narrative offer a frame for thinking about how Clare might disarrange the categories through which other nineteenth-century poets have been considered as key figures within the Medical Humanities.

From being given the title of 'Northamptonshire Peasant Poet' to becoming a crucial figure within the labouring-class canon, Clare is cast frequently in the dual role of 'labourer' and 'poet'.[46]

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[42] Roy Porter, 'The Patient's View: Doing Medical History from Below', *Theory and Society* 14.2 (1985), pp. 175-198 (p. 176).
[43] E. P. Thompson, 'History from Below', *Times Literary Supplement* (1966), in *The Essential E.P Thompson*, ed. Dorothy Thompson (New York: The New Press, 2001), pp. 481-489; Porter, 'The Patient's View', p. 176.
[44] Arthur W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 55
[45] Frank, *Wounded Storyteller*, p. 55.
[46] 'Northamptonshire Peasant' appears on the title page of *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1820).

Whilst the extent to which this offers him a pliable social identity rather than merely restricting the circles of his influence has not gone unheeded, labouring-class poets trouble attempts to uncover their concrete medical contexts.[47] In recent years, the field of Medical Humanities has proven fertile ground for studies of Romanticism and Romantic medicine as sites of exchange and interplay between literature and the medical sciences. With its roots in the Scottish Enlightenment and experimental theories of medical figures such as William Cullen, John and William Hunter, and William Cheselden, as well as the sociopolitical theories of David Hume and Adam Smith, Romantic medicine constitutes a period of intense theoretical and social development.[48] The professionalisation of medicine was ushered in by key moments of reform, such as the Apothecaries Act in 1815 and the Anatomy Act of 1832, whilst public health became an ever more pressing issue and drove the formation of the Provincial Medical and Surgical Association in 1832, the Poor Law Amendment Act in 1834, and sowed the seeds for the Health of Towns Association in 1843 (chaired by Edwin Chadwick) and the 1858 Medical Act.

Alongside these broader movements were localised engagements between poets, novelists, and physicians and specific schools of medicine, as well as innovative medical and scientific theories. Romantic poets especially have been reconsidered for their engagement with various medical cultures and with the mutual influence between medicine and poetics. Keats is of course a crucial figure at the intersection of poetry and medicine, and Hermione de Almeida and Nicholas Roe, amongst others, have done much to reveal his surgical training and education as crucial to his poetic and political sensibilities.[49] Elsewhere Neil Vickers has written illuminatingly about the depth of Coleridge's medical reading, his interactions with contemporary medical cultures, and how they formed an imperative part of his intellectual development.[50] Sharon Ruston has argued

[47] See, for example, Richard Cronin, 'John Clare and the London Magazine', *New Essays*, pp. 209-228 (p. 212).
[48] See 'Medicine', *A Handbook of Romanticism Studies*, ed. Joel Faflak and Julia M. Wright (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 375-389 (p. 379).
[49] Hermione de Almeida, *Romantic Medicine and John Keats* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Nicholas Roe, *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).
[50] Neil Vickers, *Coleridge and the Doctors 1795-1806* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

for the importance of vitalism and its surrounding debates for Shelley, suggesting it provided him with a 'vocabulary […] to express social, political and poetic questions and ideals'.[51] Ruston's scholarship has also been key to establishing more generally how 'science and medicine should be recognised as playing a part in what we now, anachronistically, call "Romanticism"'.[52] Alan Richardson has drawn attention to the pervasive influence of the mental sciences and physiological psychology upon Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats, whilst James Allard has stressed the vital role that corporeality and the medicalised body play in the poetic sympathies of Wordsworth, Keats, Joanna Baillie, John Thelwall, and Thomas Beddoes.[53] Noel Jackson, too, has furthered debates about how imperative physiology and the science of mind are to Romantic poets' investment in aesthetic experience as embodied, revealing 'the social and political ends to which such scientific knowledge was considered crucial'.[54]

Clare as a case study amongst this wealth of scholarship is not a figure who seems to demand immediate attention. He received no formal medical education or training, nor is there any evidence that he expressed a wish for any. There is no evidence that he attended any public lectures on anatomy or other popular medical sciences. He also made no attempts to write his own contributions to medical fields or theories, and his writings make few explicit references to contemporary medical or pseudoscientific figures. When compared with other contemporary figures on whom nineteenth-century scholarship within the Medical Humanities has focused, he does not sit easily within the classification of Romantic 'poet-physician', an identity unpacked by Allard as both descriptive of a poet who studied and practiced medicine as well as composed literary works, and as uniting reciprocal 'commitments to both fields into one identity without

[51] Sharon Ruston, *Shelley and Vitality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 103.
[52] Ruston, *Creating Romanticism: Case Studies in the Literature, Science and Medicine of the 1790s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 2.
[53] Alan Richardson, *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); James Allard, *Romanticism, Medicine, and the Poet's Body* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).
[54] Noel Jackson, *Science and Sensation in Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 1.

claiming explicit preference for one or the other'.[55] Clare, as a labouring-class poet, was seemingly on the margins of both contemporary medical development and a growing literary tradition of the poet as a self-confessed 'healer' who united the literary and scientific arts in his thought and work. Porter's call for attention to the lay experience of medicine highlights some of the problems encountered in trying to build up a picture of Clare's medical backdrop.

One way to consider Clare's position amongst Romantic and nineteenth-century medical contexts is first to trace some of the dominant and influential conceptions of health in the period. His personal library contains few volumes of overtly medical or scientific texts. However, the presence of one treatise in particular is telling of the social culture of health that grew during Clare's contemporary moment. J. Burns' *The Popular Guide to Health* (1835) is by no means a seminal or sophisticated text; periodical reviews did not recommend it favourably to a mass readership. *The Spectator* viewed it merely as a collection of 'old authors' that 'though now and then smacking strongly of the occult art, can do little harm, and is quaint, curious, and amusing. The other parts too much resemble quackery to find favour in our eyes'.[56] *The Athenaeum* was more scathing, accusing Burns of peddling his own medications and encouraging 'a too confident tampering with the health, a habit of taking, and (what is worse) making other people take drugs, without due consideration and knowledge'.[57] The fact that the only medical treatise recorded in Clare's personal collection was dismissed as, at best, a cobbled-together edition of older texts and theories with elements of the 'occult' and, at worst, dishonest and irresponsible quackery, does not necessarily mean that he only had access to unreliable information. Rather, it is more telling of the increasingly market-driven nature of medicine in the nineteenth century and the subsequent values ascribed to different classes of care. Rather than a singular category, the term 'quack' was, as Porter argues, a 'multipurpose idiom of abuse' that was sometimes deserved, but also thrown

[55] Allard, *Romanticism*, p. 10.
[56] *The Spectator*, 348 (1835), p. 212.
[57] *The Athenaeum*, 387 (1835), p. 241.

about occasionally in the competitive circles of 'orthodox' medical practice.[58] The label carried an emotional and moral charge that immediately passed judgement, whether valid or not, on a person's medical qualifications and mode of practice. The reviews that label Burns as a quack are as much taking advantage of the term's cultural currency as they are claiming any real evidence of quackery.

Yet whilst *The Popular Guide to Health* may not have been the most reputable manual, it evidences some common understandings from the period about what health is and how it is maintained:

> Health is that state of the human body, whether its growth be completed or not, in which the structure of the parts is sound, and their functions properly performed; rendering the individual fit for all the duties and enjoyments of life. When a person has received a sound constitution from nature, its health is to be preserved by the proper regulation of the various circumstances, internal and external, on which animal life is dependent. These are principally food and drink, the excretions and discharges, air and exercise, sleep and walking, and the management of the passions of the mind.[59]

Here, Burns' definition of health brings together a systemic and environmental approach. Health is a biological state of proper 'function', whereby each organ does its part to sustain the body as a working whole, at the same time as it is dependent upon the 'duties' of a person to follow the 'proper regulation' of their external circumstances and factors. He therefore brings together strands of influence that were circulating throughout the nineteenth century and inherited from earlier eighteenth-century texts. Whilst what has been classed specifically as 'Romantic' medicine was shaped primarily by discourses of sensibility stemming from experimental theories of the nerves and nervous system, there was also an enduring classical inheritance of Hippocratic and

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[58] Roy Porter, *Health For Sale: Quackery in England 1660-1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), p. 2.
[59] J. Burns, *The Popular Guide to Health; Or, a Rational Treatise on the Causes, Symptoms, and Mode of Cure for the Principle Diseases of the Human Body; With Simple Directions for Health and Longevity* (Glasgow: Peter Sinclair et al, 1835), p. 7.

Galenic ideas. Hippocrates' *On Airs, Waters, Places* emphasised health as the result of an optimally regulated environment, as well as taking environmental factors into account as the causes of illness and disease.[60] Galen's medical philosophy of the humours and health as a state of humoural balance within the body and mind emphasised the harmonious interaction of what he termed 'non-naturals': the unavoidable influences of air, diet, sleeping and waking, motion and rest, evacuation and retention, and the mental passions.[61] Both the Hippocratic and Galenic medical philosophies influenced and were borne out by an increased focus on health as the product of dutiful regimen – the focus that drives Burns' treatise and many others like it.

As medicine grew towards being a more professionalised and regulated practice in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there also emerged the sense that it was a social as well as a theoretical or experimental discipline.[62] This, as George Grinnell argues, placed a growing emphasis on the individual as a consumer of the medical care offered by new hierarchies of physicians, surgeons, and apothecaries, and also as a self-reflexive participant in his own state of health.[63] Pamphlets and treatises formed a crucial nexus of preventative medicine, offering advice published in English and written in lay terms that was not so much aimed at educating the reader about the intricacies of their physiological and mental make-up as it was geared towards a didactic healthcare regime.[64] William Buchan's *Domestic Medicine* (1769), George Cheyne's *An Essay on Health and Long Life* (1725) and *An Essay on Regimen* (1740), John Wesley's *Primitive Physick* (1747), John Theobald's *Every Man His Own Physician* (1764) and Nicholas Culpeper's earlier *English Physician (*1652) were all popular texts that sought to de-mystify health and to make it

[60] Hippocrates, 'Airs Waters Places', *Hippocrates*, ed. W. H. S. Jones, 8 vols. (London: William Heinemann, 1923-1995), I, pp. 65-138.
[61] Galen, *Selected Works*, trans. Peter N. Singer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. xx.
[62] See *British Medicine in an Age of Reform*, ed. Roger French and Andrew Wear (London: Routledge, 1991).
[63] George C. Grinnell, *The Age of Hypochondria: Interpreting Romantic Health and Illness* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
[64] For a sustained discussion of the role of health manuals in the period, see Ginnie Smith, 'Prescribing the Rules of Health: Self-Help and Advice in the Late Eighteenth Century', in *Patients and Practitioners: Lay Perceptions of Medicine in Pre-Industrial Society*, ed. Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 249-282.

obtainable via clear rules and regulations. Health became synonymous with self-discipline, order and, ultimately, longevity.

This focus on individual responsibility and health as a self-reflexive task was not restricted to medical manuals and treatises. John Armstrong's *The Art of Preserving Health* (1744) harnessed the appetite for didactic healthcare in a four-book poem that instils in the reader a sense of contemporary medical advice but also, as Adam Budd argues, 'opens up a new view of literary experience as a therapeutic force'.[65] There is good reason to assume that Clare would have encountered Armstrong's poem, not least because Armstrong was a close associate of James Thomson, whose work *The Seasons* (1730) was an early influence for Clare. The far-reaching conception of health as a product of regimen also made its way into another, earlier text in the poet's personal library. In his journal, he praises Francis Bacon's *Essays* (1597): 'what beautiful Essays these are I take them up like Shakespear and read them over and over and still find plenty to entertain me and new thoughts that strike me'.[66] This suggestion that reading and re-reading can itself become a form of habit takes on a new significance in light of the fact that one of Bacon's essays is on the subject 'Of Regimen of Health'.[67] The essay is also distinctly Galenic and Hippocratic in influence, advising temperance and balance in the 'passions of the mind and studies' as well as an inclination towards the 'benign extreme' as regards to diet and exercise: 'use a spare and full diet, but oftener the latter […] watching and full sleep, but rather full sleep […] sitting and exercise, but rather exercise; for so shall nature be both cherished and strengthened at once'.[68] However, most significant is Bacon's espousal of 'man's own observation' as 'a wisdom to be found beyond the rules of physic […] what he finds good, and what is hurtful, is the best

[65] Adam Budd, *John Armstrong's The Art of Preserving Health: Eighteenth-Century Sensibility in Practice* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 3.
[66] *By Himself*, p. 190.
[67] Clare's edition of Bacon's *Essays* is *Essays Moral, Economical, and Political* (London: F. C and J. Rivington, 1819).
[68] Bacon, *Essays*, p. 154.

physic to preserve health'.[69] The construction here of a regimented model of health, but one founded ultimately on individual exploration and experience rather than strict adherence to the rules of dietics, makes room to consider Clare's position amongst the medical culture of self-attention and self-care.

The turn towards person-led preventative medicine, aided by pamphlets and treatises available to a growing audience, was, as Grinnell argues, still a predominately middle-class arena. His exploration of the emergent hypochondriac individual, suffering under the new onus placed upon him to take the measure of his own health, investigates how:

> hypochondria primarily afflicted the bourgeoisie […] to speak of a nervous nation in the Romantic period is to acknowledge the dominance of the middle classes and their efforts to shape the nation in their own image as a collective body composed of relatively leisured citizens whose wealth made possible an age of medical consumerism.[70]

Following this argument, a self-reflexive relationship with one's own state of health was both the burden and the privilege of the middling and ruling classes, who had access to the kinds of texts and medical attention that might foster a practice of introspective assessment. Clare complicates this middle-class model of the hypochondriac medical consumer, I suggest, through his own mode of intense self-awareness and concern for his health – fostered whilst belonging to a labouring-class community that offered its own medicinal practices beyond the realms of middle-class medical culture. His appreciation and avid re-reading of Bacon's essays may have instilled in him an apprehension of 'man's own observation' as the way towards knowing health, where the experiential subject is the authority over what does or does not feel healthy. As Ginnie Smith argues, it would be incorrect to 'assume that the great interest in the preservation of life found amongst the earliest printed medical works, was restricted to one class'.[71] For Smith, the rise of

[69] Bacon, *Essays*, p. 151.
[70] Grinnell, *Age of Hypochondria*, p. 8.
[71] Smith, 'Prescribing the Rules of Health', p. 253.

informal education in the late eighteenth century meant that 'the level of lay medical erudition derived from private tutoring and self-education could be remarkably high', making it likely that 'by 1770 few sections of the population would have been untouched by some notion of regimen'.[72] Turning to the periodicals that Clare published in and by which he was surrounded also uncovers sources of medical instruction that, in the vein of preventative regimen, emphasised the importance of the individual as the guardian of his own health.

The *London Magazine*, for example, published a series of four 'Medical Articles' in 1820, intended 'to impart in a simple and, if possible, attractive way, important information on the chief points connected with the management of our health'.[73] Presented as a supplement to the professional advice of physicians rather than as a substitute for it, the articles covered what were perceived to be the four maxims of preventative medicine that the lay-person required for their own self-care: 'Temperature, Air, Food, and Exercise of Body and Mind'.[74] The first of these articles was published in the same issue that launched Clare onto the literary scene, with Octavius Gilchrist's article 'Some Account of John Clare, an Agricultural Labourer and Poet' (1820).[75] The reception of his first volume is framed, therefore, by the magazine's intention to instill in its readers a sense of individual responsibility for their own health. Another article in the *London,* entitled 'Sure Methods of Improving Health and Prolonging Life' (1827) also emphasised the role of the individual as his own authority over prescriptive models of health:

> The really valuable precepts connected with diet and regimen, and on which health actually depends, are few and simple – the details are peculiar to individuals, and every man must learn them from himself […] if these elaborate analyses and descriptions be examined […]

[72] Smith, 'Prescribing the Rules of Health', pp. 254-55.
[73] 'Medical Article No. I', *London Magazine* 1.1 (1820), pp. 95-96 (p. 96).
[74] 'Medical Article No. 2', *London Magazine* 1.2 (1820), pp. 179-80 (p. 180).
[75] Octavius Gilchrist, 'Some Account of John Clare, an Agricultural Labourer and Poet', *London Magazine*, 1.1 (1820), pp. 7-11.

> they will all be found to end in yielding to the taste of the reader – every result is an appeal to the individual's experience.[76]

If Clare was exposed to the dictates of regimen, then he was also opened up to the importance of the self and of subjective experience over medical strictures. In a letter to James Hessey in 1824, he writes: 'my desire is to get well […] if I coud get my head right I shoud do for if I coud read or write or even remember what I have done or *know & feel as my self* I shoud do' (my emphasis).[77] Here he places his own sense of feeling 'as my self' at the centre of his experience of health, so that getting 'well' is as much about cultivating a heightened self-awareness as it is about relieving symptoms or tracing the source of illness – even when this self-awareness carries the potential for hypochondriasis. It is health understood as a method of self-fashioning, or as a feeling around the limits of the self, that drives both this introductory chapter and the different forms of health that occupy Clare's attention in this thesis.

'**Labour's Leisure': Labouring-Class Health and the Work of Poetry**

In January 1820, Clare was thrust into the literary scene with the publication of *Poems Descriptive*. Less than a week after it was published, he fell ill. He wrote to Octavius Gilchrist complaining of his symptoms:

> I intended to send you a Copy of my Poems but am very poorly & cannot get over to Stamford for one […] I am very near being laid up what with the anxiety of the fate of the Book & a bad winter cough it has nearly confined me to my bed tho it is not a little that will do it[78]

[76] 'Sure Methods of Improving Health and Prolonging Life', *London Magazine* 9.34 (1824), pp. 228-38 (p. 228).
[77] Letter to James Augustus Hessey, 19 May 1824, *Letters*, p. 298.
[78] Letter to Octavius Gilchrist, 21 January 1820, *Letters*, pp. 26-29.

The combination of 'anxiety' over the reception of his poems with a physical ailment is an early example of how bodily and mental health and the pressures of publishing and writing would become entangled for Clare. As archival research shows, Gilchrist's reply posed a question that offers a starting point from which to examine the interrelatedness of poetry and health. Eager to see his new poet on the rise, he asked:

> But how comes this illness, just at the time that you ought to be in the best health and spirits? Shake it off, I pray you […] and let us see you to talk about the book poem by poem, and line by line. It is well enough for prosing folks like myself to be clogged with gout and shaken with catarrhs, but what have your finer wits to do with such coarse companions?[79]

Already, what appears as a casual reference to health belies its perplexing nature. Being in the 'best health and spirits' gestures towards more than a sound physical state. It also suggests a mood or emotion that Clare should be aspiring towards which apparently transcends troublesome bodily matters. Arguing for the 'finer wits' of the poet at once suggests that this figure should possess superior corporeal faculties ('wits' being defined as the five bodily 'senses' here) at the same time as implying that poetic composition is reserved purely for the mental 'wits' of intellect and reason.[80] This kind of poet might be occupied with more rarefied concerns than physical symptoms, which here appear frustratingly quotidian. Allard's attention to the intersection of Romantic medicine, poetry, and the body has done much to emphasise the important influence of corporeality on poetry as a 'materialized activity, as the work of embodied poets that has clear bodily effects'.[81] Yet Gilchrist's reply presents some assumptions about the ideal physical state of the poet at the same time as implying that they have no business with commonplace bodily sensations, especially those produced by illness. He sets up health, which may or may not be

[79] MS Eg. 2245, f. 29.
[80] *OED*, 'wit', *n*. senses 1 and 3.
[81] Allard, *Romanticism*, p. 4.

conceived of as bodily, as the conditions under which poetry is to be both produced and received. But why should the publication of a poetic volume be conducive to 'the best health and spirits'? Why is 'prosing' supposedly more susceptible to the 'coarse companions' of illness than the 'finer wits' of poetry? And why should Clare in particular be held up as a marker of these wits and the good health they presuppose?

It is worth taking a step back to ask who Gilchrist is addressing here: Clare the poet, or Clare the labourer? Prior to *Poems Descriptive* being released to the public, Gilchrist advertised Clare in the *London Magazine* as 'an Agricultural Labourer and Poet'.[82] The article presents a narrative that critics of labouring-class poetry now consider typical: a rare genius possessed of innate poetic ability in spite of his unfavourable circumstances, to which he is bound by 'destiny' rather than by socioeconomic inequity, and from which his poetry is discovered and rescued from obscurity by discerning patrons and publishers.[83] Kirstie Blair argues that such prefaces abound within this tradition, a point also emphasised by John Goodridge, Simon Kövesi, David Fairer and Bridget Keegan in their multi-volume edition of nineteenth-century English labouring-class poets.[84] Clare is not special, then, for being presented as conquering unlikely odds. Nevertheless, amidst the details of the trials he has been forced to overcome are suggestions of physical weakness and a predisposition to unhealthiness. His own abilities are framed by the fate of his father, who 'while health and strength were in his possession, was a daily labourer, but decrepitude has now reduced him to the parish for subsistence'.[85] Gilchrist portends the same fate for Clare, claiming he possesses a 'frame of no sturdy structure' and endures a 'precarious and narrow subsistence'.[86] Yet whilst Gilchrist may have emphasised the poet's constitutional frailty

[82] Octavius Gilchrist, 'Some Account of John Clare, an Agricultural Labourer and Poet', *London Magazine* i (January 1820), pp. 7-11.
[83] Gilchrist, 'Some Account', p. 8.
[84] Kirstie Blair, 'Introduction', *Class and the Canon: Constructing Labouring-Class Poetry and Poetics, 1780-1900*, ed. by Kirstie Blair and Mina Gorji (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 1-15 (p. 1); John Goodridge, Simon Kövesi, David Fairer and Bridget Keegan, ed., *Nineteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets, 1800-1900*, 3 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2006).
[85] Gilchrist, 'Some Account', p. 8.
[86] Gilchrist, 'Some Account', p.8.

as an appeal to the sympathy of his new readership, Clare figured his own beginnings in sickliness and was keenly aware of himself as overcoming physical shortcomings: 'in my early years I was of a waukly constitution, so much so that my mother often told me she never coud have dreamd I shoud live to make a man'.[87] He often treads a line between the acknowledgement of real physical hardship and symptoms on one hand, and of the sympathetic appeal of hereditary poverty and illness on the other, willing on occasion to play up his role as 'the Son of the *Lame Man* at helpstone' in negotiations with his patrons.[88] The threat and experience of sickness, whether current or preordained, offers Clare differing but entangled opportunities. One is to explore what it means to be a poet, and what poetry's function is amidst circumstances where health might be fleeting or challenged frequently. Another is to explore how sickness, vulnerability, constitutional weakness, and health become freighted with notions of performance and agency, and to attend to these not just as physical and mental states, but as terms that open up different possible identities in the literary marketplace.

To compare the physically vulnerable Clare to the healthy ideal to which Gilchrist's letter alludes is perhaps to separate the bodily toll of labour and an unhealthy predisposition from the practice of poetry. However, in the introduction to *Poems Descriptive*, John Taylor provides his own preface in which the threat of poor health is not poetry's antithesis, but instead integral to its commercial success. Pitching Clare as a more sincere communicator of what 'the poor man suffers' than his contemporaries, Taylor claims that he:

> has here an unhappy advantage over other poets. The most miserable of them were not always wretched. Penury and disease were not constantly at their heels, nor was pauperism their only prospect. But he has no other, for the lot which has befallen his father, may, with too much reason, be looked forward to as the portion of his own old age.[89]

[87] *By Himself*, p. 23.
[88] Letter to Isaiah Knowles Holland, December 1819, *Letters*, p. 19.
[89] John Taylor, 'Introduction', *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1820), pp. viii-xxviii (p. ix).

Again, the fate of his father, listed as suffering from 'violent colds', exposure, and rheumatism which combine to make him a 'helpless cripple', foreshadows Clare's and places him in a difficult bind.[90] Vulnerability to disease and ill health pose real, material dangers but are at the same time sympathetic themes that his publishers know appeal to an audience in whom the culture of sensibility has created a heightened alertness to the plight of the poor. Another review praised the arrival of a poet who:

> can teach us to feel for his poverty, and for the privations of that large class of society to which he belongs […] to rejoice in the pleasures and enjoyments, scanty as they may be, that fall to their lot […] to value their labours, and to extend our charities beyond the cold and calculating limits of parish dues.[91]

The question of what the 'coarse companions' of illness have 'to do' with Clare is therefore not so straightforward, being unavoidable in one sense and necessary for literary success in another. The prospect of illness has everything to do with a poet who is also a labourer. The task, then, is to consider the ways in which health and poetry consistently meet and diverge for Clare, by addressing the implications of his labouring-class status in relation to the forms of health to which he is drawn and figures poetically.

In *Observations on the Prevailing Practice of Supplying Medical Assistance to the Poor* (1819), Henry Lilley Smith surveys the shortcomings of parochial relief systems in England and, in doing so, touches upon the same sentiment to be found in the supposed attraction of Clare's 'peasant poet' identity:

> At no period is their situation so interesting to humanity as when disease has attacked, and is consuming that strength and activity on which they and their families depend for

[90] Taylor, 'Introduction', p. vi.
[91] 'Unsigned review, "Clare's Poems"', *The New Monthly Magazine and Universal Register* 13.74 (March 1820), pp. 326-330 (p. 327).

> support, and which they have been accustomed to enjoy in a greater degree than those who are not dependent on bodily labour for their maintenance.[92]

Whilst claiming that the poor are more 'interesting' to wider society when they are in a state of disease, Lilley acknowledges here that the dependence of the labouring-classes upon 'bodily labour' for their health is not simply a perk that they 'enjoy', but a potential threat to wellbeing deserving of medical attention. The association of labour with a vital form of health is brought into tension with the suggestion that labour can also be physically and mentally harmful. He refers to the attractive tragedy of the diseased poor in order to call for welfare reforms, in aid of both the poor who depend on local government for relief, and for the medical professionals who have unmanageable populations of labouring-class patients to attend to. Disease is not simply an interesting novelty in the medical context of poor relief, but a real threat to the communal wellbeing of a class for whom labour itself and physical exertion are perceived to be the primary form of preventative medicine.

Clare was alert to the conflicting perceptions of labour as both beneficial and detrimental to health within his rural community. Poetry often provides him with a space to consider this conflict, but also to construct an alternative way of living apart from it. In an early poem, 'The Wish' (1808-19), he constructs his ideal home and the kind of life that would be lived in it. He does away with nearly all manual exertion apart from 'trifling in the garden', in exchange for 'hours I'd spend in letterd ease / To read or study just as that might please' (*EP*, I, ll. 208-213, p. 49). This imagined state of 'letterd ease' is loaded with expectations of class mobility that are bound up with a healthier way of life. To be 'letterd' is to be able to pursue writing and composition to the exclusion of all else, but also perhaps to have the letters after one's name that ensure the privilege of a life free from physical exertion. In expressing a desire to be 'lettered',

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[92] Henry Lilley Smith, *Observations on the Prevailing Practice of Supplying Medical Assistance to the Poor* (London: 1819), p. 7.

'The Wish' attests to Clare's awareness, early on in his poetic career, that imaginative composition or study might offer an alternative freedom from manual work. Moreover, such freedom allows for a realisation of health:

> Tho health from exercise is said to spring
> Foolhardy toil that health will never bring.
> But 'stead of health – dire ills a numerous train
> Will shed their torments with afflictive pain.
> Be as it will I hold in spite of strife
> That health ne'er rises from a labouring life;
> Therefore the busines that such labour gave
> When I could do without I'd never have:
> (*EP*, I, ll. 197-204, pp. 48-49)

Here, poetry takes on a crucial role amongst the exertions of labouring-class existence for Clare. Simon Kövesi argues that the imaginative project of 'The Wish' is 'explicit that its ambition is not aesthetic, but pragmatic: to secure his existence against the blunt realities of a labouring life'.[93] For Kövesi, the material conditions of Clare's status cannot be ignored: 'Even at his most prophetic moments, even when thrown or disturbed, Clare exhibits a practicality, born of sheer material need'.[94]

But how might poetry register, or even become, this practicality? In the lines above, it seems that the contest between the aesthetic and the practical registers most strongly in the reiteration of 'health' that runs through them. It is the formal element of repetition that permits Clare to emphasise the absence of health at the same time as he wills it into being with each recurrence. He has both a creative impulse and an aesthetic to achieve in these lines. Wordsworth's 'Note to The Thorn' (1800) remarks that repetition in poetry, far from falling into 'tautology', is an instinct that strives to fulfil the 'craving in the mind' to 'communicate

[93] Simon Kövesi, 'John Clare's Deaths: Poverty, Education and Poetry', *New Essays,* pp. 146-166 (p. 152).
[94] Kövesi, 'John Clare's Deaths', p. 147.

impassioned feelings': 'Among the chief of these reasons is the interest which the mind attaches to words, not only as symbols of the passion, but as *things*, active and efficient, which are of themselves part of the passion'.[95] By repeating 'health' four times across eight lines, Clare steers the reader towards the word itself as a keynote that resounds through the poem as well as towards the poet's impulse to incarnate the mental and physical state it signifies. It is through the attempt both to communicate the scarcity of health amongst the labouring poor, and to express the wish for its abundance, that form bears out this impulse. Indeed, the placing of health in the 'The Wish' treads an uneasy line between expectation and reality. Lines 197, 198, 199 and 202 all lead with 'health', with it falling on either the first or second stress or, as in line 198, falling on the central third stress. What this creates is a series of almost tautological false starts, whereby the promise of or will towards health is never fully realised. 'The Wish' was not selected for publication in *Poems Descriptive*, but it offers here a platform from which to explore the integral and complex role that health plays across Clare's poetics, and how it might bring together the aesthetic, imaginative, and pragmatic aims of his work.

What is most striking about the recurrence of health in 'The Wish' is how Clare seeks deliberately to overturn misconceptions about rural labour and the form of life it ensures. In *The Country and The City* (1973), Raymond Williams draws on Clare and other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poets in his revisionary attempt to scrutinise the 'structure of feeling' and 'images and associations' through which the rural and the urban are perceived.[96] One persistent image of the country that Williams attempts to dismantle is that of pastoral ease and the vital physical and mental health of labouring communities. In his discussion of Crabbe and *The Village* (1783), he observes a challenge towards what has become a 'pastoral assumption':

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[95] Wordsworth, 'Note to The Thorn' (1800), *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, ed. by James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 350-52 (p. 351).
[96] Raymond Williams, *The Country and The City* (St Albans: Paladin, 1975; 1973), p. 10.

> health is the 'fair child' of labour; it 'languishes' with wealth. This is more than an observation of the simple dependence of health on exercise; it is a slanted association of health with labour and then of sickness with wealth, that in any real world is naïve.[97]

The 'naïve' division between health and wealth here is a crucial construct to consider in Clare's representations of the conditions of labour. He was dismissive of Crabbe's attempts to represent more truthfully the plight of the labouring poor: 'whats he know of the distresses of the poor musing over a snug coal fire in his parsonage box […] my worst wish shoud be a weeks confinment in some vicarage to hear an old parson & his wife lecture on the wants and wickedness of the poor & consult a remedy'.[98] What Williams identifies in Crabbe, however, can easily be applied to Clare: a critique of the acceptance of rural labour as an inherently healthy pursuit that adheres to the idealism of the pastoral mode.

Clare's initially warm reception and popularity in the early 1820s may have been invigorated partly by the threat of disease and hardship, as Gilchrist and Taylor advertised. Yet the same readership would also have had a desire to participate in a rural ideal of robust health against the sickness and contamination of the city. In a later review of *Rural Sketches* by the poet Thomas Miller, labouring-class life is presented as a rural idyll and reading poems produced in this setting is offered as a kind of health-giving escapism. For those who are 'compelled to breathe the hot air of the office, warehouse, or parliament', the 'only alternative' offered by the reviewer is 'to seat themselves in a quiet corner […] with such a volume as Mr Miller's', because his poems were 'marked by a very striking improvement of style; and what is still more important, by a fresh and healthy spirit'.[99] Not only is the text itself conceived as a curative space for the reader, but labouring-class poetics as a whole are described in physicalised terms as an urgent remedy for the supposed current state of national literature. The health-giving appeal of labouring-class writing is

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[97] Williams, *Country*, p. 116.
[98] Letter to John Taylor, 7th January 1821, *Letters*, pp. 137-38.
[99] Unsigned Review, 'Art. IV. Rural Sketches', *Eclectic Review* 6 (Jul 1839), pp. 69-82 (p. 70).

also conceived as crossing class boundaries, transgressing the divisions between the 'office', 'warehouse', and 'parliament'. Miller is added to the list of 'Bloomfield, Clare, Burns, Hogg, Allan Ramsay, Allan Cunningham, and Ebenezer Elliott' who are looked to for 'the renovation of our literature; for the infusion of new and more healthful blood into the literary system'.[100]

There is a significant commodification of the rural at play here and Clare, the sickly, vulnerable, disease-fleeing peasant, is offered conversely as a panacea to be consumed by the literate middling classes. Notably, the fashion for rural vitality in the literary marketplace runs concurrently alongside the more self-aware curation of illness, specifically consumption, as a marker of heightened poetic sensibility amongst figures such as Shelley and Byron. The supposed glamour and mythology of the 'Romantic disease' (as Clark Lawlor has it) available to poets moving in social circles to which Clare is marginal, further reveals the complex interplay between class, mass culture, literature, and medicine.[101] Caught between differing models of poetic identity – one of physical weakness and sickness, one of 'healthy freshness' and robust strength – the poet has to negotiate these two identities and the social and cultural values they ascribe to healthiness.

Pastoral Health and the Poetics of Labour

The need to cater to a readership invested in a rural healthy ideal is one potential reason for the pastoral mode in which Clare can often be seen to evoke health and experiences of wellbeing. Williams, in both his cultural theory and his edition of Clare's *Selected Poetry and Prose* (1986), is alive to the poet as complicating perceived notions of rural experience: 'Clare marks the end of pastoral poetry, in the very shock of its collision with actual country experience'.[102] How might his engagement with health register the shock of this collision? The vision of health as a state

[100] 'Rural Sketches', p. 72.
[101] Clark Lawlor, *Consumption and Literature: The Making of the Romantic Disease* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).
[102] Williams, *Country*, p. 174.

achieved and maintained through hard labour recurs throughout his work. In 'The Woodman' (1819), for example, we are assured:

> Good luck it is his providential wealth
> That hardy labour & the freshing air
> Should 'crease his strength & keep entire his health
> & neer let illness on his soul despair
>
> (*EP*, II, ll. 100-103, p. 291)

In 'Love of the Fields' (1832), too, labour is figured as a physical task that, if not experienced immediately as beneficial, instead 'grows pleasure by stealth' (*MP*, IV, l. 34 p. 111). Likewise, in an early ballad, the more communal form rouses a cry of 'Gi me the life of the Villager man / His whol' stock o treasure his health / His life & his labour shall fill up my span' (1819-20, *EP*, II, ll. 1-3, p. 402). Yet alongside these healthful conceptions of labour are also images of bodily distress and a reliance on the land that is more pathological and subject to disruption. 'The Mole Catcher' (1826) represents its subject as having an almost infantile dependency on the surroundings of his route: 'He leans on natures offerings for supply / Like a sick child upon a mothers breast' (*MP*, II, ll. 64-65, p. 24). This is no model of pastoral harmony with a cultivated, providential landscape, but a sick need for nature to provide any form of healthy sustenance. The mole catcher's fate is also overshadowed by one of Clare's scattered references to the workhouse, the threat of which creates a bind where the former sickly routine becomes preferable to the prospect of poor relief: 'When labour fails, the workhouse fare is near / And thus on miserys edge he potters round the year' (ll. 72-72, p. 24). 'The Widow or Cress Gatherer' (1820-21), too, evidences Clare's acute awareness of the kinds of bodily ailments within his community, even on a small scale: 'A hard earnd sixpence when her mops are spun / By many a whalk & aching finger won' (*EP*, II, ll. 109-10, p. 657).

Such focus on specific bodily sites of pain, or on the unsettling physicality of agricultural work, can be seen in other studies of labouring figures. In the case of the hedger, the work he does seems to put his body at odds with the seasonal experience of the rest of the community. Exposed to the elements, he is still 'burning hot when passers by / Knock their numbed hands agen their sides for cold' (*MP*, III, ll. 1-2, p. 76). Although toil is represented as a 'leisure', it still exposes the hedger to seasonal disorientation and displacement: 'How cold the day – the heat of his employ / Makes winter summer & the white thorn bough / Is all that makes it winter time with him' (ll. 5-7). This kind of desensitised state is also experienced by the 'toltering shepherd', who 'though infirm & old / Faces the cutting wind & feels no cold' (*MP*, V, ll, 13-14, p. 296). Clare's heavy, physicalised descriptions of labouring tasks both uphold the sense of these figures as images of robust strength at the same time as they register the bodily effort of toil. What this initial look into the representations of labour in Clare's work reveals is that, as much as he might play into or uphold the pastoral vision of health begot by manual work, he does not lose sight of the material impacts labour has on the body. He registers, through shifts in tone and perspective, a disparity between the efforts of attaining the 'healthy exercise' of agricultural work and its representation as a leisurely rural trope.

Clare's sonnet 'Mowers Dinner Hour' (1832) in particular registers this disparity between work and leisure, capturing a moment of rest amidst the routine of physical toil:

> Upon the shady sward in meadow nook
> Where spreads a tree to keep the waters cool
> As sweet as pictures in a pleasant book
> The mowers sit at dinner by the pool
> Healthy & stubborn as their hard employ
> Oercanopied in boughs & pleasant shade
> Theirs is the envied seat of real joy
> & luxury never sweeter dinner made
> Than they of humbler means on the rich grass
> With home brewed ale held up to merry lass
> Who laughing comes to turn the bleaching hay

> Ah did they know how happily they pass
> Their time in toil they'd never wish for wealth
> But keep their low estate & so ensure their health
> (*MP*, IV, ll. 1-14, p. 316)

This is a harmonious scene of contentment that springs from limited means of sustenance. Clare seems to offer here the advice that living off the land in a restricted way is a lifestyle most conducive to health and wellbeing. He participates in the ideal of the rural economy, whereby luxury and riches are transfigured from their associations with monetary wealth into the healthier value of 'humbler means' and a more affective experience of plenty. On first glance, the mowers are the image of pastoral health, able to experience a state of wellbeing and union with their surroundings that is a direct result of their social position and labour. However, the exact orchestration of this scene is telling of the position Clare might take in relation to such a trope.

Everything is placed in this sonnet. From the 'nook' that so neatly draws the boundaries for the scene in the first line, to the manner in which the tree 'spreads' out conveniently in real time to provide a temperate setting, to the optimal shade provided by their being 'Oercanopied in boughs', and the timely entrance of the laughing lass, nearly each line ushers in a new prop with which to arrange experience. Clare makes us alert to the potential for artifice in his description of the scene as 'sweet as pictures in a pleasant book' (l. 3). Indeed, his familiarity with the painterly arrangement of landscape in the Picturesque tradition has been well covered by critics such as John Barrell, Timothy Brownlow, and Fiona Stafford.[103] Yet beyond demonstrating an acute awareness and subtle critique of artificial perspectives, his deliberate hint towards the sense of contrivance and frame helps steer attention towards how health is being conceived. Amongst the deliberate placings, the mowers are figured as 'Healthy & stubborn as their hard employ' (l. 5). What might seem like a straightforward adoption of health as a pastoral union with the land and

[103] John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730-1840: an Approach to the Poetry of John Clare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); Timothy Brownlow, *John Clare and Picturesque Landscape* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983); Fiona Stafford, 'John Clare's Colours', *New Essays*, pp. 17-37.

the labour that goes into shaping it is complicated by the word 'stubborn'. The connotations of fixity and immovability convey a sense of physical hardiness, but also the suggestion that the mowers are stuck in their 'hard employ' with no means of getting out. The gently organising perspectives that govern this moment of repose are interrupted by a vocabulary that offers a reminder of physical hardship and, furthermore, reveals health as a frame that might fix the labouring classes in an unrealistic ideal. This is not to suggest that Clare is fully unaccepting of health as a state that is integral to the mowers' lives; his suspicion of 'wealth' held real weight, being perceived as an obstruction to the real value of mental and physical wellbeing. In a letter to Taylor, for example, he pondered how 'all pleasure to a man in sickness is as gold in a famine of no value & utterly useless […] I have found it so & felt it & health is the only current coin for happiness'.[104] However, what 'Mowers Dinner Hour' reveals is that the seemingly straightforward presence of health within scenes of rural contentment contains the possibility for more unsettling critiques. The viewpoint of the speaker, who observes the mowers from a distance, results in what might be a deliberate diversion from material reality: Clare is the one privy to the health of the mowers, not the mowers themselves who are perceived as unaware of the benefits of 'their time spent in toil'.

One reading of 'Mowers Dinner Hour', then, is that it disrupts a straightforward acceptance of pastoral ease. Guided by Williams' cultural materialism, we can attend to the hints of reality and rural hardship that peek through Clare's representation of a healthy rural idyll. Yet is there not also a subtler engagement with wish fulfilment, and poetry's role within it, at work in these lines? The poetic gaze offers Clare an opportunity, if not to cleanse toil of all traces of hardship, then to utilise the viewpoint of the outsider to salvage a health that might be going unnoticed by those who are too close to their labour to see it. The act of wishing for a better, healthier situation becomes the pastoral condition. As Steven Barfield argues, 'there is no reason why the pastoral

[104] Letter to John Taylor, January 1832, *Letters*, p. 562.

must necessarily exist only in "prettied-up" form, or indeed why it should not combine idealised and realist elements simultaneously'.[105] Williams' suggestion that Clare 'marks the end of pastoral poesy' might therefore be inaccurate. What Clare does instead is reimagine the pastoral, not as a site where health is an unrealistic construct imposed upon labouring life, but as a site where there is abundant potential for health if you find the right way of realising it. Bringing poetry and labour into relationship with each other is one way towards such a realisation for Clare.

'Labours Leisure' (1819-32), unlike his studies of agricultural workers, is a lyric meditation on Clare's individual experience of toil:

> Oh for the feelings & the careless health
> That found me toiling in the fields - the joy
> I felt at eve with not a wish for wealth
> When labour done & in the hedge put by
> My delving spade - I homeward used to hie
> With thoughts of books I often read by stealth
> Beneath the black thorn clumps at dinners hour
> It urged my weary feet with eager speed
> To hasten home where winter fires did shower
> Scant light now felt as beautiful indeed
> Where bending oer my knees I used to read
> With earnest heed all books that had the power
> To give me joy in most delicious ways
> And rest my spirits after weary days
>
> (*MP*, IV, ll, 1-14, p. 331)

The introduction of this first-person perspective on manual labour creates a dialogue between the two circumstances Clare has to navigate. The subject is, like the previous workers, exposed to the same repetitive and exhausting bodily tasks, but carries this experience over into the act of reading. The 'bending o'er' of his knees in order to read his books, here figured as a kind of

[105] Steven Barfield, '"A Full Moon Risen And The Sheep Gathered Round Him": Exploring Samuel Beckett's Uncanny Pastoral', *New Versions of Pastoral: Post-Romantic, Modern, and Contemporary Responses to the Tradition*, ed. David James and Philip Tew (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009), pp. 156-173 (p. 163).

remedy, mirrors the actions of labour in the opening lines. Whilst there are similarities between this individual account and the third-person observance of figures from around the agricultural community, then, there is also the crucial difference that here we are offered the subject at rest; labour is 'done', and the implication is that the 'careless health' that finds the subject might be a state induced by the freedom to pursue other, healthier kinds of 'work'. Just as in 'Love of the Fields', where 'labour grows pleasure by stealth', Clare uses the rhyme of 'health' and 'stealth' here to compare the imaginative freedom of reading with the bodily rewards of digging and other manual tasks. 'Labours Leisure' is guided by the same sonic constructions that are threaded through other depictions of the labouring poor ('health', 'stealth', and 'wealth' are recurrent rhymes in these contexts), but they serve to highlight both his connection to and separation from the community he seeks to portray. Goodridge argues that 'Clare's all-important sense of community is invariably edged with an unblinking awareness of its limits […] we need to read both his complex sense of community and his alert sense of isolation, his sociability and his solitariness'.[106] By adopting the rhetoric of pastoral 'careless health' into a scenario where he has also found an accompanying, and perhaps more effective, source of wellbeing in reading, Clare reveals a key tension to be found between his representations of the material health conditions of his community and the place of poetry, and the poet, within that community. Health is revealed as a crucial context that might simultaneously bridge and exacerbate the disparities between the poet and the labouring collective.

'Labours Leisure' also reveals the act of reading as a route to health that evokes the same physical experience of hard labour. It suggests that a sense of imaginative freedom is as integral to a sensation of health as bodily exercise, and might even be necessary as a remedy for the detrimental effects of toil. This notion of the curative role of the imagination anticipates a mode whereby health could be understood as a relationship with the land that is released from labour

[106] John Goodridge, *John Clare and Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 190-93.

into an alternative state of 'careless' ease and freedom. Such a state is explored at length by Willard Speigelman as a form of indolence that frequently occupied Romantic poets. Spiegelman's study traces the development of indolence in both medical and social discourses in the period, his main argument being that it evolved from a replacement for 'the older sin of sloth' to become 'paradoxically a symptom of the disease of modern life at the same time that leisure, recreation, and rural retreat were viewed as having curative powers to assuage the emotional, psychological, and physical strains of that life'.[107] Crucially, then, Spiegelman's point is that indolence gradually came to be associated less with unhealthy inactivity and more with the healthy pursuit of leisure made necessary by the strains of increasing industrialism and the pressures of urban life in the early to mid-nineteenth century. It was, therefore, a state attributed predominately to the middling classes. In *The Villager's Friend and Physician* (1804), a health pamphlet directed specifically at rural labouring communities, James Parkinson advises that, whilst the 'exercise' of manual toil is beneficial for both the body and mind, labourers still need to regulate their work with periods of rest:

> No! To you whose habits are those of industry, some few cautions against the excessive and irregular indulgence of those habits, will be more beneficial […] The All-wise Disposer of all things has decreed the due exercise of our powers to be an inexhaustible source of pleasure; so that man returns to his daily toil, with cheerful alacrity. But excessive exertions take away all zest for work, and no wonder; for if even too much pleasure will cloy, how much more must too much hard work […] Think not, however, I mean to lull you into indolence; far from it.[108]

Parkinson's insistence on the balance between work and rest amongst labouring communities gives rise to an interesting reversal of what would usually be thought of as excessive or harmful behaviour. Here, work can become an indulgent habit, and it is pleasure that is prescribed as a

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[107] Willard Spiegelman, *Majestic Indolence: English Romantic Poetry and the Work of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 15.
[108] James Parkinson, *The Villager's Friend and Physician, or, A Familiar Address on the Preservation of Health and the Removal of Disease, on its First Appearance* (London: C. Whittingham, 1804), pp. 8-9.

regulating alternative, whereas in other dietic manuals it is frequently the 'exercise' of labour that is prescribed when pleasure has been sought too often. Nevertheless, whilst an equilibrium must be sought between work and pleasure even for the habitual labourer, Parkinson is explicit that 'indolence' should be avoided. Such a purposeless, careless state has no place in a rural healthcare regime.

As a labourer, then, Clare may have been excluded from the pursuit of indolent pastimes and the luxury of aimless tasks. As a poet, however, he had recourse to an alternative realm of activity that offered respite from the demands of manual work. Just as there are numerous scenes of agricultural occupation across his poems, so are there frequent moments of repose that are all the more appreciated for coming after a hard day's work:

> Tho thro the week he labour does endure
> & weary limbs has often heard complain
> This welcome morning always brings a cure
> It teems wi joys his soul to entertain
> & doubly sweet does seem the pleasure after pain
>
> ('Sunday' (1819-20), *EP*, I, ll. 14-18, p. 360)

These lines recall the continuum of 'health to pain' discussed earlier. It seems that, in a similar manner, the hardship of labour is valuable to Clare because of the relief that succeeds it. Labour and leisure have their own rhythms that ensure the reliable return of a 'cure' at the end of each working week. Clare does not seek to eradicate the more painful or unhealthy aspects of toil, because without them, pleasure and relief would not enjoy its 'doubly sweet' recurrence. A similar relationship is evoked in 'The Summer Shower' (1819-32) , where a 'strengthening power' is found 'Like that which toil hath found / In sundays leisure hour / When spirits all relaxed heartsick of toil' (*MP*, III, ll. 90-93, p. 430). The time away from labour is where healthful feelings are to be found, and the last line of 'Sunday' itself luxuriates in the freedom from work as it extends into twelve syllables instead of ten. It is as though poetic timing were manipulated here

to demonstrate a freedom from everyday regimen and temporal organisation, and as though composition provides a means through which to reflect on and linger in the pleasures of free time.

Yet whilst this moment of poetic rest is dictated by the division of weekday and weekend time, there are other instances where Clare carves out moments of respite more spontaneously. There is the 'Husbandman' in 'Pleasures of Spring' (1828-29) who 'cheerful mid the lengthening days turmoils / Mingles full many a ballad with his toils' (*MP*, III, ll. 67-68, p. 52); the shepherd boy who, enraptured by the industry of busy insects, lies 'Musing the whole day along / And clears to let them pass / And sings a nameless song' ('The Shepherd Boy' (1842-64), *LP*, I, ll. 16-18, p. 599); and the 'cow boy' who 'Would lie & sleep till time to ramble home / The ballad from his pocket lost forlorn' ('The Cow Boy's Hut' (1832-37), *MP*, V, ll. 10-11, p. 275). In all of these instances, poetry or a form of creative play ushers in a break from work at the same time as it is interwoven with it. Clare is not a poet who is prone to matching the rhythms or actions of labour directly onto poetic rhythms – he does not seem interested in tracing a continuity between work and poetry that is purely mimetic. Instead, he is more captivated by the kind of work that occupies Gaston Bachelard in *Poetic Imagination and Reverie* (1971): a mental work that is constantly employed in the interplay between imagination and reality, and that poetry permits.[109]

Take, for instance, these lines from the sonnet 'Meadow Butterflyes' (1832):

> Brown butterflyes in happy quiet rest
> Upon the blooming ragworts golden breast
> Giving unto the mind a sweet employ
> That everything in nature meets with joy
> Ah sweet indeed for trifles such as these
> Full often give my aching bosom ease
> When I in little walks my mind employ
> Aright - & feel those happy reveries
> That nature in her varied lessons tend
> To bring our thinkings to a happy end

[109] Gaston Bachelard, *On Poetic Imagination and Reverie*, trans. Colette Gaudin (Texas: Spring Publications, 1971), p. 80.

(*MP*, IV, ll. 1-10, p. 320)

At first glance, this sonnet seems to have nothing to do with labour. The first line's quick assertion that this is a scene of 'rest' alludes to busy activity that may have come before, but even that is the activity of the butterflies and not human toil. It is not until the third line that Clare introduces a term evocative of physical work, even though here he means it to signify a mental occupation. 'Employ' occurs twice in this sonnet, implicating the mind and the body on both occasions. What Clare seeks to indulge in is a form of employment, the only task of which is to lead the mind into restorative 'reveries'. The word 'tend' also carries connotations of labour and graft, as well as a more leisurely sense of caring attention to one's mind. The poet constructs an experience of reverie – of being lost in one's thoughts or partaking in joyful, imaginative flights of fancy – around terms that are also grounded in a sense of manual activity and work. Indeed, this is in keeping with Bachelard's sense of reverie, not as detached from reality, but as a way to move more deeply into it, making labour and reverie interrelated:

> Take away dreams and you stultify the worker. Leave out the oneiric forces of work and you diminish, you annihilate the artisan. Each labour has its oneirism, each material worked on contributes its inner reveries. Respect for deep psychological forces must lead us to keep the oneirism of work safe from any harm […] The oneirism of work is the very condition of the worker's mental integrity.[110]

For Bachelard, it is not just that reverie in itself can be thought of as a kind of work, but that work and labour also necessitate an element of reverie and imagination. 'It is thus', he argues, 'that reverie demonstrates repose of the being, that reverie illustrates a sense of wellbeing'.[111] Instead of either the insistence in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century health manuals that exercise of the body and labouring work is healthier than sustained mental occupation, or the suggestion that

[110] Bachelard, *Poetic Imagination*, p. 80.
[111] Bachelard, *Poetic Imagination*, pp. 70-71.

leisurely indolence is the best cure for the over-worked mind and body, reverie offers a way for labour and leisure to coexist and inform one another. Bachelard therefore offers a supplement to Clare's sense of work and reverie, labour and poetic imagination, as inherently connected and, furthermore, as a means to carve out his own moments of health and wellbeing as a labouring-class poet.

The vocabulary that Clare forges for bringing labour and poetic imagination together in 'Meadow Butterflyes' occurs again in 'The Thresher' (1832-7), this time repurposed in a context of agricultural work:

> With hand in waistcoat thrust the thresher goes
> Early at morn to follow his employ
> He nothing wants to know & nothing knows
> & wearys life along with little joy
> He lives without the world among the poor
> & nothing sees but stock agen the door
> […]
> Hard labour is the all his life enjoyed
> His idlest leisure is to be employed
>
> (*MP*, V, ll. 1-14, pp. 276-77)

What seems like an observation of hardship and unhealthy existence also becomes full of the potential for wellbeing with the return of 'employ'. Clare does not try to erase the material conditions of the thresher's work, but instead reveals the covert opportunity for imaginative 'employ' and a restorative, idle leisure to be found in such a task, as affirmed by the final couplet. In a study of Clare's life and work, Geoffrey Grigson compares the poet's capacity not only to represent the plight of the labouring poor, but also to cope with it, to Crabbe's poems of rural life. He argues that:

> Crabbe's attitude is one of having always been in chains and making by a moral effort, by a masterful effort, the best of their chafing and drag; Clare's is one of celebrating freedom

> in the chains put upon him by life. One is the attitude of grim realism, lit by sparkles of pure apprehension, sparkles of a scarcely attained delight, the other the attitude of lyricism.[112]

For Clare, his labouring-class poetics of health does not merely seek to represent the poor health and working conditions of his community. It also entails a reparative imaginative practice, the 'attitude of lyricism' identified by Grigson, that relies on poetics to generate new ways to encounter health beyond the dictates of medical culture.

The three chapters that follow this introduction trace how Clare forges such encounters with health and how he shapes them through poetic form. My treatment of his poems is not chronological, but thematic, centred around what I argue to be the three predominant 'forms' that health takes across Clare's works: voice, breath, and place. Chapter one considers how eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theories of insanity figured health as evidenced by an individual's speech, and explores how Clare's own representations of the mad and of poetic utterance reassess the distinctions between healthy and unhealthy vocalisations. It opens up the sub-vocal as a category through which to attend to poetic sound, and interrogates the implications that this register of self-talk has for the metrical possibilities of poems and for re-hearing madness in relation to health. Chapter two investigates the influence of climatic medicine on Clare's thinking by focussing on the breath as a material force guided by the poem that dramatises notions of atmospheric transmission and contagion. Through a consideration of the influence of Keats on Clare's poetic formations of breath in relation to health, it interrogates a nineteenth-century critical division between these two poets based on Keats's urban illness and Clare's rural hardiness to suggest that the former provides the latter with a model of poetics that is both embodied and vital. Chapter three seeks to reconsider the prevalence of notions of place and locality in assessments of Clare's mental and physical health, exploring phrenology and botany as two modes of

[112] Geoffrey Grigson, *Poems and Poets* (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 77.

‘topographical medicine’ that seek to map the body and mind onto places in the natural world. By looking more closely at Clare’s poetic placings of health through attention to his line endings and transitive and intransitive verbs, the chapter uproots previous critical narratives that stage an intense attachment to places in the natural world as pathological for Clare.

Chapter One

'Health greets me for I hear her voice': Madness, Muttering, and the Sub-Vocal

In *Poetry and Pragmatism* (1992), Richard Poirier suggests that 'the great human repertoire of muttering and murmuring gives irreducible tonal evidences of someone there who, in however tattered a shape, remains free floating of any fixed point'.[1] Poirier is led to discuss such 'muttering and murmuring' by consideration of what he terms the reinstatement of 'the vague', a vocal register adopted by American writers within the pragmatist tradition such as Emerson, James, Frost, Stein, and Stevens, in order to negotiate the authority of social discourses and the trappings of 'words having to do with speaking, with trying in public to sound authentically like yourself'.[2] Although explicated within the bounds of one specific American literary tradition, Poirier's consideration of the relationship between poetry, voice, sound, and the fate of individual identity amongst public ideals, feeds into a wider debate about how language and speech become inflected with certain values. This chapter explores those values as health (conceived as sanity) and insanity. It considers how Clare's voice, both personal and poetic, can be heard in relation to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theories of and attitudes towards madness, debates that, I argue, often based their assessments of the mental health of individuals upon assumptions about how speech should and should not sound. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century insanity treatises, as well as elocutionary manuals and accounts of visits with Clare before and after he was institutionalised, are read alongside contemporary theories of voice and listening in order to attend to how Clare's

[1] Richard Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* (London: Faber, 1992), p. 154.
[2] Poirier, *Poetry*, p. 129.

conceptions of poetic utterance and metrical and sonic arrangements might challenge the divisions set up between healthy and unhealthy sound.

Poirer's recognition of a 'tattered' self that can be evidenced through a mode of speaking that is ostensibly incoherent echoes John Taylor's account of 'A Visit to John Clare' in the *London Magazine* in 1821. The article was intended to strike up interest in Clare's forthcoming second volume *The Village Minstrel* (1821), and saw Taylor launch a defence of the poet's 'provincial' language:[3]

> […] the philosophic mind will strive to read his thoughts, rather than catch at the manner of their utterance; and will delight to trace the native nobleness, strength, and beauty of his conceptions, under the tattered garb of what may, perhaps, be deemed uncouth and scanty expressions […] In poetry especially, you may estimate the originality of the thoughts by that of the language; but this is a canon to which our approved critics will not subscribe: they allow no phrase which has not received the sanction of authority.[4]

The relationship between 'thoughts', 'language', and 'utterance' that Taylor sets up here suggests that Clare, through his dedication to representing his local dialect and lexicon, might be inviting assumptions about the calibre of his mental faculties. Clothing thoughts in the 'tattered garb' of provincialisms offers a visual image of what is really a judgement of sound, whereby the words on the page strive too much towards the speech of those Clare wishes to voice, and so alienate readers who are not used to hearing them. However, in his suggestion that 'poetry especially' should be a medium through which language is the expression of 'originality' of thought, Taylor's defence of Clare becomes a defence of the kinds of utterance, and therefore the kinds of thoughts, that poetry might permit. Whilst he is

[3] John Taylor, 'A Visit to John Clare', *London Magazine* 4.23 (Nov 1821), pp. 540-548 (p. 542).
[4] Taylor, 'A Visit', pp. 542-44.

predominately making a claim for the poetic validity of the Northamptonshire dialect, Taylor's remarks also call into question other forms of 'tattered' language that eschew the 'sanctions of authority' that Clare's poetry might sound out.

Some of the most 'tattered' figures for Clare are his representations of the mad. In 'Crazy Jane' (1808-19) and 'To Health' (1808-19) (a poem to which I return from the introduction to this thesis to look more closely at its sonic construction of health), madness and health are both represented as voices that sound out from the natural world. However, the poems frame two different listening experiences. The voice figured in 'Crazy Jane' eludes recognition, confusing the poem's speaker, and yet, through its incoherent quality, demanding acute attention in order for the listener to 'discern' from whom and whence it comes. In 'To Health', the subject is greeted by a clear 'strong voice' that is comprehended instantly. These two models of listening – one that searchingly tries to interpret sound, the other instantly assured of what it hears – are emphasised by Clare's formal organisation of sound. In 'Crazy Jane' there is no narrative of why or how she went 'crazy', nor any descriptions of mad behaviour, but instead a moment of intense listening:

Hark what shrill mournful strains
Sounds from yon lonely plains
Where the low-bending willow
Drips through the mimic billow
Rais'd by the adverse winds that curl the stream
How mournfully and plain
Their dying languor on the breezes seem
Say from what throat
Or is this note?
The song of Crazy Jane! –

Ye swains from whence and where?
Comes this sad grief so drear?
It must be, - (O' so grieveing)
Some loss thats past reprieving

Or hope forlorn that never will return
- They'r dumb; - Enquirey's vain
Then lead me on ye sounds and let's descern
And further know
If all this woe
Come's from poor Crazy Jane.

(*EP*, I, ll. 1-20, p.184)

The 'Crazy Jane' of this poem exists not as a fully realised character, but as a sonic presence, emitting sounds and 'notes' that resonate from the natural world. Consequently, the sound of madness is represented as eluding comprehension and yet also as a noise that can be 'discerned' through attentive listening.

Indeed, Clare makes certain demands of his reader in this poem. He represents an encounter with unintelligible sound through verses that are ostensibly lucid. The speaker's narration of their encounter with incomprehensible sound is itself conveyed through words on the page that do carry meaning, and the object of the poem, Jane's 'mournful strains', are kept out of earshot. In order to 'hear' the disorientation that the poem's listener experiences, the reader has to attend to both the visual and the acoustic arrangement of the printed word. For example, as if straining to hear the 'Jane' that lies outside the bounds of the poem, its lines lengthen and shorten, reaching out and feeling their way towards the source of the sounds they register. The rhymes also possess this searching quality: 'strains' and 'plains' create a recurring vowel sound that repeats across the stanzas, most significantly through the name 'Jane' that sets the tone for this persistent echo. Jane's vocal presence is reiterated, but also interrupted by other rhymes, new 'notes' that make the listener question that which he thinks he hears.

The meandering rhyme scheme is further amplified by wandering rhythms: the iambic trimeter of the first two lines becomes complicated by the extra syllables and feminine rhyme

in the third and fourth lines with 'willow' and 'billow', making it difficult to know where the stress falls. The restless nature of the rhythm increases as line 5 stretches out into an uneasy iambic pentameter, beginning with a trochaic stress on 'Rais'd'. Line 6 suddenly shortens to trimeter, trimming down again to dimeter in lines 8 and 9, until returning to trimeter in line 10. The following stanza also follows this disorientating rhythmic pattern. If Clare represents madness as a voice here, it is an obscure, unstable one, speaking in sporadic rhythms and extra 'notes'. Indeed, the remark 'They'r dumb;- Enquirey's vain' suggests that the vocal sounds of madness are so inscrutable they block the listener from comprehension and make enquiry into their meaning pointless. Clare's use of the word 'dumb' seems to take on the same sense that Coleridge conceives in one of his 1818 lectures: 'even "mute" and "dumb" do not convey the absence of sound, but the absence of articulated sounds'.[5] For Coleridge, poetry 'can only act through the intervention of articulate speech'.[6] 'Crazy Jane' might then propose a different kind of 'intervention' that reimagines the sounds that can constitute a poem's action whilst at the same time considering the judgements such sounds receive. A 'dumb' madness confuses the reception of sound at an epistemological level, making the 'absence of sound' not a true absence, but a reorganisation of what we think we hear around the quality of articulacy.

In 'To Health', the voice that Clare's listener hears is mapped onto a tighter, neater organisation of sound:

> Thy voice I hear, thy form I see
> In silence, Echo, stream or cloud
> Now that strong voice belongs to thee
> Which woods and hills repeat so loud
> (*EP*, II, ll. 29-32, p. 30)

[5] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lectures 1808-1819, On Literature*, ed. R. A Foakes, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), II, p. 218.
[6] Coleridge, *Lectures*, II, p. 217.

Here, the confident recognition of the 'strong voice' of health is expressed through lines that maintain a regular iambic tetrameter, as well as a secure alternating rhyme scheme. Whilst the sounds presumed to be made by 'Crazy Jane' linger around the edges of the listener's perception, the sound of health is figured as 'loud', clear, and easy to understand. It is a sonic presence so stable and easily recognised that it is even personified and addressed as 'Thy'. Yet whilst the voice of health and the voice of madness are represented differently in the sonic constructions of these poems, they sound out from the same original place. In Margaret Grainger, Eric Robinson and David Powell's Oxford edition of *EP*, these poems are separated across two volumes with 'To Health' appearing in volume II because it was published later in *The Village Minstrel*. However, the editors' explanatory notes state that they belong originally in the same manuscript (Nor. MS I) and were composed around the same time.[7] When they are read alongside one another as they exist in their paginal manuscript order, the poems reveal a continuity or conversation between Clare's representation of the sounds of madness and health.[8] Both voices speak out to the listener from the natural world, inflected with the sounds of the wind, streams, and other natural phenomena. In this way, both health and madness confuse expectations of which sounds can be classed as voice, and, especially, which are appropriate models of poetic utterance. Susan Wolfson draws attention to the work of sound in Romantic poetry, arguing for the period's consciousness of it as a phenomenon that 'figures the forming of poetry itself'.[9] This chapter is concerned not only with how Clare is invested in sounding the materials of his craft, but also with how the poem as a structure of sound becomes a potential tool for listening more closely to health and madness, as well as

[7] *EP*, I, p. 783.
[8] Nor. MS I, pp. 118-120.
[9] Susan Wolfson, 'Romantic Measures: Stressing the Sound of Sound', in *Meter Matters: Verse Cultures of the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Jason David Hall (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011), pp. 53-77 (p. 58).

for considering how the healthy or unhealthy mind sounds when it speaks in relation to preconceived patterns or judgements.

A preliminary look, or listen, into some of the other 'mad' figures that Clare attends to offers a sense of the kinds of sounds that might signify an unhealthy mind. 'Crazy Jane' already provides a vocabulary of indiscriminate sound that nevertheless communicates unsettling or painful feelings: 'shrill mournful strains', 'dying langour', and 'sad grief' are all gleaned from the soundscape surrounding the listener in that poem. But beyond these interpretations of what feelings the 'crazy' voice might be straining to convey are some definitions of what that voice is – which is to say, not a voice, but instead a 'note' or a 'dumb' inarticulate sound. These conceptions bring the mad voice down a register from the vocal to what this chapter will address as the subvocal. 'Subvocal', in use from the early 1840s, is defined as 'of a sound, word, or speech: uttered so as to be barely audible; formed in one's mind without being uttered or spoken aloud'.[10] Whilst engaging with this definition, this chapter also conceives of the subvocal as a blurring of the distinctions between 'sound, word, or speech', in order to consider how the voice *as* a sound becomes the mode through which madness both expresses itself and is pinned down as a deviation from the coherent 'voice' of health.

Voice as a category of subjectivity has been scrutinised and interrogated persistently. David Nowell Smith is mindful of the problems that arise in trying to conceive of 'voice' as a generalised term. There is not only the problem of how to locate and 'read' the voice in the written word, but also, as Nowell Smith argues, the demand to engage with voice as a metonymic placeholder serving various critical polemics including gender, performance and

[10] *OED*, 'subvocal', adj.

authorship.[11] In these enquiries, 'voice' comes to stand for selfhood and for agency; it becomes the lens for revealing who gets to speak and who does not, so that having a voice cannot be taken for granted as universal. Representing the voices of those who are 'crazy' or 'mad' in subvocal terms can be considered dangerously reductive in this respect, then, for it suggests a taking away or silencing of selfhood. Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* (1964) is certainly alert to how madness became 'silenced' towards the end of the eighteenth century by a language of order and reason that leaves no room for expression outside of its parameters, but instead 'affords the evidence of a broken dialogue […] and thrusts into oblivion all those stammered, imperfect words without fixed syntax, in which the exchange between reason and madness was made'.[12] However, rather than simply enforcing a 'broken dialogue', the idea of the subvocal also provides a mode through which to listen back to Clare's sonic constructions of both madness and health that is illuminated by contemporary theories of voice and the ethics of listening.

Nowell Smith argues that voice 'as a category worked through by poetics will facilitate our listening to individual poems, but it is only as individual poems demand specific listenings, and voicings, that poetics can start to attend to voice in the first place'.[13] The 'specific listenings' and 'voicings' that Clare's mad figures offer sound out a range of utterances through which we can attend not only to voice, but also to how the poem can lead us back to the idea of voice as sound or utterance. Poems such as 'The Crazy Maid' (1819-20), 'Crazy Nell' (1819), and 'The Fate of Genius' (1821) offer further examples of subvocal expression that invite closer attention. The 'Crazy Maid' is heard to 'mumble' and 'mutter' (*EP*, II, l. 84; l. 90, p. 456); 'Crazy Nell' 'mutterd' and 'rambles' (*EP*, I, l. 110; l. 117, pp.

[11] David Nowell Smith, *On Voice in Poetry: The Work of Animation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 4.
[12] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Routledge, 2001), p. xii.
[13] Nowell Smith, *On Voice*, p. 7.

468-69); the 'genius', dubbed 'the crazy man', is heard 'muttering about', and is also 'dumb' and renowned for answering questions with incomprehensible 'wrong replys' (*EP*, II, l. 56; l. 42; l. 50; l. 52, pp. 667-68). These muttering, mumbling, rambling, dumb, and misdirected 'notes' of speech invite a consideration of sub-vocal 'self-talk' – a mode of self-address that presumes no audience, but that attracts assumptions about the subject's mental health because of its supposed lack of regard for communicative contracts.

'Into the nothingness of scorn and noise': Self-Talk and Overhearing Madness

'I Am' (1846) is perhaps the most well-known poem in Clare's oeuvre as an expression of his madness. Its tone of resignation, loneliness, and longing for a return to an 'Untroubling, and untroubled' childhood innocence free from confinement (*LP*, I, l. 17, p. 396) make it an oft cited example of his asylum period work and the supposed mental collapse it signifies. Yet as Jonathan Bate and Roy Porter, amongst others, have stressed, there are many potential traps for those trying to draw a causal relationship between poetry and madness.[14] One such trap is making the form of the poem symptomatic of the state of the mind. During his time at High Beach asylum, where he stayed before his subsequent committal to Northampton General asylum (where 'I Am' was composed), Dr Matthew Allen reported that Clare 'has never been able to obtain in conversation, nor even in writing prose, the appearance of sanity for two minutes or two lines together, and yet there is no indication whatever of insanity in any of his poetry'.[15] The distinction Allen makes here conceives of two different modes of voicing and makes suggestions about the expectations placed upon them in relation to form.

[14] Jonathan Bate, *John Clare*, pp. 408-18; Roy Porter, ''All madness for writing': John Clare and the asylum', in *In Context*, pp. 259-78.
[15] Allen, *The Times*, 23 June (1840); see also Jonathan Bate, *John Clare: A Biography* (London: Picador, 2003), pp. 429-430.

In his *Essays on the Classification of the Insane* (1837), Allen considers insanity as a mental state that is malleable, whereby the success of moral management rests upon its ability to have produced 'a counter-impression, given another character and form to the disease and, in some cases, on this principle, effected a cure'.[16] He also argues elsewhere in *Essays*, in relation to a patient, that 'the causes which produced his disease, and the form his insanity assumed, perfectly corresponded with each other'.[17]

These observations of insanity and the mind as an impressionable form, the cure for which can be a re-shaping rather than eradication, are suggestive of why Allen might be led to read Clare's conversation and prose as insane, but his poetry as sane. Poetry could be seen to offer a re-forming of insane expression into a different, healthier kind of sound. Prose, here aligned with spoken 'conversation', is made to adhere to a certain kind of 'appearance' or narrativity of sanity that poetry either manages to escape, or offers an alternative to when prose fails. But what is the sound of sanity that only poetry can express? Allen's straightforward suggestion of cause and effect between insanity and its 'form' is challenged by the 'years addicted to poetical prosing' that Dr Fenwick Skrimshire and William Page, a Peterborough surgeon, listed as a contributing factor to Clare's mental deterioration on his committal papers for Northampton General Asylum.[18] According to Allen's observations, Clare's 'poetical prosing' would be a form both sane and insane, or at least accountable to the expectations of how both forms should sound. Indeed, closer examination of the committal papers for Northampton asylum reveals that, instead of 'prosing', the entry actually reads 'poetical prossing'.[19] 'Pross' is an English dialect word, catalogued by Joseph Wright, and

[16] Matthew Allen, *Essays on the Classification of the Insane* (London: John Taylor, 1837), p. 18.
[17] Allen, *Essays*, pp. 10-11.
[18] See Bate, *John Clare*, p. 466.
[19] Thank you to Robert Heyes and John Goodridge for pointing me towards this source. The document in question is Pet. F4, 'Certificate of Application for the Admission of John Clare, No. 354, to Northampton General Lunatic Asylum, dated 28th December 1841', listed in Margaret Grainger, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the John Clare Collection in Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery, with Indexes to the Poems in Manuscript* (Peterborough: Peterborough Museum Society, 1973), p. 18.

means ‘to gossip, chat, talk familiarly’.[20] ‘Poetical prossing’, in light of this definition, becomes a form that incorporates talking as much as writing. Allen’s judgement of Clare’s insane ‘conversation’ might therefore not be as distinct from the poetry that he deems to bear no trace of ‘insanity’. The vocal connotation of ‘prossing’ presents an opportunity to examine the forms of ‘conversation’ that Clare might imagine as poetical, moving beyond a sense of familiar chat to encompass more unintelligible utterances. Bate argues that ‘though Allen was wrong about the insanity of the prose, he was right about the sanity of Clare’s verse at this time’, citing ‘clarity and beauty’ and ‘a surprising calmness’ as the markers of sane expression.[21] The level of formal control executed in ‘I Am’ may indeed define it as one of Clare’s saner poems with regards to these markers, but it also complicates the divisions cast between sanity and insanity because of the mode of speaking it dramatises.

It is the nature of lyric address to unsettle the direction and register of the speaking voice.[22] Stephanie’s Kuduk Weiner’s study of Clare’s relationship to lyric presents him as deeply concerned with how to construct a voice that complicates the division between personal utterance and the external world, ‘the sounds of poetic language and the sounds it seeks to portray’.[23] A crucial debate, contemporary to Clare, that sought to define the boundary across which these sounds travel was John Stuart Mill’s attempts to define what poetry ‘is’. His distinction between poetry and ‘eloquence’ in 1833 defined poetry as ‘feeling confessing itself to itself in moments of solitude’, which consequently prescribes a specific kind of listening experience where ‘eloquence is heard’, but ‘poetry is overheard’.[24] Whilst

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[20] *The English Dialect Dictionary, Being the Complete Vocabulary of all Dialect Words Still in Use, or Known to Have Been in Use During the Last Two Hundred Years*, ed. Joseph Wright, 6 vols. (London: H Frowde, 1898-1905), IV, p. 631.
[21] Bate, *John Clare*, p. 433.
[22] For a discussion of lyric address as indirect, see Jonathan Culler, ‘Lyric Address’, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), pp. 186-243.
[23] Stephanie Kuduk Weiner, *Clare’s Lyric: John Clare and Three Modern Poets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 24.
[24] John Stuart Mill, ‘What is Poetry’ (1833), in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. J. M. Robson, 33 vols. (1963-91; repr. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1996), II, p. 348.

Mill does not gesture overtly towards a sense of pathology underlying this kind of poetic self-talk, the 'overheard' poem echoes a tradition of the lyric as potentially mad. George MacLennan, for example, discusses lyric and madness historically as companionable forms due to the former's capacity for 'abolishing discursive linearity and simultaneously multiplying the semantic contexts which dispose of meaning potential'.[25] Although the poet who confesses his feelings only to himself is liberated from the social courting of 'sympathy' that eloquence must engage in, such liberation can also become a tipping point into explorations of the socially subversive or marginal.[26]

For Mill, the poem that is 'overheard' is a successful one because it offers a more immediate communication of 'the feeling in the exact shape in which it exists in the poet's mind'.[27] However, as Browning's 'Porphyria's Lover' (collected originally under the header 'Madhouse Cells' (1842)), or the confessions of some of Tennyson's speakers in his dramatic monologues would reveal, uttering aloud the 'exact shape' of mental feeling might expose an interiority that can be interpreted as insane. As Gregory Tate argues, Browning and Tennyson's explorations of their subjects' interior thoughts from the 1830s onwards are distinctly psychological: 'the Romantic focus on interiority is refigured as the psychological analysis of mental processes, a shift which parallels the rise and dissemination of analytical and rationalist concepts of the mind'.[28] Whilst Tate goes on to trace the complex relations between Romantic interior 'sensation' and Victorian psychological 'reflection' in the work of these two poets, this initial distinction also opens up the question of where Clare's poetics of madness fit in. Britta Martens proposes a more divisive reading of the Romantic lyric in relation to the dramatic monologue, arguing that the latter 'reverses the Romantic ideal of the

[25] George MacLennan, *Lucid Interval: Subjective Writing and Madness in History* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), p. 13.
[26] Mill, 'What is Poetry', p. 349.
[27] Mill, 'What is Poetry', p. 348.
[28] Gregory Tate, *The Poet's Mind: The Psychology of Victorian Poetry 1830-1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 25.

poet's private, lyrical self-expression' because it has 'communicative intention vis-à-vis a silent listener'.[29] Matthew Bevis also draws attention to how the dramatic monologue unravels the distinction between 'poetry' and 'eloquence' because 'Victorian poets were frequently concerned about how they might be heard as well as read'.[30] 'I Am' is certainly alive to communicative intentions in a way that challenges the separation of direct address and being 'overheard', lamenting private expression as the fate of the mad whilst at the same time expressing the wish for listeners.

'I Am' is not a dramatic monologue. Instead, it is a lyric that dramatises a moment of speaking which could be framed as being 'overheard', yet at the same time yearns for an audience and mourns consciously its absent listeners. Mill's definition of poetry turns it into a potentially inward, self-directed form, whereas the speaker in this poem suffers in the gap between private utterance and public recognition. The lyric permits Clare to enter into a dialogue with himself that anticipates being ignored:

1
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 vapours tost
2
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 lifes esteems;
Even the dearest, that I love the best
Are strange – nay, rather stranger than the rest

(*LP*, I, ll.1-12, p. 396).

[29] Britta Martens, *Browning, Victorian Poetics and the Romantic Legacy* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 9.
[30] Matthew Bevis, *The Art of Eloquence: Byron, Dickens, Tennyson, Joyce* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 146.

John Ashbery's comment, 'Very often people don't listen to you when you speak to them. It's only when you talk to yourself that they prick up their ears', is complicated by this poem.[31] For Clare's subject, the solitary 'self-consumer' of his own utterances, addressing oneself does not feel like it attracts the attention of curious listeners, but emphasises his sense of loneliness. Indeed, his claim that those closest to him are 'strange' and 'stranger' than the collective 'rest' could even suggest that his inward facing world plays with the markers of normativity. This is a poem composed in a supposed state of mental disturbance, and yet it is others who appear 'strange' because they are 'estranged' from and situated outside of his self-address. The responsibility for confusion is not placed directly onto the speaker in the poem, but on the listener too.

'I Am' also traces the loss of a sense of relationship between speaker and listener: Clare figures the dissolution of this relationship in sonic terms, whereby the subject speaks from a 'nothingness of scorn and noise' (l. 7). Such 'noise' challenges the division between madness and sanity. It figures the subject's confinement in both the asylum and in his own mental state as an unwilling retreat into nonsensical sound and the 'scorn' that such sound attracts, but hints at this 'noise' in a poem that, on the surface, is organised with the sane 'clarity' that Bate attributes to the asylum verse. Noise often signifies as an unwanted or troubling sound in Clare's work, frequently standing for a collective shunned by the subject. In 'Sighing for Retirement' (1840-41) he exclaims 'O take me from the busy crowd, / I cannot bear the noise!' (*LP*, I, ll. 1-2, p. 19); in 'Love and Solitude' (1832-37) he states 'I hate the very noise of troublous man' (*MP*, V, l. 1, p. 248); and in 'Footpaths' (1832), noise is made the opposite of a form of mental quiet that is peaceful and restorative: 'the mind /

[31] David Lehman, 'John Ashbery: The Pleasures of Poetry', *New York Times Magazine*, 16 December 1984, p. 64.

Yearns for a dwelling in so sweet a place / From troubles noise' (*MP*, IV, ll. 52-54, p. 319). Yet noise is also of the animal for Clare. 'The Nuthatch' (1836), for example, begins and ends with the 'noise' of 'some uncommon bird' who eludes identification (*MP*, V, l. 1; l. 3; l. 14, p. 383), whilst in 'Winter Evening' (1832) conversely it is the 'noise' of the 'jackdaws' that makes them knowable from the crows, even though both are 'intermixed' (*MP*, IV, l. 12, p. 344).

This sense of 'noise' as betraying a specificity rather than obscuring meaning is common to the way that Clare sounds the animal. Rooted in the sounds that emanate from the natural world, it loses its negative connotations and becomes instead a source of sonic intrigue that draws the listener in. The turkey's wing makes a particular 'huzzing noise' ('Turkeys' (1832-35), *MP*, V, l. 7, p. 368), in 'Autumn' (1821-22) there is the 'noise of geese that haste & hiss' (*EP*, II, l. 7, p. 589), whilst in 'The Quails Nest' (1835) noise brings about a moment of collapse between meaning and obscurity:

> I wandered out one rainy day
> & heard a bird with merry joys
> Cry wet my foot for half the way
> I stood & wondered at the noise
>
> (*MP*, V, ll. 1-4, p. 291)

The quail's song is translated here into a coherent speech-sound, speaking meaningfully within a context that the subject unfolds: 'wet my foot' might seem like a bizarre or unexpected turn of phrase, but the following stanza elaborates that 'When from my foot a bird did flee / The rain flew bouncing off her breast' (ll. 5-6). Clare's subject, although he experiences a sense of puzzled wonder, is able to imagine meaning in the 'noise' of the quail by listening to it within their shared context of the rain, and the physical meeting of bird and

foot.[32] This could be read as a moment of language production sympathetic with David Abram's insistence on 'language […] born of the interplay and contact between the human and the more-than-human world'.[33] Noise does not present a barrier to understanding, but rather opens up the possibility for the human to sound through the natural world.

The speaker in 'I Am' therefore suffers from a neglect that the above selection of birds do not: they are listened to on their own terms, or encourage their listener to hear meanings that might be nonsensical in a purely human sphere. Time is taken either to interpret their 'noise', or to allow it to exist as something not quite knowable. Such moments of listening abound throughout Clare's prose, too. In one of his natural history letters he deciphers the 'chur chur' and 'tooting noise' of the Nightingale as 'a food call and […] as a token of alarm' respectively, at the same time recording the landrake that makes 'a mysterious noise which comes in the spring […] I have followd it for hours and all to no purpose'.[34] He is also frequently attentive to moments where animals and the natural world are perceived to speak and make utterances akin to human speech. He studies their sound and structure closely in order to foster a communion with other living things that is at once meaningful and beyond the parameters of coherency.

Birds most often offer these moments of communication, but Clare moves beyond the trope of birdsong simply being a register akin to the poet's voice to apprehend more obscure vocalisations. When he listens to the magpie, for example, he observes that it is:

> easily tamed and learnd to talk […] it imitated many words readily and when it heard a sound or word that it coud not imitate readily it woud become silent and pensive and

[32] Clare also describes how the quail 'makes an odd noise in the grass as if it said "wet my foot wet my foot" which Weeders & Haymakers hearken to as a prophecy of rain & believe in it as an infallible sign', *Natural History Prose,* p. 50.
[33] David Abrams, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), p. 95.
[34] *Natural History Prose,* p. 78, p. 49.

> sit ruminating on an eldern tree and muttering as it were to itself some inaudible sounds till at length it got by heart the thing it was aiming at and then it was as lively and as full of chatter as ever[35]

The magpie's apparent language acquisition is represented in startlingly human terms, where 'talk' is not an anthropomorphic category imposed upon it but instead broadened out to include soundings below the level of speech. Beyond the ability merely to 'imitate' the sounds of speech, Clare endows the magpie with the capacity for a form of self-talk, a 'muttering' that is a means of processing thought prior to expression. This image of the magpie muttering to itself appears in a slightly altered form in 'The Progress of Ryhme' (1824-32) as a model not only of speech, but also of poetic composition. The subject compares himself to the linnet that 'mutters in its sleep at night', recalling how 'Thus did I dream oer joys & lie / Muttering dream-songs of poesy' (*MP*, III, ll. 120-124, p. 496). These human-animal mutterings bring a new dimension to Shelley's description of the poet in *A Defence of Poetry* (1821): 'A Poet is a nightingale who sits in darkness, and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why'.[36] Shelley's perception of the intrinsically baffling nature of poetic utterance and its effects on the listener are re-sounded by Clare, not as 'melody' but as 'muttering'. The magpie and the linnet are poets as much as the nightingale is, and Clare's formation of a shared subvocal register between the human and the non-human show him to be alert to the pressures of meaning placed upon human speech from which poetry offers a respite. The 'noise' that is the fate of the supposedly mad subject in 'I Am' could therefore be heard instead as an

[35] *Natural History Prose*, p. 128.
[36] P. B. Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry' (1821), *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977), pp. 478-510 (p. 486).

alternative form of utterance more in tune with the sounds Clare values as markers of true poetic expression.

Mutlu Konuk Blasing argues that the lyric holds a tension between the 'generic 'I' of language and an individuated 'I' sounded by the materials of language'; the lyric 'I' is crowded with voices as it speaks simultaneously for everyone and for itself.[37] Before writing 'I Am', Clare had struggled with this sense in which the word 'I' seems to speak for too many things that are not the individual self. In a letter to Eliza Emmerson in 1830, he observed that:

> that little personal pronoun 'I' is such a presumption ambitious swaggering little fellow that he thinks himself qualified for all company all places & all employments […] he is a sort of Deity over the rest of the alphabet being here there & everywhere (at one & the same time) he is a mighty vapour in grammer.[38]

It could certainly be argued that 'I' is 'here there & everywhere' in 'I Am', and yet it is distinctly the sense that 'all company' and places have been emptied out of this 'I' that turns it into a different kind of 'vapour'. The lines 'And yet I am, and live – like vapours tost / Into the nothingness of scorn and noise' do not permit this 'I' a ubiquitous presence that represents other people, but instead dissolve it into mere 'noise' that cannot signify anything, not even the individual. Clare offers 'noise' as a category here through which to examine how the sense of not being listened to properly, of only being able to talk to himself, reduces the subject's speech to unmeaning sound.

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[37] Mutlu Konuk Blasing, 'The Lyric Subject: Sounds, Sense, and the "I"', *Lyric Poetry: The Pain and the Pleasure of Words* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 27-31 (p. 27).
[38] Letter to Eliza Louisa Emmerson, March – April 1830, *Letters*, p. 504.

Steven Connor traces the values ascribed to 'noise' and 'voice', and the kind of selective hearing we might enact in relation to them:

> noise is anonymous, mechanical and meaningless; voice is personal, animate and expressive. Noise is accident, voice is intent. Noise has no importance, voice is full of portent. Though we can train ourselves to listen away from voices, or can under certain circumstances start to hear them as 'mere' noise, the effort this requires indicates the very strong disposition that we have to pick out voices from noise, and to identify foreground auditory phenomena as voice.[39]

Allen's case studies of the insane are punctuated with various noises, but could be seen to actively suppress the 'predisposition' of picking out voices that Connor identifies. His rationale for High Beach being made up of several buildings clustered on one site was that 'large and crowded houses are decidedly objectionable, from the greater chance of noise and disturbance, from their being less healthy'.[40] This more environmental concern with 'noise' as an aggregate, unhealthy disturbance feeds into a culture where any individual 'noise' is suspect and needs to be quieted. Allen records the 'strange loud singing noise', 'strange and disagreeable noise', and 'strange gurgling noise' made by various patients, each an instance of potential voicing yet dismissed as background noise that carries no sense or meaning.[41]

John Taylor's account of listening in on Clare's supposed madness interpreted the poet's personal conversation skills as such unmeaning noise. In a letter to his sister in December 1835, he expressed his concerns about Clare's deteriorating health. He recalled how:

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[39] Steven Connor, *Beyond Words: Sobs, Hums, Stutters and Other Vocalisations* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), p. 7.
[40] Allen, *Essays*, p. 2.
[41] Allen, *Essays*, pp. 126-172.

> He talked properly to me in Reply to all my Questions – knew all the people of whom I spoke, and smiled at my Reminding him of the Events of past Days – but his mind is sadly enfeebled. – He is constantly speaking to himself and when I listened I heard such words as these pronounced a great many times over, and with great Rapidity – 'God bless them all' – 'Keep them from Evil' – 'Doctors' – But who it was of whom he spoke I could not tell[42]

Taylor is suspicious of the form as well as the content of Clare's conversation. It is not just what he says that seems incoherent, but his delivery too, as the rapid repetition of his words adds greater alarm to his seemingly random utterances. Yet, for Taylor, the strongest signal of the poet's insanity is not the fact that he is 'constantly speaking', but that he is speaking 'to *himself*' (my italics). His conception of speech as 'proper' only when it is given 'in reply' uncovers the idea that the direction of speech plays an imperative role in distinguishing between madness and sanity. For Taylor, this distinction creates a division between talking to ourselves and talking to others, fixing madness to the former and sanity to the latter. Clare, however, had previously expressed his opinion about Taylor's own talking methods:

> he never asks a direct question or gives a direct reply but continualy saps your information by a secret passage coming at it as it were by working a mine like a lawyer examining a witness and he uses this sort of caution even in his common discourse till it becomes tedious to listen or reply[43]

It appears that Taylor, too, has at times been left talking to himself when in conversation with Clare.

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[42] Letter to Elizabeth Taylor, December 1836, Uncatalogued papers of John Taylor at Derbyshire Record Office, Matlock (9 boxes, ref. D1561). See also Bate, *John Clare*, p. 406.
[43] *By Himself*, p. 132.

Although this autobiographical fragment predates Taylor's letter and Clare's imminent diagnosis, it is a helpful counter to the claims Taylor makes about the poet and his 'enfeebled' mind. What satisfied Taylor as 'proper' replies may have just been information discreetly and indirectly 'sapped' from Clare; what were interpreted as manic ramblings may instead have been utterances born out of boredom. This is not to cast aspersions on what must ultimately have been a sincere concern for his client's wellbeing on Taylor's part, nor is it to dismiss the conclusion that Clare's mind was 'enfeebled' in this instance. Rather, it is to take a category by which Taylor and, more widely, practitioners and nosologists of insanity, drew the boundary between madness and sanity, and to uncover and reframe its possibilities. Considering both men's opinions of the other's speech shows that the notion of one dominant, fixed and totally coherent way of talking is a fallacy, and that 'conversation' might have other dimensions than just two sane people talking to each other. Geoffrey Hartman observes that:

> we don't know, to be honest, what a perfect verbal system is like. But we do know language develops by what Coleridge calls desynonimization and the structuralists call binary opposition. A breathing space, a division within redundancy, appears and makes room for us, for our word.[44]

The 'verbal system' that evidences either a healthy or unhealthy mind might have its own redundancies, and therefore the possibility for such a vocal 'breathing space' that arises somewhere between self-address and direct replies.

[44] Geoffrey Hartman, 'The Voice of the Shuttle', in *A Critic's Journey: Literary Reflections 1958-1998* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 52-68 (p. 61).

One such moment where Clare might make room for this new kind of verbalising occurs in *By Himself*:

> I know not what made me write poetry but these journeys and my toiling in the fields by myself gave me such a habit of thinking that I never forgot it and I always mutterd and talkd to myself afterwards and have often felt ashamd at being overheard[45]

Through his elision of talking to himself with poetic composition, Clare sets out a term through which we might think about self-address in his poetry, specifically how it sounds and what values with which it might be inscribed. Clare states that he talked to himself as a way of composing poetry, but also that he 'mutterd'. When considered as a result of what he calls his 'habit of thinking', these mutterings call into question the way in which language and speech are used to distinguish between madness and sanity, and the role poetry plays in navigating and complicating that distinction. What Clare does, then, is to bring the sound of self-talk into relationship with the question of what can be determined as healthy or unhealthy.

Muttering and the 'Healthy Tone' of Mind

Clare's autobiographical sketches provide an account both of the poet's life and of his poetic development. Clare recalls how, during his first job ploughing for Francis Gregory, he:

[45] *By Himself*, p. 73.

> always went by my self to weeding the grain, tending horses and such like. Once every week I had to go for a bag of flower to Maxey, a village distant about 2 Miles […] I was of a very timid disposition […] and I had two or three haunted Spots to pass […] therefore I must in such extremitys seize the best remedy to keep such things out of my head as well as I coud, so on these journeys I mutterd over tales of my own fancy and contriving into ryhmes as well as my abilities was able[46]

Clare posits a therapeutic use of composition here: making up 'tales' and turning them into 'ryhmes' is a defence mechanism and protective 'remedy' against fear. Yet whilst such a remedy might be employed to 'keep things out' of his head, it also permits a mode of expression that, when it communicates what is *in* the head, or the mind more precisely, it confuses the listener. The sense of mental protection felt through muttering to oneself is inferred again later, when Clare describes the hours spent working for Francis Gregory as 'the Nursery for fostering my rustic song'.[47] Poetic development and education are aligned with a softer sense of attentive care, but this secure 'nursery' is another site of inarticulate utterances: 'Here I got into a habit of musing and muttering to ones self as pastime to divert melancholy, singing over things which I calld songs and attempting to describe scenes that struck me'.[48] If the young Clare is in the nursery here, he is not being tended to by others, but learning a particular kind of private self-soothing – the therapeutic recitation of an inner, personal language that is not necessarily supposed to be heard by anybody else and might not be understood if it was. The recollection of 'what *I calld* songs' (my emphasis), suggests that they might not have translated as songs outside of his own moment of singing.

Clare was certainly alert to a disparity between his private 'mutterings' and a way of talking that was acceptable to others:

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[46] *By Himself*, p. 9.
[47] *By Himself*, p. 612.
[48] *By Himself*, p. 8.

> I generaly kept looking on the ground and I have been so taken with my story that I have gone muttering it over into the town before I knew I got there this has often embarrasd me by being overheard by some one who has asked me who I was talking too[49]

The early, occasional habit of muttering to himself seems to become more entrenched throughout *By Himself*. What was once a pastime and coping mechanism used to guard against feelings of fear or melancholy becomes that 'habit of thinking' that shapes the expression of his thoughts as an incoherent sound and, significantly, as poetry. As Clare's admissions of shame and embarrassment suggest, the method of composition developed in his autobiographical sketches, whilst therapeutic in solitude, becomes problematic when it is 'overheard' by other ears. His mutterings provoke curiosity, but by their very nature do not invite listeners in completely. Muttering disrupts a two-way model of communication: variously it can mean to 'speak in a low, barely audible tone with the mouth nearly closed', 'to express dissatisfaction covertly in low tone', to 'grumble in an undertone', 'to make a low, ominous rumbling sound', and 'to recite in low, indistinct tones'.[50] These different intentions or purposes behind muttering reveal a subversive potential, a way to articulate feelings of displeasure or contrary emotion in a deliberately inarticulate, obscured way; the 'sub-vocal' becomes an apt mode through which to express opinions or feelings that need to be kept below earshot.

There is, then, some agency in this way of speaking. Whilst the instances of 'crazy' muttering cited at the beginning of this chapter can be thought of in one way as uncontrollable, misinterpreted, or denied the attentive listening that they call out for,

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[49] *By Himself*, p. 10.
[50] See *OED*, 'mutter, v.1'.

muttering can also be deliberately evasive. Clare punctuates certain scenes with this register to give the impression of different social levels of sound. For instance, in the 'June' section of *The Shepherd's Calendar* (1827), a rural courtship between a 'swain' and a 'maid' is surveyed by the 'envious' who 'mutter oer their beer / And nodd the secret to his neighbour near' (*MP*, I, ll. 149-150, p. 83). In counterpoint with these secret mutterings are the more openly declared 'ale and songs and healths and merry ways', with 'healths' here signifying a communal toast and express wish for the welfare of others (l. 154, p. 83).[51] Even when removed from a context of medical discourse, or a direct reference to the state of the mind and body, health is figured as an openness of sound against the obscurity of muttering. Elsewhere in *Shepherd's Calendar* muttering appears as a register of deliberate secrecy, such as in 'February' when it is the sound of 'secret newsings mutterd oer' (*MP*, I, ll. 76, p. 29). In other poems too, such as 'The Lodge House' (1819), muttering is the tone of gossip: 'Besure now & then mutterd hints went about' (*EP*, II, ll. 73-74, p. 236). Clare also sometimes turns to muttering to represent figures other than the mad, such as those he perceives to be on the fringes of society. One is made privy to 'Truths told by gipsys & expounded dreams / & mutterd things kept secret from the rest' ('The Cross Roads or Haymakers Story' (1820), *EP*, II, ll. 12-13, p. 619). This form of muttering offers another perspective on the sub-vocal madness that occurs throughout Clare's work, suggesting the element of choice involved in adopting a mode of speaking that sounds inscrutable. Regardless of whether it is deliberate or uncontrollable, what unites the above definitions is the way in which muttering lingers at the boundary between language and sound. All of the above descriptions adopt the word 'tone' or 'sound' in their definitions of muttering's relation to speech, suggesting that it could be thought of as a language of sounds, or as a language that utilises sounds in a different way to regular speech. In this way, muttering does

[51] *OED*, 'health', n.6.

not necessarily invite others to hear, or even 'overhear' what is really being said, as sense becomes subservient to the strange, incoherent sounds produced.

The definition of muttering as a speech made up of tones and sounds resonates with certain terms for defining the healthy mind and body that circulated during the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. Allen's *Essays* asserts his intention 'to assist the disturbed and diseased mind to regain its tranquillity, and in many cases to resume its healthy *tone* of action' (my italics).[52] The term 'tone' refers to a physical, muscular fitness 'proper to the organs or tissues of the body in a strong and healthy condition', but also to 'a state or temper of mind', as well as to musical, vocal, and other sonic applications.[53] To conceive of the mind as having a 'healthy tone' brings all of these associations into play, suggesting that sound plays a key role in the definition of the healthy mind as both a metaphor and a more material sense of the mind as made up of 'tones' that need to sound in the right way. This sonic understanding of the mind is also present in the phrase 'sound mind'. In *Observations on Insanity* (1798), John Haslam argued that 'the sound mind seems to consist in a harmonised association of its different powers, and is so constituted, that a defect, in any one, produces irregularity, and, most commonly, derangement of the whole'.[54] In 'Summer Images' (1830), health is figured as a state of 'harmony' for Clare. The opening lines hail the arrival of 'rude health' (*MP*, III, l. 1, p. 147) before representing this health through various experiences of listening. Health is an acoustic phenomena characterised by 'joys which sooth & not distract mine ear' (l. 24, p. 148), 'Filling with harmony the ear & eye' (l. 138, p. 155), 'mellow sounds' (l. 167, p. 157) and 'no discordant tune' (l. 35, p. 149). His use of muttering and other sub-vocal sounds might therefore rework their connotations of madness into the

[52] Allen, *Essays*, p. x.
[53] *OED*, 'tone', II. 7 and 8.
[54] John Haslam, *Observations on Insanity, with Practical Remarks on the Disease, and an Account of the Morbid Appearances on Dissection* (London: F. and C. Rivington, 1798), p. 18.

potential for healthful associations, being a form of expression that offers 'sound' and 'tone' to the listener.

One contemporary figure who gestured towards the health of the body and mind as a construction of sound was Thomas Arnold (father of the Thomas Arnold who would go on to become one of Clare's physicians in Peterborough) who wrote extensively on the classification of insanity. In *Observations on the Nature, Kinds, Causes, and Prevention of Insanity* (1782), his discussion of the mental and bodily 'tones' that make up the states of health and illness conceives of the 'sound' mind in a deeply material way. Arnold figures the workings of the body and mind as constituted of a series of 'vibrations' of the 'medullary fibres', an argument influenced by the physiological writings of David Hartley.[55] He argues that 'all our mental operations, all our thoughts, passions, sensations, and exertions, are accompanied with corresponding motions or vibrations' on which 'their regular, and efficacious exertions, chiefly depend'.[56] The discussion that follows figures the healthy, 'regular' workings of the mind in terms that are simultaneously material and sonic. Arnold states that 'these motions and vibrations' are 'like those of the air in the propagation of *sound*' (my emphasis), inviting the notion that the healthy, or unhealthy, workings of the mind might actually emit a sound that could, in theory, be listened in on.[57] The material acoustics of the healthy body and mind evidenced by Arnold and others provides a crucial language for thinking about how the poem might be able to register and rework such concepts through its own formal materials.

Arnold's discussion of the various psychophysiological 'tones', the different arrangement or balance of which dictate whether a person is in a state of sickness or of

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[55] Thomas Arnold, *Observations on the Nature, Kinds, Causes, and Prevention of Insanity, Lunacy, or Madness* (Leicester: G. Robinson, 1782), p. 291; David Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations*, in Two Parts, 2 vols. (London: S. Richardson, 1749).
[56] Arnold, *Observations*, p. 291.
[57] Arnold, *Observations*, p. 292.

health, speaks to this chapter's earlier notion of health and madness as having specific differences in sound quality: 'the mind seems to be affected, for the most part, with ease, cheerfulness, and good spirits, by the vigorous; and with uneasiness, dejection, and languor, by the weaker, and less perfect tones'.[58] What these 'weaker, and less perfect tones' might sound like, or the sounds they might cause the subject to emit, is developed in Arnold's classification of 'incoherent insanity': 'it arises out of such a state of the brain, as produces, perpetually, trains of apparently unconnected, or very slightly connected, ideas; with calm, and, not incessant, but frequent incoherent talking, or *muttering*' (my emphasis).[59]

Elsewhere in *Observations on Insanity*, Haslam also hears muttering as that 'defect that ruins the harmony of healthy utterance':

> When admitted he was very noisy, and importunately talkative […] On the 5th he merely muttered […] Within a few days of his disease he only muttered to himself […] She now talked incoherently; and, towards the evening, merely muttered to herself […] he lay insensible of what passed about him, muttered constantly to himself.[60]

In his later work, *Observations on Madness and Melancholy* (1809), Haslam goes on to highlight one of the most 'unmistakeable' signs of the insane person:

> If to an ordinary observer, a person were to talk in an incoherent manner, he would think him mad; if his conduct were regular, and his observations pertinent, he would pronounce him in his senses[61]

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[58] Arnold, *Observations*, p. 102.
[59] Arnold, *Observations*, p. 471.
[60] Haslam, *Observations on Insanity*, pp. 41-94.
[61] John Haslam, *Observations on Madness and Melancholy: including Practical Remarks on those Diseases; together with Cases: and an Account of the Morbid Appearances on Dissection*, 2nd edn (London: J. Callow, 1809), p. 38.

Although Haslam goes on to make clear that, when it comes to identifying particular types of insanity, 'there are many different shades, which are not so likely to strike the common examiner', he has identified what appeared to be a key trope in the reception and classification of madness.[62] The madman is instantly recognisable for the way in which he talks. Haslam's study of mental illness, which attempted to produce more nuanced definitions of madness by investigating conditions such as 'mania' and the 'depressing passions', still worked outwards from this initial split between madness and sanity, figured through speech and communication.[63] Allen, too, enforced this distinction. His observations of his patients, although in reference to different conditions, cases and symptoms, often also mentioned the way in which they spoke, and often elided details for more generalised observations of 'muttering' and 'murmuring':

> almost always muttering to himself as if he held busy converse with his own thoughts […] when any of his operations or mutterings are interrupted, like one whose studies are broken in upon at some unlucky moment, he seems vexed and unhinged […] his present state of mind presents a strange mass of confusion from which nothing can be drawn or collected, except [...] from his muttering to himself […] he seems stupid and churlish, always silent unless spoken to, and then he answers with abruptness and impatience, in a murmuring, grumbling, and almost unintelligible manner.[64]

The word 'murmuring' throws up a new register to which the chapter will return later as a sound that might in other contexts be a preferred sub-vocal utterance to the more subversive mutter. However, here it is subsumed into Allen's indiscriminate list of noises.

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[62] Haslam, *Observations on Madness*, p. 38.
[63] Haslam, *Observations on Madness*, p. 19, p. 43.
[64] Allen, *Essays*, pp. 118-195.

Under a regime of moral management, Clare may have been permitted to ramble around the grounds of the institution in an unrestrained way, but this supposed freedom was curtailed at the level of speech: no vocal 'rambles' were permitted. This kind of disengaged listening that groups all the utterances of the mad together in a noisy mass now seems very distant from the 'talking cure' that emerged from later developments in psychiatric care. Indeed, Allen makes a point of insisting in *Essays* that 'silence' is the desired response to patients who openly voice their 'delusions', arguing that 'if it does not cure, it restrains them from talking on the subject of their delusions […] we must exert all our eloquence, and call forth the most overpowering arguments against the folly, wickedness, and direful consequences'.[65] Perhaps more significant than the attempts to silence patients is how their attempts to communicate their own pathologies are considered so easily trumped by the 'eloquence' of those administering treatment and care. Within the system of moral management, madness is set up as both something instantly betrayed by the voice but also something that you cannot talk about, to yourself or others. One could be talked out of madness, however, through a discourse that is perceived as dominant because it has the advantage of such recognised rhetorical devices as eloquence and argumentation, seemingly denied to the ramblings of madmen. Fenwick Skrimshire also recognised incoherency and distorted conversation as a symptom of mania – the condition with which he diagnosed Clare. He states that a person's 'incongruity and incoherency in regard to, and in relation to, the former deportment of the individual in question', can be a key sign that he has descended into mania.[66] Although Skrimshire does suggest that incoherency itself must be assessed in relation to the patient, rather than taken blindly as a symptom of insanity, he also omits detail as to what this incoherency might sound like and how it might manifest. Andrew Scull and

[65] Allen, *Essays*, pp. 99-100.
[66] Fenwick Skrimshire, *The Village Pastor's Surgical and Medical Guide* (London: Ibotson and Palmer, 1838), p. 203.

Roy Porter both highlight the suspicious gaps in representation in case studies and treatises such as these.[67] Although such case studies were written in order to forge a more rigorous study into what caused madness and how it could be treated, their reports of 'mutterings' as evidence for insanity diminish the patients' actual experience of their condition to a one-word summary. There is no room for variation, or sense of scale, but instead a crude distinction between a rational, true, and sane language through which we can read the world, and a mad and manic diversion from it.

Some of Clare's more meditative lines that try to unpick what the appropriate register for poetic language is seem to resist this distinction, such as in 'Is poesy dwelling in a nice culled sound' (1820-30):

> Is poesy dwelling in a nice culled sound
> Or soft smooth words that trifle on the ear
> Unmeaning music – is it to be found
> In rhymes run mad that paint to startled fear
> Monsters that is not & that never where
> Is it in declamations frothing high
> Worked like maschinery to its mad career
> -- No poesy lives in its simplicity
> & speaks from its own heart to which all hearts reply
>
> (*MP*, II, ll.1-9, pp. 239-40)

Clare confuses the expectations placed on certain poetic sounds and their connotations through subtle rhythmic discrepancies. The line 'Is poesy dwelling in a nice culled sound' draws playful attention to its own sonic ambiguities, and undercuts the sense that 'poesy' is

[67] Andrew Scull, *The Most Solitary of Afflictions: Madness and Society in Britain, 1700-1900* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1993); Roy Porter, 'The Voice of the Mad', *Mind-Forg'd Manacles: A History of Madness in England from the Restoration to the Regency* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 229-273.

made up of carefully selected ('culled') and arranged sounds by making that very word rhythmically ambiguous. The line can be scanned as having either ten or eleven syllables because of the way that 'poesy' has the potential to be glossed over as two. In comparison, the line 'In rhymes run mad that paint to startled fear' does not deviate from iambic pentameter, and so asserts regularity over the threat of formal disorder. Clare uses rhythmic arrangement and ambivalence here to subvert expectations of 'smooth' and 'mad' sound respectively, before suggesting that neither are explicitly the register through which a poem can speak. The very 'simplicity' that he assigns to poetic speech is already made fallible through another instance of 'poesy' creating the potential for an extra syllable, and the last line's imagination of a direct ease of communication lurches away from the loosely iambic structure of the previous lines with an alexandrine. What these sonic effects achieve is an invitation to hear more than straightforward discourse in the poem and to be alert to its multiplicities of sound.

The pressures placed on forms of communication outside of the poem do not always leave room for such multiplicities. Other people who visited Clare at both High Beach and Northampton asylum also reported experiences of conversing with the poet in which the words themselves were muttered or incomprehensible. A clergyman who visited him in 1847 witnessed a 'man in middling stature […] apparently lost in thought, muttering to himself in broken sentences', and later reported upon talking with Clare that his musings were delivered in a 'rapid and peculiar' tone. This clergyman's companion is reported to have said that 'he occasionally brings forth some fine thoughts in these perambulatory improvisations. But these must be caught the moment they are uttered, or they are gone forever'.[68] The poet John Dalby set about trying to catch his moment of conversation with Clare in verse after he visited him along with Thomas Inskip and G. J. DeWilde, the editor of the *Northampton*

[68] Bate, *John Clare,* p. 473.

Mercury. His poem does not give details of what Clare said, but rather summarises the conversation:

> Let me recall him when Inskip led
> The unconscious poet to your home, DeWilde,
> And we sat listening as to some fond child,
> The wayward unconnected words he said –
> Prattle by confused recollections led[69]
> (ll. 15-18)

These moments of broken conversation, described as wayward, unconnected, ephemeral, rapid, and peculiar, were used by Clare's various visitors to confirm for them his mental deterioration. However, such instances and poetic usages of the subvocal might be re-heard for the healthy associations of their 'tones' and 'sounds' through the mode of listening offered by contemporary speech theory.

Listening Back through the Oral Imaginary

The mutterings that are reported of Clare by those who encountered him in the asylum, and that feature in his own depictions of both 'crazy' figures, test the sonic boundaries of speech in a manner akin to what Brandon LaBelle terms the 'oral imaginary'. This realm of speech is, for LaBelle, the 'excesses and energies, the sloppy and the inchoate wordings that hover in and around discourses […] the poetics of an experimental orality'.[70] He recognises in his work a more embodied language that is attentive to the mouth as the material site in which

[69] John Dalby, 'John Clare', *Northampton Mercury*, cxliii, 3 (June 1864), in *Critical Heritage*, pp. 273-74.
[70] Brandon LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and The Oral Imaginary* (New York; London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 12.

language is formed, and so is necessarily made up of obscure noises, distortions and interruptions that are integral to the act of asserting a subjective voice, of 'having a say'.[71] The oral imaginary deviates from standardised notions of the voice as made up of purely articulate sounds, bound always to the signification of fixed meanings, an understanding of spoken language that Steven Connor also examines in his exploration of how 'it would seem to make no sense to mark off certain features of speech as noise from other features of speech that are taken to be meaningful, sense-making sound. All phonemes, or distinguishable elements of speech, are at once noises and sounds'.[72] Such contemporary reconsiderations of the subjective voice as a site of material production, an acoustic phenomena that utters individual experience through sounds that move within, above, and below meaningful 'language', aid a consideration of Clare's efforts to sound out what is healthy. For LaBelle, muttering and other vocal disruptions or distortions make audible the

> initial gap, when the words hold themselves back in search of form […] such breaks […] interrupt our speaking. Yet they do so by inflecting its rhythms; they expose the body, uncovering language as a material sculpted by the oral cavity'.[73]

Attending to how Clare might use the rhythms of speech and sub-vocal sound enables a closer consideration of how health is incorporated into the lyric's subjective work, how the lyric allows Clare to explore the registers of his own self-talk and, in doing so, sound out his health via his own oral imaginary.

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[71] LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, p. 4.
[72] Connor, *Beyond Words*, p. 10.
[73] LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, pp. 67-68.

Once a patient at High Beach, Cyrus Redding offers some insight into how Clare was progressing following his visit and report on the poet for the *English Journal* in 1841. Redding took as the 'principal token of his state of mind' a conversation on the topic of:

> prize-fighting, in which he seemed to imagine he was to engage; but the allusion was made to it in the way of interpolation in the middle of the subject on which he was discoursing, brought in abruptly, and abandoned with equal suddenness […] as if the machinery of thought were dislocated, so that one part of it got off its pivot, and protruded into the regular workings; or as if a note had got into a piece of music which had no business there.[74]

In 'For John Clare' (1970), John Ashbery's prose poem that works both to evoke and empathise with Clare's intense attention to the world around him, there is an echo of Redding's criticism:

> It is possible that finally, like coming to the end of a long, barely perceptible rise, there is mutual cohesion and interaction. The whole scene is fixed in your mind, the music all present, as though you could see each note as well as hear it. I say this because there is an uneasiness in things just now. Waiting for something to be over before you are forced to notice it.[75]

Unlike Redding, Ashbery's understanding of Clare's extra musical 'notes' is less inclined to pathologise them, although he does hint at the difficulties encountered by being prone to such notes – an 'uneasiness' at their presence, and a not completely welcome compulsion that means the poet is 'forced' to notice them even when he may not want to. Ashbery and

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[74] Cyrus Redding, 'Cyrus Redding Visits John Clare', *English Journal*, 20 (15 May 1841), pp. 305-9; 22 (29 May 1841), pp. 340-3, in *Critical Heritage*, pp. 247-256 (p. 248).
[75] John Ashbery, 'For John Clare', from 'The Double Dream of Spring', *Collected Poems 1956-1987*, ed. Mark Ford (New York: The Library of America, 2008), pp. 179-243 (pp. 198-199).

Redding use different vocabularies to identify a mannerism they both notice in Clare: a tendency to wander off topic, to gather lots of things together in the same place, to flit between one thing and another. Ashbery's words are 'mutual', 'cohesion', and 'interaction', whilst Redding's are 'abruptly', 'abandoned', 'dislocated', and 'protruded'. Perhaps these different perspectives occur because Redding discusses Clare's speech, whilst Ashbery is concerned with his way of looking at and moving through his surroundings. Also, Redding recalls an actual conversation he had with Clare, whilst Ashbery draws on his own reflective reading.

However, the way in which Redding likens the connections between the poet's thoughts and words to a 'machine' that produces 'regular workings', but has the potential to break and become 'dislocated', is contrary to the looser thought process that Clare aligns with the natural movements of a river in 'A Spring Day' (1820s-1830s), where ideas of speaking, observing, wandering through one's environment, and poetic composition all overlap and mutually interact:

> Now forth the Poet rambles with the spring
> Southern the morning speeds on easy wing
> With winds soft whispering sunshine all the way
> In glorious promise of a healthy day
> […]
> His thoughts gush out by starts in various moods
> Now eddying like a runnel thro the woods
> Dallying with pleasant things as it with leaves
> Then starts till wider space its glow recieves
> & like a cataract dashd with maddening ire
> As almost kindles water into fire
> His thoughts start out with joys unfelt before
> & maddening raptures makes his soul run oer
> With its divine consceptions till they rise
> Forgetting earth & mix with paradise
>
> (*MP*, II, ll.1-28, pp. 316-17)

Redding's machine-like model of the relationship between thought and language sets up a hard boundary between sanity and insanity. It suggests that there is a fixed and even pre-set mode of thinking and speaking, and that any deviation from that mode is a glitch in need of repair. For Redding, that mechanical process works smoothly when thoughts appear and are uttered in a regular, sequential way, without any abrupt or sudden jumps between subjects. In 'A Spring Day', however, Clare's model of thinking is one where 'thoughts gush out by starts', moving quickly between 'various moods'. Against Redding's hard, fixed machinery, Clare's thoughts are capable of shape-shifting from narrow 'runnels' into 'wider space', with their mutability even approaching a supernatural quality able to effect elemental change: 'As almost kindles water into fire'. So convoluted and ever-changing is the direction of thinking in this poem that form and content seem to collapse into one another. The lines 'Dallying with pleasant things as it with leaves / Then starts till wider space its glow receives' set both the pace and subject of thought, and in doing so pivot on their metaphor so that the 'leaves' of 'pleasant things' rested upon by the river of thought also become a sudden departure. The lack of punctuation at the end of line 21 rolls the word 'leaves' into 'Then starts', creating the sense of abrupt coming and going to which thoughts are subject, as well as undercutting the rest-point of the leaves in the river with this new moment of interruption. Each new line gushes and dashes with the forward momentum of running water and, in these runnels of lines, Clare opens up a fresh channel of thought to flow through them.

One of the consequences of opening up these meandering channels is that they give rise to potentially maddening experiences. Indeed, Allen describes the case of one particular patient by employing the same metaphor of an uncontrollable body of water: 'even at a distance, his voice sounded like a river escaping from some narrowed part, and rushing with

impetuosity over everything that would impede its course'.[76] For Clare, the 'maddening ire' and 'maddening raptures' that arise from the spontaneous flow of thinking are here a cause for joy, perhaps even fulfilling the promise of a 'healthy day'. Furthermore, the passage demonstrates how these moments of joyful, healthy madness sometimes occur as a trip in the metrical line – an extra 'note', to nod to Redding and Ashbery. 'Maddening' presents in the above extract as having an unfixed syllable count. With three syllables enunciated, 'madd-en-ing', the iambic pentameter becomes upset by the extra beat, whereas regularity is maintained by glossing over this extra syllable. That this metrical ambivalence should occur over the word 'maddening' is significant. The poet whose thoughts Redding claimed sprung up erratically 'as if a note had got into a piece of music which had no business there' deliberately plays around with the 'notes' of rhythm. Yet there are other words in the above passage which also contain such metrical uncertainties. Significantly, the word 'glorious' throws the same line that contains the word 'healthy' off beat, hinting that an experience of health is to be found in such moments of irregularity. Two more words in the passage further develop this sense of healthy irregularity. Both 'whispering' and 'rambles' convey a sense of the vocal, of elements of speech, but whilst 'whispering' holds the same metrical ambivalence as 'glorious' and 'maddening', 'rambles' scans regularly. Yet within the word 'rambles' itself there lies, not an ambivalence of metre, but of meaning: it signifies both 'to wander or travel in a free, unrestrained manner, without a definite aim or direction', as well as 'To wander freely in speech or writing […] to write or talk in an aimless, incoherent, or inconsequential fashion, without an ordered sequence of ideas'.[77]

There is more of an overlap of meaning than a separation in these two definitions, but it is within this overlap that the above passage from 'A Spring Day' resides. A ramble in

[76] Allen, *Essays*, p. 8.
[77] *OED*, 'ramble', senses 1b and 2.intr.

both senses, Clare aligns the process of wandering through the landscape in search of the promise of health with an uncontrolled flow of speech and in doing so creates that sense of 'mutual cohesion and interaction' that Ashbery identifies in his work by layering health and madness on top of one another through sound. Clare's acute attention to detail allows him to 'see each note as well as hear it' and his lines appear to stretch to accommodate these extra notes and the possible 'uneasiness' that comes with them. A similar connection occurs in his poem 'A Ramble' (1818-20). In this poem, rambling through the landscape is both 'sweet and dear / To tastes warm bosom & to healths flusht cheek' (*EP*, I, ll.1-2, p. 500) as well as something that is only accessible to those who can be attentive enough to find meaning in it:

> I cannot think it how the reason is
> That every trifle natures bosom wears
> Should seem so lovly & appear so sweet
> & charm so much my soul while heedless passenger
> Soodles me bye an animated post
> & neer so much as turns his head to look
> But staulks along as tho his eyes were blinded
> & as if the witching face of nature
> Held but now a dark unmeaning blank
>
> (ll. 33-41, p. 501)

In this poem, then, rambling does not distort meaning, but moves deeper into it, even though such meaning may not adhere to 'reason'. There is a moment later in the poem where Clare celebrates 'That longing pausing wish that cannot pass / Uncomprehended things without a sigh / For wisdom to unseal the hidden cause' (ll.47-49, p. 501). When read in relation to the potential for metrical trips in the previous extract, it can be argued that he sets up the search for health as one that must attend to possible multiplicities of sounds and meanings within words. The gushing out of 'various' moods (another word that makes indeterminate the iambic pentameter of the line accompanied by the connotation of 'gushing' as a sudden

outpouring of speech) indicates what might be heard in Clare's poetry when trying to tune into its construction of health.

Alongside the worries of his visitors that the sub-vocal mutterings and extra 'notes' of Clare's speech were indicators of an unsound mind, are questions about vocal propriety and how to define 'correct' speech. What has come to be considered as the elocutionary movement, beginning in the eighteenth and developing into the nineteenth century, is a significant context for thinking about how speech, poetry, and the state of the body and mind can be thought of as inherently connected. Elocutionary theorists were invested in a prescriptive model of speech, a communicative integrity whereby one's words are a coherent expression of one's thoughts and, consequently, follow a form or a pattern that is recognisable and can be shared. The scientific impulses behind elocution had a vast political and social reach, where speech in its ideal form can express a collective national identity, is laden with class politics and the ideology of talking 'properly', and assimilates the individual into the communal by, as Andrew McCann argues, 'fashioning a kind of subject compatible with the norms of public conduct, communication, hygiene and responsibility'.[78] John Thelwall, amongst other elocutionary theorists such as Thomas Sheridan, Benjamin Smart, and John Walker, brought poetry to the fore as that which can provide an exemplary structure of sound for expressing the impressions of the mind. Significantly, the arguments presented by elocutionists often tied in with contemporary terms and debates relating to what makes the mind healthy or unhealthy, and also resonated with the notion that the health of the mind (or the body) can be evidenced by the sound of a person's speech.

For example, John Walker's *Elements of Elocution* (1781) contains a discussion of poetry's exceptional capacity for conveying the 'passions', the regulation of which recurs as a

[78] Andrew McCann, 'Romantic Self-Fashioning: John Thelwall and the Science of Elocution', *Studies in Romanticism*, 40.2 (2001), pp. 215-232 (p. 217).

marker of mental and physical health for nosologists of insanity. Arnold, for example, argues that 'the passions are the principal instruments of the mind's agency on the body. Their effects are various, sudden, and on many occasions, violent'; Allen observes that the 'excitement of the depressing and exhilarating passions alternately, is the most striking characteristic of the insane'.[79] For Walker, each 'passion' possesses its own 'peculiar quality of sound', through which our 'natural feelings […] stand in need of the regulation and embellishment of art'.[80] Poetry is heralded as that which can best 'paint', and perhaps provide a regulating blueprint for, the correct sounds of the passions, and Walker lists each one with its characteristic sounds and gestures. For instance, 'joy' has the potential to become 'extreme' and take on 'a wildness of look and gesture that borders on folly, madness, and sorrow'; in 'fear and terror' the voice is 'weak and trembling, the sentences are short, and the meaning confused and incoherent'; 'sickness' has 'infirmity or feebleness in every motion and utterance […] the voice feeble, trembling, and plaintive'.[81] The sound patterns that poetry constructs, with Shakespeare being Walker's favoured example, make it an effective tool for voicing and for guiding the listener's recognition of each of these states. However, Walker also argues that:

> We cannot put ourselves in the posture, or attitude, of any passion, without communicating a certain degree of the passion itself to the mind. The same may be observed of the tone of voice which is peculiar to each passion: each passion produces an agitation of the body, which is accompanied by a correspondent agitation of the mind […][82]

[79] Arnold, *Observations*, p. 152; Allen, *Essays*, p. 17.
[80] John Walker, *Elements of Elocution, being the Substance of a Course of Lectures on the Art of Reading*, 2 vols. (London: T. Cadell, 1781), II, p. 272.
[81] Walker, *Elements of Elocution*, pp. 280-410.
[82] Walker, *Elements of Elocution*, p. 279.

If poetry can be taken as constructing a deliberate vocal 'posture, or attitude' that communicates various passions, it could also seemingly transfer such passions into the mind of the poet or reader. The 'tone of voice' for which a poem becomes the most fitting vehicle could also carry with it the potential to agitate the passions of the body and mind to unhealthy excess. Whilst Walker attests to the need for poetry to uncover or set a standard for the correct sounds to express the changing states of the mind and body, he also makes room for the suggestion that some kind of restraint needs to be placed on the kind of sound that is acceptable.

In *A Letter to Henry Cline* (1810), Thelwall suggests what this restraint might be. He recalls how his reading of Dryden and Milton and the process of 'ascertaining and methodizing the particular rhythmus I should adopt', led him to the revelatory discovery of why:

> certain combinations and succession of sound, that baffle all the discriminations of mere grammatical analysis, and all ascertainment from the customary rules of quantity, should produce an agreeable impression – while others, equally undefinable, by the ordinary dogmas of criticism, should be productive of a discordant effect upon the ear; and why certain modes of effort, in the pronunciation of speech, should give smoothness and facility to the flow of spoken language; while other modes of effort were necessarily productive of dissonance and disgust, and were readily aggravated into absolute Hesitation and Impediment'.[83]

Here Thelwall traces the poetic effect of 'rhythmus' on speech as that which is at once a baffling and 'undefinable' affect and at the same time a clear indicator of the difference between discordant and 'agreeable' sound. Thelwall does not immediately assign discordance and agreeableness to the categories of irregular and regular rhythm as might be

[83] John Thelwall, *A Letter to Henry Cline, Esq., On the Imperfect Developments of the Faculties Mental and Moral, as Well as Constitutional and Organic on the Treatments of Impediments of Speech* (London: Richard Taylor and Co., 1810), pp. 5-7.

expected. Whilst making rhythm the imperative framework of speech that organises it into coherent sound, he also states that this framework might not adhere to the 'customary rules of quantity' or the inflexible 'dogmas of criticism'. He does, however, make the claim that an elocution that follows the principles he considers inherent within English prosody and rhythm, can improve 'health […] (even in those cases where popular prejudices would least expect) […] by the very means that give grace, impressiveness, and harmony to rhetorical delivery'.[84]

One such 'case of popular prejudice' that might require the healthy improvement of elocution for Thelwall are what he calls the 'mental and moral' disorders of mania and insanity. If rhythm can be utilised to control speech, then for Thelwall it can also be used to structure and direct the 'passions' of the mind that might fall into derangement and cause distortions of impediments in the subject's speaking voice. It is in his discussion of how rhythm might be used as an ameliorative control mechanism for mental disorder that Thelwall seems to suggest the need for regularisation and adherence to fixed norms:

> Remove the proximate or active cause, and you conquer the disease; establish a system, and enforce a regimen, that may preclude the return of such an active cause, and your patient is secure. Remove the mental and moral maladies (no matter from what prior circumstances they may, themselves, originally have sprung) that are, in reality, the immediate causes of so many serious impediments; restore, or produce those essential links of association, between the physical perception and the mental volition, and between the mental volition the organic action, which either have been somehow broken, or have never properly been formed – and the stammerer, the stutterer, the throttler, the endless reiterator, and almost the whole order of unfortunate persons, whose impediments consist in obstructed utterance, are relieved from their affliction […] tranquilize the agitated mind; restrain its impetuosity […]'[85]

[84] Thelwall, *Letter*, p. 10.
[85] Thelwall, *Letter*, pp. 57-58.

In his call for 'system', 'regimen', 'restrain' and tranquilizing influences over the mental faculties, Thelwall appears to advocate a mode of rhythmic dogma that does not permit the mind, and the poetic expression of that mind, to ramble or wander into rhythmical indeterminacy.

There are echoes of Wordsworth's theory of metre in the 'Preface' to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1802) in Thelwall's elocutionary theory. Wordsworth's evolving suggestions about the relationship between metre and the 'passions' charts, as Susan Wolfson argues, 'the shuttles and shifts between […] passion and restraint'.[86] Oscillating between metre as 'tempering and restraining the passion' and as 'something which will greatly contribute to impart passion to the words', Wordsworth is captivated by the effect that prosody has on the reader's mind and his faculties of expression.[87] His careful negotiations of the role of metre in assuaging the passions do not seem to have convinced Clare, however, who remarked that 'wordsworth deifes all art & in the lunatic Enthuseism of nature he negligently sets down his thoughts from the tongue of his inspirer'.[88] Whilst Clare hears a 'lunatic' enthusiasm in Wordsworth, Thelwall seems to side more strongly with the poet's notion of metrical restraint without paying heed to the counterbalancing passion that metre 'imparts'.[89] He values the rhythmic flexibility of subjective speech in so far as it does not stretch beyond the bounds of normal or healthy utterance, but when speech moves into the realms of the sub-vocal or oral eccentricities, sounds that might evade what is normally considered as regular speech, he seeks to smooth them over in an attempt to alleviate the mental agitation and disorder that lies

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[86] Susan Wolfson, 'Wordsworth's Craft', *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 108-124 (p. 114).
[87] William Wordsworth, 'Preface to *Lyrical Ballads'* (1802), *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems, 1797-1800,* ed. by James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 741-760 (pp. 755-56)
[88] Letter to Markham E. Sherwill, 12 July 1820, *Letters,* p. 87.
[89] For an extensive discussion of the similarities and divergences between Wordsworth's prosodic and Thelwall's elocutionary theory, see Judith Thompson, 'A New School of Poetry', *John Thelwall in the Wordsworth Circle: The Silenced Partner* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 161-186 (pp. 171-182). See also Brennan O'Donnell, *The Passion of Meter: A Study of Wordsworth's Metrical Art* (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1995), pp. 26-39.

at their root. Thelwall's subject is denied a private 'self-talk' that might transgress the socially accepted rhythms and articulation of successful public utterance.

This is where Thomas Sheridan's contribution to the elocutionary movement can be seen to provide a more flexible model for listening to, and making judgements upon, the rhythms of speech. Thelwall has been cast as the more directly medically and socially democratic elocutionist by critics such as Judith Thompson.[90] Yet Sheridan's argument about the adherence of speech to 'poetic numbers' in *Lectures on the Art of Reading* (1775) is more forgiving of what he perceives as 'disorder':

> Nothing is so easy as to express irregular emotions by irregular feet; but the art of the poet consists in giving a disorderly air to the numbers, in order to produce a conformity to the sentiment; but which, on examination, will be found to be strictly conformable to the rules of metre; and one great pleasure of the mind is, in the perception of that expression of disorder, arising from order itself, which is one principle advantage that verse has over prose.[91]

In this attention to the rhythmical nuances necessitated by the communication of sentiment and emotion, Sheridan provides one answer to an argument he makes earlier in *Lectures.* Dissatisfied with what he perceives as the dominance of prose over the nation's poetry reading habits, he claims that:

> The bulk of readers have chosen what they think is a safer course, which is, that of running the lines one into another, without the least pause where they find none in the

[90] See Judith Thompson, 'Re-Sounding Romanticism: John Thelwall and the Science and Practice of Elocution', in *Spheres of Action: Speech and Performance in Romantic Culture*, ed. by Angela Esterhammer and Alexander Dick (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), pp. 21-45.
[91] Thomas Sheridan, *Lectures on the Art of Reading; Second Part: containing the Art of Reading Verse* (London: J. Dodsley, 1775), pp. 239-240.

> sense; in the same manner as they would do in sentences of prose […] by this means, they reduce poetry to something worse than prose, to verse run mad.[92]

Sheridan's comments here give a possible shape to the 'poetical prosing' that was listed as a contributing factor to Clare's madness, that is, poetry with no 'sense' of pause. What he offers instead is a kind of ordered madness, which poetry has the advantage of being able to convey whilst retaining its formal integrity. His perception of 'disorder, arising from order itself' expresses the essence of this chapter's consideration of how Clare negotiates prescriptive models of healthy utterance through moments of metrical indeterminacy. Rather than driving a wedge between mad and healthy, or sane, utterance, metre facilitates their coexistence within the structural integrity of the poem. The pleasure that can be found in moments of disorder is also key to Clare's consistent return to 'mad' vocalisations as a model of poetic sound.

Elocution can therefore provide a crucial context from which Clare emerges. His opinions on 'grammar' attest, if not directly to an awareness of specific elocutionists, then certainly to a familiarity with arguments about how speech and correct pronunciation arose from governance over the written word. He claims that he is more concerned with 'correct thinkings rather then the correct placing of particles and stops and other trifling […] such an attainment will get the possessor an enlightened and liberal mind and […] the niceties of intricate Lectures on grammer with its utmost perfection will not attain it for him.'[93] The question of what 'correct thinkings' may be for Clare, and how he might go about sounding them, invites consideration of how he might evoke and develop further the 'disorderly' advantage of poetry in order to extend the possibilities of what is healthy or unhealthy in

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[92] Thomas Sheridan, *Lectures on the Art of Reading; First Part, containing the Art of Reading Prose* (London: J. Dodsley, 1775), p. 264.
[93] Clare, 'Grammar', *Major Works*, ed. Eric Robinson and David Powell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008; 1984), p. 481.

poetic rhythm; how he constructs his individual poetic voice outside of healthy oral propriety and communal norms; and how to listen to these possibilities instead of restraining or tranquilizing them.

'Overhearing' Clare's poetry therefore might not just require thinking about the relation of the reader to a poet who locates his craft in muttering to himself; it also calls for a definition of a particular quality of listening. 'Over-hearing' comes to mean not just listening in on something, but *over*-listening, being particularly attentive to the different sonic and semantic possibilities residing in Clare's poems. The listener should be open to a kind of auditory ramble, allowing the ear to wander attentively over the words and rhythms in order to uncover their multiple meanings. When reading and listening to Clare's poems, we have to adopt a position similar to Henri Lefebvre's figure of the 'rhythmanalyst':

> He will be attentive, but not only to the words or pieces of information […] He will listen to the world, and above all to what are disdainfully called noises, which are said without meaning, and to *murmurs* (rumeurs), full of meaning.[94]

Here, Lefebvre provides a model of attentive listening, a listening that might not be as interested in finding meaning as it is in tuning into meaningless 'noise', recalling as it does the 'nothingness' of noise in 'I Am'. Furthermore, he highlights another subvocal sound that Clare also explores throughout his poetry, the 'murmur'. Attending to the murmurs in his work does indeed suggest an engagement with healthy and unhealthy conceptions of language and speech when considered in relation to the word's pathological connotations, such as a heart murmur or complications with breathing. This understanding of murmur, as well as it being a quiet, incoherent utterance or expression of dissent or discontent, was

[94] Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, trans. Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore (London; New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 19.

circulating by 1821, and so Clare's engagement with it could be inflected with its medical implications.[95] However, there is also the sense that, poetically, the 'murmur' was a more acceptable sound than the incoherent, subservient mutter.

Murmuring, Muttering, and the Voice of Health

Although Clare explores the potentially healthy registers of sound that can be heard in subvocal utterance, there is also a distinction between the associations of muttering and murmuring in his work. Murmuring is frequently valued as a soft pleasant sound, often associated with the movement of water or other natural phenomena. In one ballad, 'Streamlet thou hast known my love' (1819-20), the murmur is akin to a loving address:

> Streamlet as thy water flutter
> Oer the stones wi murmuring noise
> Coudst thou sound what love did utter
> Thou woudst sound a world of joys
> (*EP*, II, ll. 5-8, p. 248)

In 'To the Memory of Bloomfield' (1823), the poet's legacy is figured as the sound of 'murmurs tender' that will 'murmur on' (*MP*, IV, ll. 5-13, p. 181), eliding this particular sound with a kind of poetic authority or register of authenticity. In 'Summer Morning' (1818-19) the 'murmur' is an integral part of the concert of 'rural themes' that the poet delights in listing (*EP*, I, ll. 73-79, p. 553), whereas in the 'August' section of *The Shepherd's Calendar* (1827), murmuring is figured as a sound that has mentally soothing and reparative qualities:

[95] *OED*, 'murmur, n., 5'.

> & on each weary mind what rapture dwells
> To hear once more its pleasant chiming bells
> That from each steeple peeping here & there
> Murmur a soothing lullaby to care
>
> (*MP*, I, ll. 143-46, pp. 125-26)

As a sound emanating from the natural world, the reparative sound of murmuring is also compared to muttering. Whilst muttering takes on a positive and generative connotation for Clare as an instance of natural, poetic vocalisation (figured in his descriptions of birdsong, for example), he is also alert to its more sinister qualities. In 'Description of a Thunderstorm' (1820), muttering is figured as an ominous, threatening sound as 'the 'proaching thunder mutters on the ear / & still keeps creeping on more loud & loud', only to finally disperse into a more comforting register: '& a slow murmur wakes the delug'd plain / A murmur of thanksgiving mixt wi fear' (*MP*, III, ll. 46-75, pp. 48-49). For other poets of the Romantic period, the murmur is a sound that lends itself to a sense of both the poet's deep sympathetic engagement with the natural world, and of nature as a poetic teacher. In 'To My Brother George', Keats's speaker worries over whether 'the still murmur of the honey bee / Would ever teach a rural song to me' (ll. 13-14).[96] In the first book of *The Prelude* (1805), Wordsworth's subject casts about for communion with his natural surroundings by asking 'Underneath what grove / Shall I take up my home, and what sweet stream / Shall with its murmurs lull me to my rest?' (I, ll. 11-14).[97] In 'The Eolian Harp' (1795), the murmur provides for Coleridge an emptying out of sound, or a way to listen beyond it, before the 'breeze' of poetry comes rushing back in: 'The stilly murmur of the distant Sea / Tells us of

[96] John Keats, *Major Works*, ed. Elizabeth Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001; repr. 2008), p. 25.
[97] Wordsworth, *The Thirteen Book Prelude*, ed. Mark L. Reed, 2 vols (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1991), I, p. 107.

silence' (ll. 11-12).[98] However, it is John Thelwall, the elocutionist who thought reciting poetry might be able to cure the 'stammerer' and the 'stutterer', and soothe the 'agitated mind', who makes an explicit connection between the murmur and a state of health. 'Invocation to Health' (1801) opens with a call to health and an imagination of what sounds might herald it: 'Dost thou follow some sheep track, and bound up the hill? / Or wander, sedate, by the murmuring rill? / Thee, Health! I invoke' (ll. 3-5).[99]

Murmuring seemingly does not have the same unhealthy implications as muttering for Thelwall, and is often the subvocal register of choice for other poets of the period. Indeed, Clare had his own mutterings edited into more acceptable sounds in 'The Invitation' (1819) when it was published in *The London Magazine* in 1820. The final two stanzas of this poem in the manuscript version printed in Robinson and Powell's Oxford edition read as follows:

> He feels the gentrys kindness much
> The muse she mutterd pen a sonnet
> Ye cant gie less returns for such
> So he that moment fixt upon it
>
> & much he star'd & gausd about
> & mutterd oer his his undertaking
> & glad he was to shamble out
> Wi little ceremony making
>
> (*EP*, I, ll. 25-32, p. 499)

The version that was printed in the *London Magazine* replaces these mutterings:

> He felt the gentry's kindness much,
> The Muse, she whisper'd 'pen a sonnet,'
> 'Ye can't gi'e less return for such,
> 'So instantly begin upon it!'

[98] S. T. Coleridge, *Poetical Works*, ed. by J. C. C Mays, 8 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), I.I, p. 232.
[99] John Thelwall, *Poems, Chiefly Written in Retirement* (London: W. H. Parker, 1801), p. 165.

So, after gazing round about,
And musing o'er his undertaking,
Right glad was he to shamble out,
With little ceremony making.[100]

Perhaps it was felt that the more subversive connotations of muttering, with its hint at complaints being obscured from listeners, was not an appropriate tone for a poem that would introduce Clare to and be circulated amongst the wider public. The substitution of 'musing' also removes the sense of the vocal that 'mutterd' conveys, silencing the clumsy or imperfect sound of composition into a moment of concentrated thought, or communion with a higher level of inspiration. These edits are revealing for the way that they stifle what comes to be a crucial oral term for Clare's own imaginings of and reflections on his poetic process. Whilst his use of 'murmur', 'murmurs', 'murmuring', and 'murmurings' does not seem to be significantly more or less than other poets of the period, his body of work contains more instances of 'mutter', 'mutters', 'muttering', mutterings', and 'muttered' than any of his Romantic or earlier contemporaries. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, and Shelley use some of these variations on occasion, whilst his 'brother bards' Keats, Bloomfield, and Chatterton seldom do. Charlotte Smith, whom Clare admired for her detailed depictions of the natural world, and Thomson, a major poetic influence, are also both left lacking in their use of this register.[101] Why, then, is Clare so drawn to this mode of speaking? Or what does it offer him that the softer sound of murmuring might not?

In Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), 'mutter' and 'murmur' are not defined as separate vocal qualities to the same degree that they appear to be

[100] 'Some Account of John Clare, an Agricultural Labourer and Poet', *London Magazine*, 1.1 (Jan 1820), pp. 7-11 (p. 11).
[101] The online resource *Literature Online* lists 80 combined occurrences of 'mutter', 'mutters', 'muttering', 'mutterings', and 'muttered' in Clare's poetry, 23 in Wordsworth, 20 in Byron, 15 in Coleridge, 11 in Shelley, 8 in Thomson, 4 in Charlotte Smith, and 2 in Bloomfield and Chatterton, see http://literature.proquest.com.

in their poetic appearances. His entry for 'mutter' calls upon 'murmur' as an interchangeable sub-vocal term, defining it as 'To grumble; to murmur', 'To utter with imperfect articulation; to grumble forth', and 'Murmur; obscure utterance'.[102] Sheridan's *Complete Dictionary of the English Language* (1780) also treated 'mutter' and 'murmur' as almost interchangeable terms, both with connotations of complaint and discontent. His text defines 'murmur' as 'A low continued buzzing noise; a complaint half suppressed'; 'To give a low buzzing sound; to grumble, to utter secret discontent', whilst 'mutter' was defined as 'to grumble, to murmur'; 'murmur, obscure utterance'.[103] It is interesting to note that within these texts that sought to prescribe how the words of the English language should be pronounced in accordance with elocutionary principles, as much as to catalogue and define the words that make up that language, these sub-vocal registers are subsumed into one another without much distinction. They take on equal value as that which is inarticulate and deliberately obscured.

Yet, as evidenced by the above examples, muttering and murmuring communicate a more differentiated sonic range when they become poetic sounds. For Clare, they are perhaps even more distinct as a sound that occurs in the natural world and the sound of the subject processing what they hear in a moment of personal reflection and composition. Take, for instance, this recollection from his autobiographical prose, recounting his return to agricultural labouring after working as a gardener:

> the continued sameness of a garden cloyed me and I resumed my old employments with pleasure were I coud look on the wild heath, the wide spreading variety of cultured and fallow fields, green meadows, the crooking brooks, and the dark woods waving to the murmuring winds these were my delights and here I coud mutter to myself as usual unheard an unnoticd by the sneering clown and conscieted coxcomb,

[102] Samuel Johnson, 'To Mutter *v.n'*, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London: J and P. Knapton, 1755), p. 1343.
[103] Thomas Sheridan, *A Complete Dictionary of the English Language, both with Regard to Sound and Meaning*, 2 vols. (London: Charles Dilly, 1790; 1780), II, pp. 85-87.

> and here my old habits and feelings returnd with redoubled ardour for they left me while I was a gardiner'[104]

Here, Clare's earlier embarrassment as being 'overheard' composing rhymes to himself by others has shifted to a more confident pursuit of that which 'delights' him, even though it still attracts the 'sneering' of those who might encounter the sounds of such a scene. Yet more interesting is the counterpoint of murmuring and muttering in this passage. Clare sets up a kind of sonic boundary between what one hears in the natural world, and how one processes that sound, so that murmuring is not echoed by the listener, but transformed into his own sub-vocal appreciation or transposition of it. Muttering might be a more active sound for Clare, then, a way to vocalise the thought process that occurs in listening to something and reciprocating with a personal response.

Indeed, muttering is often productive when it occurs across his work. In 'The Wild Flower Nosgay' (1820), he recalls how:

> I roamd the fields about a happy child
> & bound my posies up with rushy ties
> & laughd & mutterd oer my visions wild
> Bred in the brain of pleasures extasies
>
> (*EP*, I, ll. 13-16, p. 410)

The physical action of gathering up flowers into arrangements is layered onto another craft in these lines, with 'posies' echoing 'poesy'. Muttering is again the register associated with composition and, furthermore, with the possibility of madness manifested as 'visions wild' and a state of ecstasy: both are underscored by the rhythmical trip of 'oer' that has the potential to derail the metre of the line. In 'Dawning of Genius' (1817-19), too, muttering

[104] *By Himself*, p. 13.

becomes the process of transforming experience into language, or of searching for a language with which to structure a perception of the world:

> Thus pausing wild on all he saunters by
> He feels enrapturd tho he knows not why
> & hums & mutters oer his joys in vain
> & dwells on something which he cant explain
> The bursts of thought with which his souls perplex
> Are bred one moment & are gone the next
> Yet still the heart will kindling sparks retain
> & thoughts will rise & fancy strive again
>
> (*EP*, I, ll. 33-40, p. 452)

Muttering here is figured as the sound of trying to pin down impressions as they occur, to fix thoughts as they arise, but without necessarily having to 'explain' what those thoughts or impressions are. Furthermore, the action of 'pausing wild' poses an embodiment of a measure that is at once orderly and disorderly, so that the sauntering pace of the genius becomes a manifestation of the wayward expression of his thoughts. For the subject who cannot 'explain' his rapturous experience of the world around him, it is more important to sound out the workings behind their mental or inspirational activity, and to trace their development (again reaching an erratic and 'enrapturd' pitch of potential madness), than it is to have to sort them into a fixed or coherent meaning. Uttering 'hums' and 'mutters' may be 'in vain' in these lines, but that is not to deny them any other purpose, or the pleasure that arises from the act of mere sounding. Perhaps this could be one instance of what Clare means when he states that he prefers 'correct thinking' over clarity and grammatical precision; a sense of the inexplicable that translates into an audible form of disorder and spontaneity. To return to 'The Crazy Maid', madness might be one way of classifying this form of thinking, but muttering is the route to verbalising and evidencing it through sound.

'The Crazy Maid' studies the plight of a young woman whose insanity is again figured predominantly through verbal ticks and incoherencies:

> Poor wilderd wretch shell labour hard adays
> Folding her aprons corners snugly up
> To fill her lap with pebbles – searching round
> With much industry these she deems as stars
> Dropt from the heavens by her lovers hand
> To please & make her happy – she woud laugh
> & count the heap shed gatherd oer & oer
> Suns moons & stars oft sorting them shed sit
> For hours & hours upon some hilly bank
> Arranging them in letters of his name
> Decietfull man she lovd him & was happy
> & as her childish playthings wearied her
> Shed rise & kiss them one by one & woud
> Mumble to each some pretty secret story
> Giving them charge to take it to her lover
> Some tender tale as how she lovd him still
> & how ere while promise long made
> She tended to fullfill to take a trip to heaven
> To see & live with him & be at rest
> Thus to her stones shed mutter & woud oft
> Cite striking passages that pleasd her much
> Of things once past in their unlucky love
> As true as if shed reason ever so
>
> (*EP*, II, ll.71-93, p. 455-56)

Significantly, in a passage full of obsessive counting and time-keeping, there are moments where words arise that cannot be counted to an exact measure. 'Oer & oer' and 'hours & hours' are both measurements of a repetitive act and of the time spent doing it. Yet there is an unsettling inexactness to these descriptions. Rhythmically, both 'hour' and 'oer' seem to match each other in a neat replication of time and action; but each is ambiguous in the number of syllables it contains. Both swing between one or two syllables depending on how they are emphasised: the location of both in their poetic lines suggests they become elided

into one syllable in order to fit within the iambic pentameter. Yet the hint of the extra syllable is still hidden in them, engendering a sense of uncertainty about the maid's actions. The stones have already become objects of indeterminacy before they are then affiliated with the implication of more confusing sounds. 'The Crazy Maid' allows him to explore the affective qualities of such a language in relation to poetry. When the maid mumbles to the stones in order to 'give them charge to take it to her lover', the word 'charge' suggests some form of exchange or transformation. To take seriously the maid's 'belief' that she has endowed the stones with the 'charge' of her own voice is not to believe what Clare has set up as mad and pitiable behaviour, but rather to conceive of a way to think about the stones as poems themselves.

The mutterings of the maid are not directed totally towards herself in this poem, but offered outwards, along with the recitation of 'striking passages'. They are objects that have been arranged rhythmically ('oer & oer…for hours & hours') into letters and words, representations of 'mad' sounds that are offered up for interpretation. In his essay 'Poetry and Schizophrenia', John Wilkinson observes that 'in any act of poetical writing different levels of consciousness are involved', and so poets may be 'deploying the language of madness under […] conscious control, and for calculated literary purpose'.[105] Wilkinson is concerned with debunking the idea that the choice of poetic language or style can be used as 'evidence' for pathology, and for a decreased awareness of and control over what one is writing. He therefore creates a place for madness as an integral element of the compositional process. Indeed, in *The Work of Poetry* (1997), John Hollander opens his titular chapter by observing that 'A poet's work can appear to be very strange. It can look, for example, like a manual labourer's utter respite from work (sitting in a rocking chair, thinking, remembering,

[105] John Wilkinson, 'Too-Close Reading: Poetry and Schizophrenia', *The Lyric Touch: Essays on the Poetry of Excess* (Cambridge: Salt, 2007), p. 161.

muttering, humming)'.[106] In light of this, the Maid's mutterings and deliberations over her stones can be re-read as a carefully articulated craft that invites us to hear her 'craziness' reimagined as a poetic impulse.

To conclude, I would like to return to the distinctions between the sound of health and madness drawn out at the beginning of this chapter. The listener in 'Crazy Jane' can be taken as a model for what Clare asks of his own listener: a searching, unfixed mode of attention that allows the ear to wander over all the potential sounds offered by a poem and, indeed, sounds that challenge conceptions of what the voice is and should be capable of. The listener in 'To Health', however, can take a more passive role, assured by the category of health that the sounds he hears will be immediately coherent and easy to interpret. The reader is offered a similar listening experience in another poem where health is conceived of as a 'voice' that speaks to the subject from the natural world. In 'On Visiting a Favourite Place' (1832), health is an instantly recognisable and familiar sound:

> Health greets me for I hear her voice
> Hope – peace are comrades once again
> Joy stoops for flowers that say rejoice
> & shall such friendships cheer in vain
>
> (*MP*, III, ll. 11-14, p.562)

The mutterings and other sub-vocal utterances that so often create a tension between rhythmic regularity and irregularity in Clare's poems train the ear to resist the supposedly uncomplicated listening experience associated with health. This could be taken as another instance where health is defined as the antithesis of madness – a voice instead of noise, personified instead of vague wandering sound, addressing the listener directly instead of

[106] John Hollander, 'The Work of Poetry', *The Work of Poetry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 3-12 (p. 3).

skirting around the edges of auditory perception. And yet, in line thirteen, the word ‘flowers’ refuses to be subsumed into this neat auditory arrangement. Instead it holds a small moment of rebellion against harmony and coherency with yet another ambiguous syllable lurking beneath the iambic tetrameter. Muttering is productive in more ways than one for Clare. It offers him an alternative poetic register through which to air more openly the sounds of madness and use them to structure the kind of thinking that guides poetry rather than rational discourse, but it also invites us to listen more closely when all we think we can hear is health.

Chapter Two

'As from healthier climes': Breath and Atmospherics

If the previous chapter was concerned with how Clare negotiates and challenges the construction of health as a vocal phenomenon, then this chapter looks beyond the voice to the underlying force that guides it: the breath. It suggests that, for Clare, breath is poetry's means of disclosing the effects of atmosphere and climate so central to his understanding and representation of health: breath is thus taken up in his poetry both as an image of health and as a material force rendered by the poem. As a poet who worked and wrote outside, climate was an immediate issue for Clare. Jonathan Bate, in his discussion of the posthumous diagnosis of Clare's psychophysiological complaint, even suggests that he might have suffered from a form of seasonal affective disorder: 'Clare was conscious of the seasonal cycle of his illness. In temperate climates depressive symptoms peak in spring and autumn: these were the times of year when he said that the blue devils most often came upon him'.[1] While this theory is one of several Bate offers to diagnose Clare, it opens the seasonal and climatic behaviours of Clare's condition to a strain of medical thinking across his poems and prose. This chapter traces the synthesis of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century medical theories of local and national climate and atmospheric shifts within his works. It begins by introducing the breath as a point from which to consider the poem as an affective register of both climatic transmission and contamination. It then looks more closely at Clare's formal manipulations of the breath that complicate distinctions between healthy and unhealthy breathing. The influence of Keats on Clare's representation and control of the breath is integral to this discussion, which compares his nineteenth-century reception to Clare's: reviewers of both sought to define literary affect and readerly experience in terms of health

[1] Jonathan Bate, *John Clare: A Biography* (London: Picador, 2003), p. 413.

and illness via metaphors of breath and contagion. Rather than reinforcing the critical evaluation of Keats and Clare as each other's literary antithesis, however, I look more closely at how both poets respond to what has been considered a Romantic preoccupation with aerial effects, and at how this shapes their attitudes towards the breath as a material phenomenon and as a vehicle of health. In particular, I consider how Clare responds to Keats's representations of the sensible body, and what he might take away from the interplay of medicine and poetry in the latter's formal command of pulse and breath. The chapter then opens out to discuss how Clare brings his own local environment to bear on the relationship between breath and health. I seek to enrich understanding of how the poet negotiates different forms of air, and to attend to the politics of aerial exposure as they inflect his inquiries into physical and mental health.

'a medicated atmosphere': Affective Airs and Pneumatic Poetics

In his middle-period sonnet 'Midsummer' (1832), Clare associates the discovery of health in the natural world with a moment of respiratory exchange:

> Midsummers breath gives ripeness to the year
> Of beautiful & picturesque & grand
> Tinting the mountain with the hues of fear
> Bare climbing dizziness – where bushes stand
> Their breakneck emminence with danger near
> Like lives in peril – though they wear a smile
> Tis sickly green as in a homeless dream
> Of terror at their fate – while under land
> Smiles with home hues as rich as health to toil
> In mellow greens & darker lights that cheer
> The ploughmen turning up the healthy soil
> & health and pleasure glistens everywhere
> --- So high ambitions dwell as dangers guests
> & quiet minds as small birds in their nests
>
> (*MP*, IV, ll. 1-14, p. 255)

Here, Clare figures health as a product of rural labour and activity, not only implied as the result of the physical exercise of 'toil', but literally dug up from the ground, the fruit, perhaps, of the seasonal 'ripeness' breathed out at the start of the poem. By figuring health as this kind of bountiful return gained from the midsummer season, he also alludes to the role of climate and its effects as the deliverers of health. Moreover, he draws upon the breath – both the atmospheric 'breath' of the season and the breath of the subject – as the point of contact with these effects. At the same time, he dramatises the act of breathing through the formal workings of the sonnet. As the perspective flits between the contrasting topographies of mountains and fields towards the discovery of health, Clare directs the reader's breath along the way. The dashes he inserts interrupt the rhythmic pace of the lines, and so offer moments of pause that orchestrate a new intake of breath. In the first eight lines, these pauses seem to conspire with the breathless 'dizziness' of the sudden shift from the picturesque to the sublime; the lines feel gasped as they take in the 'sickly green' countenance of the bushes and the perception of terrifying height. The breath is also manipulated through the spondaic stress that falls on 'breakneck' and interrupts the line's iambic pentameter, lending it an ominous physicality beyond the precarious angle of the bushes. One's own neck is brought to the fore as a site of breathing and of the threat of injury.

Yet what can be taken as the sonnet's volta in line nine turns the movement away from the dizzy heights of the sublime towards a lower prospect. With this shift in perspective comes a new vista organised around a fresh category: health. This transition is also marked by the formal control of breathing. Indeed, there is already a sonic clue woven into this poem as to the integral relationship between breath and health, fostered through their half rhyme and shared 'ea' sound that also acts as a visual rhyme between the two. As the 'breath' that opens the first line ripens and echoes through 'healthy' and 'health', Clare emphasises the

acoustic union of these words in his orchestration of the lines. The dash that initiates the start of the turn in line eight suspends the breath, before releasing it in sympathy with the rush of health facilitated by the unimpeded lines that follow. Turning towards a more practical, work-driven engagement with nature, Clare is aware of health as both a felt, physical state and as an aesthetic principle. The visually pleasing and the physically beneficial come together in the lines 'while under lands / Smile with home hues as rich as health to toil'. Prosopopoeia and synaesthesia, in which the reader is given the sense of the land smiling in colours, combine to represent a rich sensory experience aligned with the tangible causal relationship between 'toil' and 'health'. Surveying the land here begets health in a manner similar to how the exercise of labour produces healthful effects in the body, and the allure of natural landscape as a therapeutic space is conceived both somatically and aesthetically.

This continues in the following lines, where the physical 'turning up' of the soil (itself 'healthy' and full of goodness) uncovers a 'health and pleasure' that appeals to taste as much as to the body. In his conflation of the physical with the artful, Clare contributes to and develops received aesthetic categories, recognising how they can structure the perception and physical experience of the world before turning towards health as his preferred aesthetic and bodily mode. He reveals his 'debt to the discourse' of the sublime and the picturesque, as Sarah Houghton-Walker notes, by reshaping them into a model of health that combines the realm of the aesthetic with a more 'down-to-earth', material condition.[2] There is something of Onno Oerlemans' conception of the 'material sublime' at work here, defined as:

> not just a sense of awe and fear (those 'horrid moods') but a sudden recognition that it is possible to see at once how thought and existence are estranged from a clear awareness of the physical world, and that they are yet inexplicably rooted in it. It is also, of course, a yearning to recover that rootedness.[3]

[2] Sarah Houghton Walker, 'Enkindling Ecstasy: The Sublime Vision of John Clare', *Romanticism* 9.2 (2003), pp. 176-195.
[3] Onno Oerlemans, *Romanticism and the Materiality of Nature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), p. 5.

The yearning for 'rootedness' that Oerlemans describes emerges in the closing lines, and extends into a representation of health as that rootedness. Breath is both the background and the foreground to this realisation. It signifies a connection between the subject and his surroundings as an image of seasonal context, but also as the bodily manifestation of affective experience in the gasps of sublime terror and the supposedly easier breaths of grounded health. Breath therefore becomes a means of tracing, not only the influence of atmospheric effects upon the subject, but also how these effects might transmit from poem to reader.

Integral to the aesthetic categories of the sublime and the picturesque, to the actions of labour, to atmospheric effects, and to the manipulations of poetic form, breath is, as Michael O'Neill has it, 'all-sustaining'.[4] Taken from Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), O'Neill understands the 'all-sustaining air' as the persistent Romantic influence upon modern poetry that frequently manifests in references to the air and the breath. These references become 'multi-faceted' metaphors that transmit across poetic periods and disciplines, and 'sustain' experience in another sense: they offer 'an image of the way in which human beings are affected by, and affect, prevailing climates of thought and belief'.[5] Air, breath, and their cognates and synonyms are 'all-sustaining' because of their recurrence as images and metaphors across poetic movements, but also because of what they are metaphors for: the transmission and exchange of thoughts and feelings that arise from the subject's interactions with others and with the world. This argument builds on M. H. Abrams' recognition of the 'correspondent breeze' that pervades the Romantic canon and reveals poets of this period to be captivated frequently by the movement of air in both the external world and within

[4] Michael O'Neill, *The All-Sustaining Air: Romantic Legacies and Renewals in British, American, and Irish Poetry Since 1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
[5] O'Neill, *All-Sustaining Air*, p. 16.

themselves.[6] Abrams argued it to be the 'chief theme of continuity and interchange between outer motions and the interior life and powers'.[7] Air and its motions are bound up (sometimes simultaneously) with immaterial concepts of inspiration and the spirit, with atmospheric and seasonal elements such as winds, breezes and storms, with musical and poetic associations of Aeolian vibrations, with revolutionary impulse, and, on a physiological level, with respiration and 'the action of human lungs'.[8]

As a result of their physiological, psychological, and emotional resonance, air and breath are also discussed frequently within affect theory. In her study of the relationship between thinking, feeling, and their textual representations, Isobel Armstrong is drawn to breathing as the most immediate and visceral site of affective transmission:

> What could an utterance and a burst of gunfire share? Most obviously, they temporarily alter breathing patterns, the gasp prompted by the assault of unexpected gunfire, the effort of responding to the aggressive speech patterns of a poem.[9]

Armstrong envisages reading a poem almost as a form of assault, thrust upon the reader via the breath in order to make him feel its affective content physically as well as cognitively. Her assessment of the aesthetic as always 'experienced in consciousness and registered by the body', and for which the breath is a key vehicle, is expressive of air in its Romantic sense outlined by Abrams.[10] By opening his sonnet with an exhalation, 'midsummer breath', Clare engages actively with the connotations of this trope, and anticipates his poem as an affective aesthetic space. When he later arrives at health as an ideal state disclosed by the sonnet, he has already set up a framework of mind-body transmission, and so health becomes offered out to the reader as an affective state tangible beyond the poem's bounds. Tuning into

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[6] M. H. Abrams, 'The Correspondent Breeze: A Romantic Metaphor', *English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. M. H. Abrams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 37-54.
[7] Abrams, 'The Correspondent Breeze', p. 36.
[8] Abrams, 'The Correspondent Breeze', p. 37.
[9] Isobel Armstrong, *The Radical Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 109.
[10] Armstrong, *Radical Aesthetic*, p. 108.

breath's potential within form to cross over from the metaphorical to the material, as well as its supposed potential to transmit the affective experiences a poem might name, Clare is able to figure breath as that which begets health.

So far, I have set up the interplay between the aesthetic and the affective that will remain crucial for considering Clare's explorations of breath, health, and the relationship between them. Casting over the connections forged between the two in medical spheres also offers a rich framework for developing further a sense of how the poet might shape the breath. Breath and health share a connection that stretches back to the 'pneuma' or 'air' that pervades ancient Greek and Roman medicine.[11] The word 'pneumatic' anticipates Abrams' sense of the Romantic adoption of air as both material and metaphorical, as well as metaphysical; it can mean 'belonging or relating to spirit or spiritual existence' as well as 'relating to or operated by means of wind or air', and later came to refer especially to air that is 'under pressure'.[12] 'Pneuma' defined an immaterial spirit or life force that enters the body as the source of both health and disease, as well as, according to Steven Connor, an 'active fiery principle that pervades and animates the cosmos'.[13] These early terms found an echo in some of the medical and scientific innovations concerning the effect of airs on disease that captured eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thought. The investigations that occurred at the Pneumatic Institute in Bristol during 1799-1802 can especially be seen to have developed the pneumatic school of thinking into an experimental practice, where air materialised into a substance that could be examined for its composite elements, both healthy and unhealthy, and then be inhaled deliberately. Prior to the Pneumatic Institute, the development of pneumatic chemistry by Joseph Priestley, amongst others, led to the discovery of the different 'airs', or

[11] See, for example, Georgia L. Irby, ed., *A Companion to Science, Technology, and Medicine in Ancient Greece and Rome*, 2 vols. (Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), pp. 308-354, 516.
[12] *OED*, 'pneumatic', *adj*. and *n.*, senses 1 and 2.
[13] *OED*, 'pneuma', *n*., sense 2; Steven Connor, *The Matter of Air: Science and Art of the Ethereal* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), p. 157.

elemental gases. Priestley's six-volume *Experiments and Observations on Different Kinds of Air* (1774-86) is one of the most influential works in this area, detailing the discovery of oxygen, nitrous oxide and nitric oxide, and ammonia amongst others. As Sharon Ruston argues, Priestley's pneumatic experiments also fed into vitalist debates, where although 'by the 1790s, air had been ruled out as the single principle of life', the works of Priestley and also John Thelwall's *An Essay Towards a Definition of Animal Vitality* (1793) showed that vitalists were still captivated by how 'knowledge of respiration might illustrate how the vital principle operated'.[14] At the Institute, Thomas Beddoes, Humphry Davy, and James Watt explored the medical uses that could be given to newly discovered gases and, as Neil Vickers argues, tried 'to refine out of common air the very essence of the exciting powers'.[15] The inhalation of various gases, such as carbon dioxide, oxygen, or hydrogen, via different breathing apparatuses, were trialled on both healthy and unhealthy subjects, but especially, as Beddoes records, on 'the choice of patients, who could have no hope from common remedies, and by consequence might be fit subjects for the factitious airs'.[16] The discovery that air can be 'factitious' and manufactured deliberately to excite or affect mental and physical faculties was a medical innovation that also had consequences for how the craft and affective work of poetry were conceived.

The work being carried out at the Pneumatic Institute captured the attention of Coleridge, who participated in the inhalation of nitrous oxide in aid of Davy's investigation into whether it was a powerful physical stimulant that could 'increase the force of circulation, produce pleasurable feeling, alter the conditions of the organs of sensation, and in their most extensive action destroy life'.[17] Perhaps his encounters with air as a medical technology used

[14] Sharon Ruston, *Shelley and Vitality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 27.
[15] Neil Vickers, *Coleridge and the Doctors: 1795-1806* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 49.
[16] Thomas Beddoes, M. D., *Notice of Some Observations Made at the Medical Pneumatic Institution* (Bristol: T. N. Longman and O. Rees, 1799), p. 6.
[17] Humphry Davy, *Researches, Chemical and Philosophical; Chiefly Concerning Nitrous* Oxide (London: J. Johnson, 1800), p. 555.

to stimulate the body and mind influenced Coleridge's suggestion in *Biographia Literaria* (1817) that poetic metre 'tends to increase the vivacity and susceptibility both of the general feelings and the attention […] As a medicated atmosphere, or as wine during animated conversation, they act powerfully, though themselves unnoticed'.[18] He finds in contemporary medical applications of air a framework for poetic form, and specifically for metre, that masks its work from those who encounter it. It is the enigmatic potential for air to act upon the human faculties, such as the body or mind, and yet remain invisible in itself that captures Coleridge's imagination and makes it a rich metaphor for the affective work of poetics. Wordsworth had also been drawn previously to the atmospheric as a poetic realm. In his 1802 'Preface', he wrote:

> The objects of the Poet's thoughts are everywhere; though the eyes and senses of man are, it is true, his favourite guides, yet he will follow wheresoever he can find an atmosphere of sensation in which to move his wings.[19]

That the poet should follow 'an atmosphere of sensation' as his main compositional drive rather than the more immediate sensory faculties suggests that Wordsworth, like Coleridge, was drawn to the atmospheric as an elusive yet vital model of poetic affect. An atmosphere circulates around an environment, unable to be touched or seen, but felt regardless and necessary to sustain life. By placing the poet in this airy domain, he likens the poem to an environment that requires a sustaining force to animate it. Both poets offer psycho-physiological models of poetic form that harness the materiality of affect as an 'atmosphere', and so can be considered as sympathetic with the pneumatic understanding of air as something that, like the poem, can be administered to the physical and mental faculties.

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[18] S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), II, p. 66.
[19] William Wordsworth, 'Preface to *Lyrical Ballads'* (1802), in *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, ed. By James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 741-760 (p. 753)

Whilst a full account of the theories and responses that came out of the work at the Pneumatic Institute is beyond the scope of this chapter, it remains a significant context for setting up how air and atmospherics were seized by medical experimentation and poetic imagination in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The new materiality lent to air by its experimental separation and application in a clinical setting further revealed it as a force capable of inducing healthy or unhealthy effects upon the body, without completely eradicating its invisible or enigmatic qualities. What should also be noted, however, is the difference that the Pneumatic Institute reveals between air as an emergent medical technology, and as an element circulating in the natural world. Inhaling selected airs in an indoor setting via an apparatus and taking the air of one's natural surroundings are two different forms of encounter. Coleridge's appropriation of the Institute's therapeutic airs complicates this distinction. In his correspondence with Davy he discusses a man who displays 'rampant high spirits' and recurrent 'paroxysms', the causes of which are mysterious. He asks: 'Does it not seem here, as if Nature herself had elaborated the nitrous oxyde out of the common Air?'[20] His suggestion that the air of the outdoors can take on the qualities of that which would normally be applied in a clinical setting suggests that he anticipates an encounter with air that is not always 'natural'. That is, even breathing in the air of one's surroundings can take on the experience of its being administered somehow, and can also be as stimulating or therapeutic as the medicated airs inhaled at the Institute. Coleridge's suggestion that metre might function as a 'medicated atmosphere' is alive to the possibility that the poem could be a space that registers these conflicting senses of air as natural and applied. Furthermore, health and breath's initial meeting in the sense of the

[20] S. T. Coleridge, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Leslie Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), I, pp. 605-6.

'pneumatic' might also have something to offer a reading of poetry's potential to become itself a kind of airy technology.

Given their early linguistic relationship, it should not be surprising that the appearance of breath in poetry both Romantic and otherwise is accompanied frequently by health. Yet what else might breath and health's relationship in the sense of the 'pneumatic' lend poets who explore their interconnectedness? For Clare, the scene that unfolds in 'Midsummer' intimates the sense of health as an invisible, airy 'pneuma' whilst at the same time favouring a more embodied materiality. There is an element of the 'pneumatic' in his formal manipulations of the breath, revealing his attention to the poem as a space that might put air 'under pressure'; it might imagine and reconceptualise different forms and associations of air as well as put more material pressure on the action of breathing through its metrical pacing or disruptions of the line. Rather than Coleridge's unobtrusive metrical 'atmosphere', form and all of its potential interruptions comes to the fore as the means through which a poem makes us aware of the breath. This sense of the breath as a malleable material, as well as its connectedness to health, also occupies poets whose volumes Clare had in his library or those for whom he professed an admiration.

Thomson's *The Seasons* (1730) is well-known for being the first volume Clare owned and for supposedly sparking his poetic development ('I still remember my sensations in reading the opening of Spring', he wrote).[21] Each season sees Thomson describe in detail its various atmospheric effects on both the natural world and the minds and bodies of those who inhabit it. Jonathan Bate argues that Thomson's appreciation of a 'Newtonian concept of order' within the seasons does not account for 'weather as a primary sign' of nature's 'mutability'.[22] It is perhaps his reliance on the felicity and regularity of seasonal transitions,

[21] *By Himself*, p. 10.
[22] Jonathan Bate, 'Living With the Weather', *Studies in Romanticism* 35 (1996), pp. 431-47 (p. 439).

however, which allows Thomson to usher in their positive effects. What is significant is how central health is within the seasonal shifts across the volume and, moreover, how it is represented as airy motions and figurations of the breath. In 'Spring', he recalls how 'Pure was the temperate air' and the 'Zephyrs bland' that 'Breath'd o'er the blue Expanse […] / […] Of Nutriment and Health' (ll. 323-339).[23] Later in 'Autumn', health is carried again by seasonal airy motions and received as an intake of breath: 'He, when young Spring protrudes the bursting Gems, / Marks the first Bud, and sucks the healthful Gale / Into his freshen'd Soul' (ll. 1311-1313).[24] Breath and health together pervade the work of other poets in Clare's personal library.[25] Mary Robinson's 'Ode to Health' (1824) yearns for the 'soft and fragrant breath' of health (l. 56), whilst 'The Progress of Melancholy' (1824) invokes 'bliss-breathing health' (l. 54).[26] William Cowper's *The Task* (1785) describes the 'breath of blooming health' (II, l. 184), whilst James Montgomery refers to the 'breath of life and health' in 'A Night in A Stage-Coach' (1828) (ll. 35-36).[27] Robert Bloomfield, who, along with Keats, Alan Cunningham, and Chatterton was cited as one of Clare's 'brother bards', also figured health in relation to breath and other airy sensations. In 'Shooter's Hill' (1819), he implores 'Come then, O Health! I'll strive to bound / My wishes to this airy strand; […] / […] Give strength of nerve and vigorous breath' (ll. 77-86).[28]

These glances at some of the poets Clare read show breath and health to have been figured within a literary framework as much as a medical one. Whilst Abrams's essay

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[23] James Thomson, *The Seasons,* ed. James Sambrook (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 18-20.
[24] Thomson, *The Seasons*, p. 199.
[25] As in David Powell, *Catalogue of the John Clare Collection in the Northampton Public Library* (County Borough of Northampton: Public Libraries, Museums, and Art Galleries Committee, 1964), pp. 23-34.
[26] Mary Robinson, *The Poetical Works of the Late Mrs Mary Robinson* (London: Jones & Company, 1824), pp. 36, 23. The dates of publication given refer to the publication of the edition in Clare's personal library, which is a posthumous edition of Robinson's poetical works. The poems were published originally in *Poems by Mrs M. Robinson*, 2 vols (London: 1791), I.
[27] William Cowper, *The Poems of William Cowper*, ed. John D. Baird and Charles Ryskamp, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980-1995), II, p. 143; James Montgomery, *The Poetical Works of James Montgomery* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1828; 1850), p. 120.
[28] Robert Bloomfield, *Wild Flowers; or, Pastoral and Local Poetry* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1819), p. 80.

reveals this interplay as occurring across the Romantic period, the figure who has received perhaps the most attention from critics as bringing the poetic and the medical together in conceptions of the breath is Keats. A qualified apothecary and surgeon trained and educated at Guy's and St Thomas's Hospital, Keats frequently encountered the body on both a theoretical and practical level. His attendance at Astley Cooper's anatomy and physiology lectures, recaptured through his personal lecture notes, as well as courses in the 'Practice of Medicine' and 'Theory of Medicine and Materia Medica', resulted in an intimate knowledge of the body's various systems and interrelated functions.[29] This theoretical knowledge was accompanied by first-hand experience of the ill and injured body. As the detailed accounts of Nicholas Roe, Donald Goellnicht, and Hermione De Almeida reveal, the grisly realities of surgery showed him that the body does not always behave in reality as it does in theoretical discussions of systems and procedures.[30] This often translates into a poetically intuitive way of representing bodily effects and sensations, where form and content come together to recreate corporeal behaviours without putting them under strict control.

For example, Keats frequently takes advantage of the trope of poetry as a breath-like inspiration in order to bestow it with a more material impact through form. In 'Ode to Apollo' (1815) he traces the efforts of his poetic ancestors in breath-like terms. Spenser emits 'Wild Warblings from the Aeolian lyre / Enchantment softly breathe, and tremblingly expire' (ll. 34-35), whilst 'the laurel'd peers' stand 'Breathless' after the contributions of Maro (ll. 16-20), and Shakespeare's 'lips pour forth […] inspiring words' (l. 29).[31] Breath functions as a classical sense of the 'breath' of poetry, poetic inspiration, and connection with

[29] See Donald Goellnicht, *The Poet-Physician: Keats and Medical Science* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984); Hermione De Almeida, *Romantic Medicine and John Keats* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).
[30] See Goellnicht, *Poet-Physician*, p. 20, and Nicholas Roe, 'The Pharmacopolitical Poet', *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 160-181 (p. 163).
[31] All references to Keats's poetry are from John Keats, *Major Works*, ed. Elizabeth Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). All book and line numbers are cited within text.

the muses, but is also brought to a more physiological level through rhythm. In the words 'tremblingly expire', 'inspiring' and 'Aeolian lyre', for example, Keats is alert to the spoken element of poetry, or the way its form directs speech, because he offers through these words different rhythmic possibilities that play with vocal inflection; 'lyre', 'expire' and 'inspiring' all possess the potential for an extra syllable. They are words that, through their 'ire' (or 'yre') sounds, seem to squash two syllables together. Such diphthong-like, gliding speech sounds complicate where to place the stress and the breath when uttering the line. 'Aeolian' and 'tremblingly' offer alternative syllable counts, too, as 'Aeo' seems to compact two syllables into one, whilst 'tremblingly' hints at a tremulous fourth syllable lurking within its sounds ('trem-b-ling-ly'). In 'On Poetry in General' (1818), William Hazlitt draws on breathlessness as a key component of what he calls poetic 'progress':

> painting gives the event, poetry the progress of events: but it is during the progress, in the interval of expectation and suspense, while our hopes and fears are strained to the highest pitch of breathless agony, that the pinch of the interest lies.[32]

Keats, whose attendance at Hazlitt's lectures has been well established, may well have been influenced by this conception of poetic breathlessness.[33] As he charts the 'progress' of events in 'Ode to Apollo', he materialises a form of 'breathless agony' through lines that challenge a sense of even breathing as they follow the expressive attempts of each poet.

The 'breathless agony' of poetic utterance was also an uncomfortable reality for Keats. Any consideration of breath in his poetry is confronted by it as a reminder of the poet's own consumptive state and that of his brother's, whom he nursed. The debilitated

[32] William Hazlitt, 'On Poetry in General', *Lectures on the English Poets: Delivered at the Surrey Institution* (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1818), pp. 1-38 (pp. 20-21).
[33] See Nicholas Roe, *John Keats* (London; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), pp. 208-214. See also David Bromwich, *Hazlitt: The Mind of a Critic* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 362-401.

Titans in 'Hyperion: A Fragment' (1818; 1820), for example, are not presented as lauded poet-figures with a heightened nervous sensibility. Instead they:

> Were pent in regions of laborious breath;
> Dungeon'd in opaque element, to keep
> Their clenched teeth still clench'd, and all their limbs
> Lock'd up like veins of metal, cramp't and screw'd;
> Without a motion, save of their big hearts
> Heaving in pain, and horribly convuls'd
> With sanguine feverous boiling gurge of pulse
> (II, ll. 22-28)

With the enormous size of the Titans comes an amplification of their physical pain, registered through Keats's formal orchestration of the breath. The 'laborious' breath is emphasised by the gliding syllables of 'laborious', and by the semi-colon that makes the line feel 'pent' with its sudden pause. Keats also sounds out a form of laboured breathing in this passage, where the consonance and near-assonance of 'hearts', 'Heaving' and 'horribly' mimics a fraught exhalation. Later on in the poem, Hyperion's even, healthy breathing becomes threatened: 'He spake, and ceas'd, the while a heavier threat / Held struggle with his throat but came not forth;' (ll. 251-52). Here interruptive commas mimic the difficulty of breath passing through, and again the semi-colon placed after 'came not forth' produces a deliberate hiatus in sympathy with strangled utterance. Keats is not frightened to explore the limits of the breath, directing it into moments of disruption even as he is painfully aware of breathing as a fundamental requirement of health. It is this willingness to submit the breath to formal interruption, whilst cognisant of its potentially damaging psycho-physiological effects, that I want to explore in relation to Clare's response to Keats.

'In living character & breathing word': Keats and Clare's Textual Contagions

A fragmentary, yet influential, relationship between Clare and Keats has been traced by critics who have sought to uncover their traces of communication as well as to compare their formal innovations.[34] They are two poets who should have met but never did, missing opportunities due to illness on both sides.[35] Sharing publishers in Taylor and Hessey and a doctor in George Darling, Clare and Keats skirted round each other in both literary and medical circles, their only points of contact being letters mediated through Taylor, and encounters with each other's work. Yet whilst their shared interest in and development of forms such as the sonnet has been examined in detail, scholarship on the relationship between these two poets has neglected to consider what Keats as a 'poet-physician' might have offered Clare.[36] More specifically, there has been no consideration of how the former's exploration of breath both medically and poetically might have helped to shape the latter's engagement with it in relation to health. Before turning to this train of inspiration in more detail, I assess the nineteenth-century receptions of both Keats and Clare as a crucial framework through which to read health, and illness, as terms that offer a vocabulary for the conception of their perceived aesthetic differences and wider cultural influence.

The receptions of Keats and Clare's poetics in nineteenth-century periodicals implicated them in a medicalised framing of reading experience, shaped by the specific environmental and sociocultural positions from which both poets were perceived to be writing. The class politics behind Lockhart's attack on the Cockney School have been discussed by Jeffrey Cox and Gregory Dart, amongst others.[37] They reveal the conservatism

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[34] See John Goodridge, 'Junkets and Clarissimus: The Clare-Keats Dialogue', *John Clare and Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 59-82.
[35] See Goodridge, 'Junkets and Clarissimus', p. 60.
[36] See Sara Lodge, 'Contested Bounds: John Clare, John Keats, and the Sonnet', *Studies in Romanticism* 51.4 (2012), pp. 533-554.
[37] Jeffrey Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt, and their Circle* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), pp. 16-37; Gregory Dart, *Metropolitan Art and Literature, 1810-1840 Cockney Adventures* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012), pp. 30-60. See also William Keach, 'Cockney Couplets: Keats and the Politics of Style', *Studies in Romanticism* 25 (1986), pp. 182-96.

behind the 'Cockney School campaign' and its worries about the growing cultural authority of a poetic collective who supposedly knew 'absolutely nothing of Greek, almost nothing of Latin', and whose 'muse talks indelicately like a tea-sipping milliner girl'.[38] Yet Lockhart's reviews also reveal his determination to assert Cockneyism as a threat to the contemporary canon through a specifically medicalised lexis: Hunt is decried as the founder of a new 'unhealthy and jaundiced medium' and 'disease', the successful spreading of which is apprehended 'with the most sickening aversion'.[39] Hunt's poem 'The Story of Rimini' (1816) is described as a 'pestilential air' that he 'breathed forth into the world to poison and corrupt'.[40] Here, Lockhart's airy metaphor offers a mode through which to read the affective and influential capacity of a text, figuring reception as a form of contagion. It also introduces an important play on the word 'air' that combines a sense of the poetic and the atmospheric. The musical connotations of 'air', defined as a sung tune or melody, associate it with the lyric impulse and with poetic composition.[41] As Daniel Tiffany argues, the 'substance of song – the lyric "air" – encounters its scientific shadow in the body of air described and harnessed by pneumatic philosophy'.[42] Lockhart knowingly conflates this sense of 'air' as organised, poetic sound with air as an atmospheric force, in order to emphasise what he perceives as the dangerous reach of Hunt's Cockneyism. In *Contagious Metaphor* (2012), Peta Mitchell argues that 'air has come to signify a more affective form of contagion that is also bound up with the spread of ideas and information'.[43] The 'air' of poetic song already conceives the poem as a breathing-space – as a trace of the poet's own breath – but by aligning it with

[38] Cox, *Poetry and Politics*, p. 22; John Lockhart, 'On the Cockney School of Poetry No. I', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (Oct 1817), pp.38-41 (pp. 38-39).
[39] Lockhart, 'On the Cockney School of Poetry No. I', pp. 40-41.
[40] Lockhart, 'On the Cockney School of Poetry No. III', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (Jul 1818), pp. 453-456 (p. 455).
[41] See Roland Greene, ed., *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 26.
[42] Daniel Tiffany, *Toy Medium: Materialism and Modern Lyric* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 96.
[43] Peta Mitchell, *Contagious Metaphor* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), p. 38.

pestilential, atmospheric airs, it takes on a wider reach both physiologically and socially; it can alter the ideas and behaviours of a reading population as well as their bodily sensations. Moreover, by framing a text's affective potential as 'pestilential' and contagious, the agency or defences of the person who encounters it are diminished, with air providing a model of unavoidable transference and exchange.

If Hunt is the purveyor of poison and disease, then Keats is represented as one of his most unfortunate victims. Lockhart's rhetoric, forged around airy conceptions of health and illness, bemoans how Keats has become a 'patient far gone in the poetical mania' and caught the 'infection' of Cockneysim.[44] Significantly, it is the irregularity of Keats's poetic form that is the 'infection' Lockhart decries, with the suggestion that 'firm treatment and rational restraint' would be the most effective cure.[45] He compares Keats's grasp of rhyme and metre to 'the loose, nerveless versification and Cockney rhymes of the poet of Rimini', another attack on Hunt.[46] Lockhart's physicalised and medicalised critique locates his concerns about the social and literary effects of the Cockney school in the effects of the mind upon the body – a body made up of cultural and literary values but one that is also conceived in material, physical terms in order to assert both its vulnerability and its need for 'healthy' governing forces. In this respect, he brings the development of sensibility as a form of affectivity defined through medical, philosophical, social, and literary terms into account.

As Janet Todd, Jerome McGann, and Ildiko Csengei have shown, sensibility became a highly diffuse term after gaining currency as a neurological theory of sensation registered by the nerves.[47] The neurological theories of Albrecht von Haller and Robert Whytt, as well as

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[44] Lockhart, 'On the Cockney School of Poetry No. IV: Of Keats, The Muses' Son of Promise, and What Feats He Yet May Do, &c', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (August 1818), pp. 519-24 (p. 519). See also G. M. Matthews, ed., *Keats: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge Kegan & Paul, 1971), pp. 97-110.
[45] Lockhart, 'On the Cockney School No. IV', p. 522.
[46] Lockhart, 'On the Cockney School No. IV', p. 522.
[47] Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Meuthen, 1986); Jerome McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Ildiko Csengei, *Sympathy, Sensibility, and the Literature of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

Cheyne's psychophysiological account of 'nervous diseases' in *The English Malady* (1733), paved the way for a new 'psychoperceptual system', 'symptom language', and culture of feeling that sought to define literary affect as embodied.[48] Lockhart's description of the irregularities in Keats's poetic form as 'nerveless' therefore carries echoes of the discourse of sensibility and its understanding of physiology, personal character, and literary form as interconnected. 'Nerveless' can be defined variously in reference to person, body, and literary or artistic style, with the respective definitions being 'lacking courage or resolve; weak, incapable of effort', 'lacking energy, weak, listless, limp', and 'diffuse, insipid, lifeless'. In reference to a person or a body, 'nerveless' can also mean 'lacking sensation, lifeless'.[49] To call Keats's poetics 'nerveless' is to imply that the lines themselves are weak and lifeless in a bodily sense (they have no pulse, perhaps, because his poetic metre is not fit and regular), and to anticipate the harmful physical effects of these nerveless lines on the reader.

Lockhart's approach sides with the more suspicious reception of sensibility and its effects. From the weeping 'Man of Feeling', whose tears are signs of moral and social consciousness, to the supposed swooning and fainting of 'hysterical' female readers, sensibility, particularly in relation to literary affect, came to be associated with harmful mental and physical sensations, contagion, and lack of control as much as it was perceived to be a force for moral improvement.[50] Thomas Beddoes was particularly alert to what he perceived as the pathological effects of reading, arguing that the 'passions' can be overly stimulated by certain kinds of literature in a manner 'baneful to health'.[51] Battling against the emergence of a reading public who were supposedly vulnerable to the 'hubbub in the brain'

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[48] G. J Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 3; Csengei, *Sympathy*, p. 140.
[49] *OED*, 'nerveless', *adj*., senses 1.a, 1.b, 2.a, and 2.b.
[50] Todd, *Sensibility*, p. 28.
[51] Thomas Beddoes, *Hygeia: or, Essays Moral and Medical on the Causes Affecting the Personal State of our Middling and Affluent Classes*, 3 vols. (Bristol: J. Mills, 1802-3), III, p. 164.

caused by the ever-widening dissemination of novels, poetry, and plays, Beddoes argued for caution against the mind's influence over the body:

> Who has not found how much the ideas of the mind influence bodily members? How quickly, for example, does the thought of a favourite dish make the mouth water? […] Pursue this principle, and you will understand how possible it is, that a variety of prevalent indispositions, as fluor albus, tendency to miscarriage, and even a dropsy of the ovarium, may be caught from the furniture of a circulating library.[52]

Clare, in a fit of frustration at his own declining sales, also falls into this language of contagion when later despairing at the emergent popularity of novels over poetry: 'this is the age of book-making – and like the smallpox almost everybody catches the plague'.[53] Lockhart's reviews of Keats and the Cockney School come after Beddoes' medicalization of literary affect, but retain and take seriously the argument that literature (in this case poetry and, more specifically, irregular poetic form) can corrupt the health of a reader's body and mind.

Breath and breathing were harnessed as significant tropes of this corruption for those who wished to criticise Keats's poetry and the unwelcome sensations it might produce. Just as Hunt was accused of breathing forth a 'pestilential air', so was it later suggested that Keats's poetry spread similarly harmful airs:

> In the poetry of Keats, as all must feel, there is an excess of greenth and vegetable imagery; in reading his descriptions, we seem either to breathe the air of a hothouse, heavy with the moist odours of great-leaved exotics, or to live full-stretched out at noon in some shady nook in a wood, rank underneath with the pipy hemlock, and

[52] Beddoes, *Hygeia*, III, p. 15.
[53] *By Himself*, p. 211.

> kindred plants of strange overgrowth. In Wordsworth, as we have seen, there is no such unhealthy lusciousness.[54]

The 'unhealthy lusciousness' identified by the reviewer seems to come not from an air that is poisoned, but one that is overloaded to the point of feeling artificial. The pervasive criticism of the Cockney school's synthetic and suburban perspective of the natural world ('sickly fancy' and 'laborious affected descriptions of flowers seen in window pots') is evident, as Keats's supposed 'excess' of natural imagery does not create a sustaining environment faithful to material reality, but a suffocating one drawn from artificial fantasy.[55] The 'air of a hothouse' is under pressure and cannot circulate freely, and is here suggestive of an atmosphere inhospitable to anything but the hyperbolic and unnatural. Even periodicals that gave favourable reviews of his works were drawn to the breath as disrupted or unsettled by Keats's natural descriptions, such as the remarks in the *Examiner* in 1818 that he 'always speaks of, and describes nature, with an awe and a humility, but with a deep and almost breathless affection'.[56] The presentation of Keats as a poet who does not leave the reader room to breathe, whether because of accusations of Cockney artifice or of a heightened degree of affection, opens up a conversation between his reception and Clare's, who was seen as introducing a healthier poetic aesthetic than Cockneyism could offer.

Perhaps the most well-known point of comparison between Keats and Clare is the opinions they shared about each other's poetics that can be found in the latter's correspondence. In 1820 Clare received a letter from Taylor passing on Keats's regret at being too ill to meet the poet when he visited London. Taylor also divulges Keats's opinion of Clare's poem 'Solitude': 'he observed that the Description too much prevailed over the

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[54] David Masson, 'The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth', *North British Review*, 13 (August 1850), pp. 494-95.
[55] Lockhart, 'On the Cockney School No. IV', p. 521.
[56] Unsigned Review, 'Literary Notices', *Examiner* (Oct 1818), pp. 648-49 (p. 648).

Sentiment'.[57] John Goodridge has alerted readers to the possibility that Taylor's own editorial motives may have interfered with his representation of Keats's opinion.[58] Yet whether responding to Keats's observation or to his publisher's veiled criticism, Clare offered his own views in 1830, in a letter recommending Keats's poems to Herbert Marsh:

> as far as I can judge his descriptions of senery are often very fine but as it is the case with other inhabitants of great citys he often described nature as she appeared to his fancys & not as he would have described her had he witnessed the things he describes – thus it is he has often undergone the Blackwood stigma of Cockneyism & what appears as beautys in the eyes of a pent up citizen are looked upon as consiets by those who live in the country[59]

These two assessments introduce a set of terms that ostensibly separate Keats and Clare into opposing environments and, consequently, opposing poetic sensibilities: country and city, description and sentiment, reality and artifice. Whilst Clare is judicious in his recognition that Cockneyism is a 'stigma' perhaps unfairly attached to Keats, and does not set up his own poetry explicitly as the better alternative to Keats's 'fancys' and 'consiets', his remarks echo the disunion that certain periodical reviews enforced between Cockney and rural poetics.

The contemporary reviews of Clare's poetry also utilised a medicalised discourse, but one that served to represent him as a healthful literary presence against the artificial pestilence of the Cockney school. Clare's rural poetics were heralded as an antidote to the supposedly false representations of nature that the Cockneys offered. In the *Monthly Review* in 1820 he was praised for his 'valuable' compositions that were 'artless and unsophisticated', and so a welcome change from 'the effusions of a poet writing pastorals as

[57] John Taylor, Letter to John Clare, 16 March, 1820, *Letters*, p. 38.
[58] Goodridge, *John Clare and Community*, p. 62.
[59] Letter to Herbert Marsh, January–October 1830, *Letters*, p. 519.

he wanders through the fields to the north-east of London'.[60] A later review in 1822, attributed to Josiah Conder, reasserted this view of Clare as an 'artless' poet, and revised the notion of breath as a trope of harmful contagion into an impression of descriptive immediacy:

> These poems breathe of nature in every line […] There is a literal fidelity in the sketches […] while the rural feeling which pervades and characterises them, gives meaning and animation to the tameness of the rural scene. The best substitutes for a walk in the country – we do not mean Hampstead – to those who are immured in the metropolis, would be, so far as the mind is concerned, the perusal of some of the poems of John Clare.[61]

Figured as lines that 'breathe', Clare's descriptive 'fidelity' begets an almost incarnational poetics, where his powers of 'animation' are seen to materialise the natural world for the reader beyond mere aesthetic representation. The act of reading is fleshed out into an embodied experience of both the form and the content of his works, as the review alludes to the breath of the reader, perceived to inhale those lines in their reading, as much as to the 'breath' of nature's lively and vivid descriptions. Furthermore, reading Clare's poetry is considered as a healthy supplement to physical exercise. Whilst Conder considers 'the mind' as the main beneficiary of poetry's effects, it is in fact brought into relationship with the body in what is anticipated as a healthful way through the catalyst of the breath; the mental activity of reading becomes a way to invigorate the body and enact the effects of the countryside upon the reader.

Breath recurs as this bridge between the aesthetic and the material throughout Clare's early reception, a central image in the representation of him as an unsophisticated genius who

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[60] Unsigned review, *Monthly Review* xci (1820), pp. 296-300; see *Critical Heritage*, pp. 73-76 (p. 74).
[61] Josiah Conder, 'Unsigned Review', *Eclectic Review* n.s xvii (January 1822), pp. 31-45, in *Critical Heritage*, pp. 168-171 (p. 169).

writes purely from direct experience of the natural world. In 'A Visit to John Clare' (1821), Taylor's description of Helpston remarks upon the 'poetic spirit which now breathes about the names of many of its most prominent objects'.[62] Another review reinforces the popular reputation of 'poor' Clare, a 'beggared friendless rustic […] often perhaps without even the bare materials with which to give his poetic breathings their first rude form', in a call for the continuation of patronage and funding.[63] Elsewhere, indirect praise is awarded through the remark that 'even in the poorest and meanest versifiers are now and then to be met with movements that show the breath of poetry was there'.[64] In another review it is declared that 'the poems of John Clare will always be open' to those who 'admire an earnest love of nature, expressed in simple yet appropriate language, breathing a pure and reverent spirit'.[65] Running through many of these instances is the classical notion of the poet as occupying a special, elect role, harnessing the inspirational breath of the muses. This poetic figure is complicated by Clare's labouring-class status, whilst at the same time becomes a useful way for his reviewers to reconcile their preconceptions of what a labouring-class man should be doing with his time with their praise for the poetry he has been able to produce. That poetry is a special 'breath' gifted to a chosen poet justifies how 'even the poorest and meanest versifiers' could have this breath bestowed upon them. This idea of poetry as an innate gift is further appropriated into Clare's 'peasant poet' status: poetry becomes a physical necessity as his 'poetic breathings' suggest at once a continuous bodily function and a product that he must be able to keep creating to ensure his livelihood and, indeed, survival.

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[62] John Taylor, 'A Visit to John Clare', *London Magazine* iv (November 1821), pp. 540-48, in *Critical Heritage*, pp. 157-165 (p. 157).
[63] Unsigned Review, *European Magazine* lxxx (November 1821), pp. 453-58, in *Critical Heritage*, pp. 165-66 (p. 166).
[64] John Wilson, 'Unsigned Review', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* xxxviii (July 1835), pp. 231-47, in *Critical Heritage*, pp. 225-238 (p. 228).
[65] John Plummer, 'John Clare', *St James's Magazine* x (July 1864), pp. 438-47, in *Critical Heritage*, pp. 274-75 (p. 274).

Breath is therefore charged with a physical urgency and immediacy in the reception of Clare that tarries over into the bodies and minds of readers. One review celebrates his 'exquisitely vivid descriptions of rural scenery', 'keenness of observation', and 'minute fidelity', which allows his readers to feel a 'sort of affinity to the Author'.[66] The reviewer figures this 'affinity' through Coleridge's argument in *Biographia Literaria* that the most 'unequivocal mode of manifestation' of poetic genius is 'to represent familiar objects as to awaken the minds of others to a like healthy freshness of sensation concerning them'.[67] That this 'healthy freshness of sensation' should be a product of the 'minds' of Clare's readers again suggests that his poetry brings both the mind and body into play through the act of reading, where health functions as a form of internalised aesthetic appreciation as much as a physical 'sensation'. Another review in 1827, also attributed to Josiah Conder, remarked that Clare's poetry could:

> image to the mind's eye the natural objects which the season and the place may present. There they are, softened by the reflection, but just as they breathe or bloom; and any poor wight, in cities pent, by means of this *camera lucida*, may see them as he sits with his book in his hand.[68]

Both a non-physicalised and a material term, the 'mind's eye' is here something more than merely imaginative thought; it is both an internal process of visualization and a fleshing out of that process into embodied experience.

Proffering Clare's works as a channel of intense rural observation that can remedy the stultifying effects of city life unites the atmospheric with the poetic. Cyrus Redding's remark

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[66] Unsigned review, *Eclectic Review* n.s xiii (April 1820), pp. 327-40, in *Critical Heritage,* pp. 88-92 (pp. 88-89).
[67] Unsigned Review, *Critical Heritage*, p. 88.
[68] Josiah Conder, 'Unsigned review', *Eclectic Review* n. s xxvii (June 1827), pp. 509-21, in *Critical Heritage*, pp. 202-206 (p. 206).

that 'it is true that they who drew their earliest breath in the carboniferous atmosphere of cities […] must take for granted the emotions and descriptions of a rural poet', is expressive of contemporaneous attitudes towards the metropolis as an unhealthy environment, at the same time as it capitalises on this medicalised language of atmosphere to advertise the merits of Clare's poems.[69] Conder's earlier reference to 'Hampstead' as a poor substitute for the countryside that Clare so vividly brings to life is also reflective of climatic medicine's divisions between the country and the city, conflated with an assessment of the unhealthiness of the Cockney poets residing in that area of London. Thomas Forster's *Researches About Atmospheric Phenomena* (1813) warned of the 'fogs, impregnated with numerous effluvia and smoke' that abounded in 'great cities', and Clare's correspondents were determined to impress upon him the hazards of exposure to the air in London.[70] Eliza Emmerson, friend, benefactor, and editorial advisor to the poet for *The Rural Muse* (1835), frequently corresponded with Clare about their 'mutual ails of body and mind', and what she judged to be his 'nervous malady'.[71] In 1834, her letters persistently attribute her sufferings to the city's inhospitable atmosphere: 'nothing in medicine will serve to rally your nerves so much, as the getting out of doors […] it is now six months that I have been the invalid, a prisoner of my own smoky city abode. My nature, is quite panting for emancipation and fresh air'; 'Here I still remain, breathing the pestilential air of this great Babel […] I am, in form and feature, become one of the shadowy tribe'; 'I hope your health is improved, and that your spirits have been rallied in the golden scenes of the Harvest-time. We have had a blessed season of fine weather, but the heat has been almost killing in London'.[72] Writing to Clare in

[69] Cyrus Redding, 'Cyrus Redding Visits John Clare', *English Journal* 20 (15 May 1841), pp. 305-9, in *Critical Heritage*, pp. 247-253 (p. 250).
[70] Thomas Forster, *Researches About Atmospheric Phenomena* (London: Thomas Underwood, 1813), p. 60.
[71] MS Eg. 2249, f. 207; f. 235.
[72] MS Eg. 2249, f. 207; f. 225; f. 226.

Northborough, Emmerson represents back at him an idealised vision of rural healthiness against the 'pestilential air' of London.

Such a stark division between rural health and metropolitan disease was, however, complicated by Clare's desire for the advice of Dr Darling above those of his local practitioners. In August 1824, Clare had, so he wrote to Thomas Inskip, been in London for three months 'for the benefit of better advice than the country affords & I am sorry to acknowledge that I feel very little better I have been in a terrible state of ill health six months gradually declining & I verily believe that it will upset me at last'.[73] Inskip's reply offered advice as to why Clare's health had not improved from his stay in the city, again rooted in the language of climatic effects:

> I grieve to have so had an account of your own health, and heartily pray that with care and implicit attention to the Doctor's 'rule of Right' you may recover […] I have a great notion of Sea air in your case – you ought to have been by the Ocean all this summer; why did the Doctors keep you humbugging in London Stink for three months? They must […] wish to prey on your little carcase, and pick a poet's pockets. Had I known, I would have called and snatched you from their clutches, and took you to Dover, and it would have increased my own pleasure materially to have seen old Neptune's Dominions for the first time in company with J. Clare. I desire you not to die that I may have that pleasure next summer[74]

In blaming 'London Stink' for Clare's failure to return to health, Inskip brings to light a tension at the heart of the poet's interaction with the city at the same time as he warns against its harmful atmospherics. Despite the fact that his rural surroundings are figured consistently as a healthier environment, London, in Clare's view, should be more conducive to his health

[73] Letter to Thomas Inskip, 10 August 1824, *Letters*, p. 300.
[74] MS Eg. 2250, f. 240.

and recovery because the medical advice offered by Darling is of a higher calibre. Inskip is quick to favour the natural cures of air and ocean whilst also implying that the doctors in London are guilty of exposing Clare deliberately to their own noxious airs in pursuit of profit. What begins as a proposed intervention into Clare's health founded on the curative properties of air, however, turns quickly into an assessment of his poetic sensibilities. In the same letter, Inskip writes:

> however Fashion and false taste may for a while mislead, however Cockney poetry may captivate the swains of Cheapside, or the Nymphs of Fleet ditch, the better part of Readers – those who have Heads to think and Hearts to feel must come back for their delights to Clare, to Bloomfield, and to Nature.[75]

It seems that 'London Stink', for Inskip, is a much a poetic influence as an atmospheric one, and that Clare's 'humbugging' in London exposes him to its effects, for which his own poetry is the best remedy.

Indeed, whilst Clare was making visits to London between 1822 and 1824 to converse with his publishers and their wider literary circle, the *London Magazine* published Charles Abraham Elton's 'The Idler's Epistle to John Clare' (1824), a poem imploring Clare to leave London for a healthier environment:

> The paven flat of endless street
> Is all unsuited to thy feet;
> The fog-wet smoke is all unmeet
> For such as thou
> Who thought'st the meadow verdure sweet
> But think'st not now[…]

[75] MS Eg. 2250, f. 241.

> […]Drugs? – Can the balm of Gilead yield
> Health like the cowslip-yellowed field?
> Come sail down Avon and be healed,
> Thou cockney Clare!
> My recipe is soon revealed;
> Sun, sea, and air
> (ll. 7-72).[76]

This passage draws connections between poetry, place, and the body in its anxiety about both the state of Clare's physical health and therefore the kind of poetry he might be writing whilst in the city. References to breath and breathing can again be taken from the harmful 'fog-wet smoke' and its opposition to the healthy 'air' of the poet's familiar meadows and fields. The attention to Clare's 'feet' as a localised example of his displacement conflates poetry and the body through its connotations of poetic 'feet', whilst addressing him as 'cockney' further reveals specific worries about the type of poetic unhealthiness of which Clare is suspected.

The poet is caught, therefore, between the healthy rural ideal of his poetics that are reflected back at him through reviews and personal correspondence, and his own sense of the inadequate healthcare that 'the country affords'. Furthermore, commenting on his own poor health whilst residing in London alters his perspective on his rural identity. In the same letter that he sent to Inskip in 1824, Clare proposed that he would 'only be at home for a few weeks to try the air to be sure if it improves my spirits I shall remain if not the next thing for me to try is salt water'.[77] Here, Clare sounds more like an urban resident participating in the commodification of natural cures than a person rooted deeply in his locality. The 'air' of Helpston is just another option next to 'salt water' that may or may not cure him, rather than an essential element of his rural constitution. Although his time spent in the city seems to

[76] Charles Abraham Elton, 'The Idler's Epistle to John Clare', *London Magazine* x (August 1824), pp. 143-5, in *Critical Heritage*, pp. 183-86 (pp. 183-85).
[77] Letter to Thomas Inskip, 10 August 1824, *Letters*, p. 300.

have failed to improve his health ('I feel very little better'), Clare's dependence on Dr Darling's care and his metropolitan perspective on the curative benefits of his 'home' revise the division between country and city, and health and illness, in his thinking.

Turning to Keats's letters also reveals an explicit challenge to the atmospheric division between the rural and the urban that was echoed in the criticism of the Cockney school. Writing to Taylor in 1819, he recognises a relationship between breath and health that challenges a sense of the curative 'breath' of rural poetry. After advising Taylor on the kind of 'air' to which he should be getting regular access ('you should live in a dry, gravelly, barren, elevated country open to the currents of air'), Keats writes:

> What makes the great difference between valemen flatland men, and Mountaineers? The cultivation of the earth in a great measure – Our health temperament and dispositions are taken more […] from the air we breathe than is generally imagined […] I am convinced there is as harmful Air to be breath'd in the country as in Town.[78]

Keats's revision of the split between country and city air, and their supposedly healthy and unhealthy effects, reconsiders Clare's position as the restorative poet of natural freshness both atmospherically and with regard to his peasant poet identity. Indeed, Richard Cronin argues that Clare is closer to the supposed artificiality of Cockneyism than his nineteenth-century reviewers may have realised, because of the role the *London Magazine* played in marketing his artless aesthetic to an urban audience: 'Cockney poets and peasant poets are close kin, both cultivating an impure language that allowed them to mediate between the magazine's readers and the kinds of experience with which those readers are unfamiliar'.[79] The 'harmful Air' of the country that Keats anticipates emerges here as a poetic air that is

[78] Letter to John Taylor, 5 September 1819, *The Letters of John Keats, 1814-1821*, ed. by Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), II, p. 155.
[79] Richard Cronin, 'John Clare and the London Magazine', *New Essays*, pp. 209-227 (p. 222).

harmful because it is ultimately artificial, and the country from which it blows is as removed from the metropolitan public as the fancies of Cockneyism.

Clare was sensitive to a reading experience that, whilst not offering a completely artificial sense of the natural world, was alert to the poem as a mediating force, facilitated by the breath. He represents moments of reading in terms similar to the physicalisation of the reading process in Conder's review of his works, and figures poetry itself as a multisensory language. In 'Shadows of Taste' (1830) he writes 'A pleasing image to its page conferred / In living character & breathing word / Becomes a landscape heard & felt & seen' (*MP*, III, ll. 71-73, p. 306). In 'The Holiday Walk' (1827-30), he praises 'My Thompson or Cowper' for their verses that 'yield / A freshness like that which we left in the field / That sing both at once to the ear & the eye / & breath of the air & the grass & the sky' (*MP*, III, ll. 295-300, pp. 409-10). Similarly, in 'The Pleasures of Spring' (1828-29), the poet is conceived as possessing a heightened sensibility to the natural world, mediated through the written word:

> There is a calm divinity of joy
> Breaths rapture round oer every ones employ
> The Poet feels it neath some forward bush
> The first in leaf to hide the singing thrush
> Where cutting open with heart beating speed
> Some book just purchased which he loves to read
> Some brother poets new engaging song
> Which warm anticipation sought so long
>
> (*MP*, III, ll. 23-30, p. 50)

His prose, too, documents a connection between reading and bodily sensation: 'I usd to feel a pleasure to hide in the woods […] reading the often thumbd books which I possesd till fancy "made them living things"'; 'the Pastoral Ballads of Bloomfield breath of the common air and the grass of the sky one may almost hear the water of the river Lea ripple along and the

grass […] rustle in the pages that speak of it'.[80] Although Clare's conception of the 'living character' of words and the 'heart beating speed' that accompanies the pleasures of reading fosters a poetics of direct bodily sensation in these examples, he remains attuned to the essential work of 'fancy' in bringing the reader into contact with the world laid out before them on the page. Represented to his readership as a poet who offers an unmediated, artless, and material encounter with his rural surroundings, Clare is sensible of the poem as a site that constructs and crafts this encounter; he may be celebrated as a poet whose 'air' is healthy because it comes direct from the source, but this healthy breath is still channelled through the poem and open to Cockney flights of fancy.

In perusing the nineteenth-century receptions of Keats and Clare, then, it becomes clear that cultural, literary status and essential bodily function meet at the level of breath. In uniting the atmospheric and the poetic, as well as being the perceived site of healthy, or unhealthy, effects upon the body, breath and breathing pervade the conception of Clare as a restorative, and Keats as a corruptive, poetic influence. Both Keats and Clare's poetics are utilised for a cultural agenda – one that imagines society as a healthy body that poetry can either maintain or corrupt. However, the suggestion that Clare might be a healthy answer to Keats, or offer poetry more full of healthy sensation because of its breath-like qualities, does not take into account how Keats might offer Clare this healthy model of breathing in the first place. The following section will explore how Keats might have an 'inspirational' effect on Clare's own consideration of the relationship between poetry, breath, and health.

Keatsian Breathings

[80] *By Himself*, pp. 160, 171.

When he read Keats, Clare encountered a physical freedom that his formal experiments seemed to incarnate:

> he launches on the sea without compass - & mounts pegassus without saddle or bridle as usual & if those cursd critics could be shovd out of the fashion wi their rule & compass & cease from making readers believe a Sonnet cannot be a Sonnet unless it be precisly 14 lines & a long poem as such unless one first sits down to wiredraw out regular argument & then plod after it in a regular manner the same as a Taylor cuts out a coat for the carcass – I say then he may push off at first rate – but he is a child of nature warm & wild.[81]

The lack of 'saddle' or 'bridle' that Clare so appreciates hints at Keats's own criticism of Augustan poets, who failed to align themselves with the poetic powers of Apollo, but instead '[…] with a puling infant's force / They swayed about upon a rocking horse, / And thought it Pegasus' ('Sleep and Poetry', ll. 85-87). His observation that Keats's formal experimentation and deviance creates a poetics that will not 'wiredraw out regular argument & then plod after it in a regular manner the same as a Taylor cuts out a coat for the carcass' reveals his attraction to poetry that seeks to act upon a living body and, moreover, to reconsider expectations of what should be classed as healthy or unhealthy. The suggestion that the constraints of regular poetic form become like a 'coat for the carcass' enlivens Keats's poems by comparison, whose poetic experimentation is live and 'warm' compared to those that might be dead on the page in their conformity. Whilst Keats mocked the Augustan versification of Pope, Clare expressed a feeling of physical frustration with his metrics: 'Looked into Pope I know not how it is but I cannot take him up often or read him long to gether the uninterrupted flow of the verses wearys the ear'.[82] It is in moments of formal 'interruption' that poetry stimulates, rather than wearies and numbs, the body for Clare, and it

[81] Letter to James Augustus Hessey, 4 July 1820, *Letters*, p. 80.
[82] *By Himself*, p.189.

is significant that he should be so drawn to the interrupted elements of Keats's poetics as incarnations of embodied vitality.

Keats's medical training asserted an objective view of the body. In his notes on the healthy human pulse, for example, the body is presented as an object to be measured empirically and numerically:

> The Pulse at Birth is 140. At one Year 124 at 2 Years 110. At 3 yrs 98 at 7 86 at Puberty 80 in an adult 75 at 60 years 60. In some Persons though healthy the Pulse is remarkably swift or slow.[83]

Yet whilst objective measurement is here the dominant mode of determining what the healthy pulse should be like, Keats is also attentive to a more 'lived' experience of pulse. He is aware that, whilst the medical gaze upon the body operates in relation to quantitative data and norms that it uses to monitor and regulate bodily functions, each individual is subjective in their own lived body, and still 'healthy' even though their 'swift' or 'slow' pulse does not map onto the average statistic. Recent criticism in the field of what has been termed 'Romantic medicine' and its relationship to cultural and literary thought maintains a predominately Foucauldian approach, where medicine's role is primarily to produce the healthy body as that which is strictly regulated and, in turn, contributes to a morally regulated society.[84] The spirit of reform behind the medical sciences becomes in effect an exercise in social control, where 'physiology […] provides a material connection between individual and social organization' and discourses of health and wellbeing sought to 'clarify and police

[83] Keats, *John Keats's Anatomical and Physiological Notebook: Printed from the Holograph in the Keats's Museum, Hampstead*, ed. Maurice Buxton Forman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934), p. 24.
[84] See James Robert Allard, 'Medicine', in *A Handbook of Romanticism Studies*, ed. by Joel Faflak and Julia M. Wright (Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 375-390.

norms of deviance and propriety'.[85] Although Keats's mention of the subjective pulse is brief, and has been taken from a lecture rather than conceived himself, it shows an engagement with a definition of health that does not adhere to a regularised norm. He is less interested in health as regimented than he is in subjective idiosyncrasies. It is not so much 'self-regulation' that Keats uncovers in his attention to the pulse, but a perspective of the healthy body as a subjective and individualised phenomenon.

A lack of bodily consciousness is a defining quality of health for the medical phenomenologist Havi Carel, as I discussed in the introduction of this thesis. A healthy body is defined by its unobtrusiveness or absence, permitting actions and perceptions without demanding our close attention to the bodily process that underlies them.[86] Breath and breathing are a particularly good example of this 'background' bodily function. The perpetual reflex motion of breathing in and out is usually such a physical certainty that one does not have to think about it, but can take from this bodily constant a secure 'lived' experience and sense of self. Michael Eigen has suggested that 'in the experience of breathing the ego finds support for its own sense of constancy and unifying activities. No rhythmic, continuous, and consciously accessible body experience is more constant, permeating, and unifying'.[87] This healthy sense of constancy between bodily function and lived experience is of course predicated on the trust that breathing and other physical processes continue without an interruption that demands attention. Conversely, illness is what Carel suggests brings the body to the forefront of our attention:

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[85] Paul Youngquist, *Monstrosities: Bodies and British Romanticism* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 14-15; George C. Grinnell, *The Age of Hypochondria: Interpreting Romantic Health and Illness* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 8.
[86] Havi Carel, *Illness* (Durham: Acumen, 2008), p. 26.
[87] Michael Eigen, 'Breathing and Identity', in *The Electrified Tightrope*, ed. by Adam Phillips (London; New York: Karnac, 2004), pp. 43-47 (p. 46).

> It is only when something goes wrong with the body that we begin to notice it. Our attention is drawn to the malfunctioning body part and suddenly it becomes the focus of our attention, rather than the invisible background for our activities. The harmony between the biological and the lived body is disrupted and the difference between the two becomes noticeable.[88]

In his poetic representations of breath and breathing, Keats registers this disruption between the 'biological' and 'lived body'. The breath frequently draws attention to bodily experience, as in 'Otho the Great' (1819) when Ludolph, fearful of 'A bitter death, – a suffocating death, – / A gnawing – silent – deadly, quiet death!' (V, I, ll. 22-23) exclaims 'O, where is that illustrious sound of war / To smother up this sound of labouring breath' (ll. 28-29). Disrupted breathing, fostered here through fragmentary punctuation and the metrical elongation of 'labouring', brings the body sharply into focus when Ludolph wishes to 'smother' it back down into transparency. The question of how this disrupted bodily presence should be attended to calls for attention to how poetry and medicine might differ in both their conception, and treatment, of the unhealthy body for Keats. Although his medical notes on the pulse indicate an awareness of the subjective life of the body, and how this lends preconceived measurements of pulse a certain flexibility, elsewhere his medical knowledge asserts the importance of regulation for the body. He writes of the 'quick unhealthy irritable pulse'.[89] The medical side of Keats is aware of the subjectivity of the body's functions, but is also aware that sometimes regulation is a real bodily need. His intimate knowledge of the body makes it difficult to find a middle-ground between the ideological and moral connotations of terms like regular and irregular in relation to illness and health, and a knowledge of what the body needs on a physiological level to stay healthy and alive.

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[88] Carel, *Illness*, p. 26.
[89] Keats, *Anatomical and Physiological Notebook*, p. 26.

Yet the way that Keats's representations of breath often modulate the metre and enforce moments of pause in his lines shows that the related physiological functions of breath and pulse share a poetic relationship as well. In his medical notes, he observes that 'the function of breathing is a sympathetic action'.[90] By this he means to comment upon the physiological processes that are all in 'sympathy' with one another in the act of breathing: 'from irritation on the beginning of every Air Tube affects every abdominal muscles and produces coughing. Sneezing is an instance of complicated sympathy'.[91] However, the 'sympathetic action' of breathing can also be taken as an expression of both its relatedness to metrical pulse, especially in moments when that pulse might be thrown into irregularity, and the experience of health that this sympathetic relationship with pulse can foster. In the opening lines of 'Endymion' (1818), Keats conceives an everlasting 'thing of beauty' in physiological terms of breath and health:

> A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:
> Its loveliness increases; it will never
> Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
> A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
> Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.
>
> (I, ll. 1-5)

Keats anticipates Eigen's healthy constancy of breath here, as its perpetual presence underpins his sense of an everlasting aesthetic experience and poetic immortality. However, the line in which breath is introduced as this poetic constant reveals that breathing does not necessarily have to be regular to be healthy. The feminine rhyme of 'ever' and 'never' in the first two lines extends them metrically, a rhythmic gesture towards the expansive sense of

[90] Keats, *Anatomical and Physiological Notebook*, p. 56.
[91] Keats, *Anatomical and Physiological Notebook*, pp. 56-57.

time those words convey. Also, in the line 'Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing', the commas that divide up the line emphasise the long, drawn out quality of this breath, creating simultaneously a feeling of 'quiet' pause in between each breath, yet also a sense that the line could be gasped in its brokenness. These lines are peppered with colons and semi-colons that direct and control the breath through enforced pauses. Peter George Patmore's review of 'Endymion' in the *London Magazine* in 1820 described the poem as 'an involuntary out-pouring of the spirit of poetry – that will not be controuled […] the verse frequently runs riot, and loses itself in air'.[92] It is, perhaps, not a lack of control, but the deliberate crafting of interruptions, that makes the 'air' of these lines run riot. In conceiving a poetic model of healthy breath, Keats' formal play draws attention to its potential for disruption. Poetry, unlike medicine, has the option of tending to, and even creating, moments of bodily irregularity without having to fix or regulate them.

Just as Clare was drawn to the embodied aspects of Keats's poetic experimentations (his 'warm & wild' approach to versification), so was he drawn to the poet's representation of breath. Indeed, when Clare read Keats, he wrote a letter to Hessey marking out particularly favourable passages. Immediately following on from his admiration of Keats's physicalised poetics, he writes 'I have skimd over Keats & noticed the following as striking'. Amongst passages quoted from 'Isabella' (1820) and 'Autumn' (1820) are, significantly, some passages from 'Hyperion':

> 'No stir of air was there
> Not so much life as on a summers day
> Robs not *one light seed from the featherd grass*
> But *where the dead leaf fell* there *did it rest'*
> *Hyp:*
> *'*& poplars & lawn shading palms & beach

[92] Peter George Patmore, 'Endymion, A Poetic Romance, By John Keats', *London Magazine* 1.4 (1820), pp. 380-389 (pp. 381-383).

In which the *zephyr breaths its loudest song*'[93]

Given the reception history of the two poets, it is significant that Clare should so favour passages of 'Hyperion' that deal with breath. The first passage in particular, taken from the beginning of the poem, makes direct connections between health and breathing:

> Deep in the shady sadness of a vale
> Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,
> Far from the fiery noon, and eve's one star,
> Sat gray-hair'd Saturn, quiet as a stone,
> Still as the silence round about his lair;
> Forest on forest hung about his head
> Like cloud on cloud. No stir of air was there,
> Not so much life as on a summer's day
> Robs not one light seed from the feather'd grass,
> But where the dead leaf fell, there did it rest.
> (I, ll. 1-7)

These opening lines do have something of the 'hothouse' about them. The repetitive sound patterns work to accentuate the lack of air circulation and suffocating nature of the place Saturn occupies. Poetic production, or 'progress', seems to expire in Keats's representation of airlessness, as he recycles words ('far', 'from', 'forest on forest', 'cloud on cloud') and consonant sounds (the pervasive s's and f's). Rhyme is deployed to this effect too, in lines 5-7. The word 'air' lurks within 'lair', its latent sonic presence suggesting that air is not so much lacking in these opening lines as it is repressed by Keats's exhaustion of sounds. This exhaustion continues into the following lines, as the half-rhyme 'stir of air' and the full rhyme of 'there' ghost the word 'air' whilst asserting its absence. All healthy invigoration

[93] Letter to James Augustus Hessey, 4 July 1820, *Letters*, p. 81. Italics are presumed to be Clare's own.

and movement are also negated through the repetition of 'not' and 'no' in the passage that Clare quotes to Hessey.

What might Clare take from this airless, breathless aesthetic? Keats's direct connection between breath and health, if only through their absence in this passage, is influential for him. The 'healthy breath of morn' that is negated in 'Hyperion' is present in many of Clare's poems. 'Morning Pleasures' (1830) opens with the lines 'The dewy virtues of the early morn / Breathes rich of health and leads the mind to joy' (*MP*, IV, ll. 1-2, p. 214); in 'A Spring Morning' (1828) 'Spring cometh in with all her hues & smells / in freshness breathing over hills and dells' (*MP*, IV, ll. 1-2, p. 165); in 'Summer Ballad' (1819-32) 'Morn sprinkles treasures in her way / Green health in every place' (*MP*, IV, ll 25-26, p. 141). Yet more than a reaction against the lack of air in 'Hyperion', Clare could be seen to respond to the compositional relationship between poetry and breath in Keats's work. Whilst Clare found Keats's classical allusions problematic, his warm reception of 'Hyperion' invites closer attention to the model of poetic composition that Keats forges within it.[94]

In both 'Hyperion: A Fragment' and its reconstructed version, 'The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream' (1819), Keats represents the process of poetic composition as a physiological feat that involves uncomfortable experiences of both breath and pulse.[95] In the first version, Keats depicts Apollo's transformation into a god (and therefore the realisation of his divine poetic status) as 'wild commotions' that 'shook him, and made flush / All the immortal fairness of his limbs; / [...] and with a pang / As hot as death's is chill, with fierce convulse / Die into life' (III, ll. 124-130). In 'The Fall of Hyperion', the speaker's own realisation of his status as a poet is similarly visceral:

[94] See Goodridge, *Clare and Community*, p. 65.
[95] The date given for 'The Fall of Hyperion' is its date of composition.

I heard, I look'd: two senses both at once
So fine, so subtle, felt the tyranny
Of that fierce threat, and the hard task proposed.
Prodigious seem'd the toil, the leaves were yet
Burning, - when suddenly a palsied chill
Struck from the paved level up my limbs,
And was ascending quick to put cold grasp
Upon those streams that pulse beside the throat.
I shriek'd; and the sharp anguish of my shriek
Stung my own ears – I strove hard to escape
The numbness; strove to gain the lowest step.
Slow, heavy, deadly was my pace: the cold
Grew stifling, suffocating, at the heart;
And when I clasp'd my hands I felt them not.
One minute before death, my iced foot touch'd
The lowest stair; and as it touch'd, life seem'd
To pour in at the toes […]

(I, ll. 118-134)

Keats's representation of the poet as a figure who must endure physical pain and stress as part of the creative process is echoed in Clare's discussion of his own poetic development in 'The Progress of Ryhme' (1824-32), where he describes how he:

[…] felt without a single skill
That instinct that would not be still
To think of song sublime beneath
That heaved my bosom like my breath
That burned & chilled & went & came
Without or uttering or a name
Untill the vision waked with time
And left me itching after rhyme

(*MP*, III, ll. 197-204, p. 498)

Clare's representation of poetic composition responds to the impression of bodily pain and discomfort in Keats's depiction. The line 'That burned and chilled and went and came' echoes Keats's own switching between extreme temperatures ('Burning, - when suddenly a

palsied chill'). His attention to the breath feels Keatsian too, in the way that he combines a sense of high inspiration ('song sublime') with the embodied experience of a struggling, heaving bosom. Whereas Keats's lines are full of interruptions – commas, dashes, colons, and semi-colons – that shape a form of stifled and suffocating breath, Clare's run on into each other, but to similar effect. The repetition of '&' creates a sense of hyperventilation, whilst the consecutive rhyming couplets that have no halting punctuation, and his anaphoric use of 'that', drive each line forward with no space carved out for breath. The 'bosom' that 'heaved' also recalls the laborious breath of the titans in 'Hyperion: A Fragment', with their big hearts 'heaving'. If Keats shows Clare how the body in pain and respiratory distress can be reconciled with the spirit of poetic inspiration, or indeed how poetic composition necessitates moments of disrupted breathing, then the following section builds on this inheritance as it explores how moments of disrupted breath become a crucial means of materialising health for Clare.

'Health breathes in every wind': Clare's Breath-Boundaries

Clare, like Keats, is alert to breath as a material force that can be directed by poetic form, and of its influence on health. Yet whilst Clare did not possess the same medical education as Keats, this is not to say that there were no other texts available to him that communicated popular medical ideas or theories. The *New Monthly Magazine* published a series of articles between 1822 and 1824 entitled 'The Physician'.[96] These articles disseminated medical advice, theories, and case studies for a mass readership, the emphasis being on accessibility

[96] For Clare's mentions of the *New Monthly Magazine* see *Letters*, p. 123; pp. 188, 218. For 'The Physician', see *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal, Jan. 1821-Dec. 1869*, ed. by Thomas Campbell, 5.19 (Jan 1822) – 11.43 (Jan 1824).

and preventative medicine rather than specialised lexis or highly theoretical discussion. Within the series is an article entitled 'No. XIII: Of the Influence of the Winds on Health', the purpose of which seems to be to debunk the metaphorical notion of universally healthy winds and airs as much as to offer practical advice. The author warns:

> not to bestow on the winds in general greater or more unqualified praise than they deserve. So little as we can assert without qualification, that this or the other kind of food, drink, or medicine, is absolutely wholesome or pernicious, so little can the same thing be said of the winds.[97]

In exchange for a generalised sense of the 'salubrious' qualities of the winds, the author argues for a contextualised, and specifically material, approach to assessing their healthy influence upon the body and breath of individuals. In doing so, the article also questions any medical approach that does not discriminate 'the winds' in this case-specific way: 'A physician, therefore, is liable to involve himself in many contradictions by pronouncing unconditionally on the qualities of the winds'.[98] The wind is divested of its elemental universality and becomes variable, subject to the express characteristics of place and person. Factors such as 'atmosphere', 'vapours', 'temperature', 'region', 'damp' and 'dry' all dictate the healthy or unhealthy effects of the wind, as does the subjective nature of the human body.[99] The importance of individual constitutions takes precedence over a generalised sense of fresh air being good for everybody; those with a pre-existing weakness in the chest are urged to take caution against 'the air that rushes of itself into the lungs'.[100]

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[97] 'The Physician No. XIII: Of the Influence of the Winds on Health', *New Monthly Magazine* 10.37 (Jan 1824), pp. 437-441 (p. 438).
[98] 'The Physician', p. 438.
[99] 'The Physician', pp. 438-439.
[100] 'The Physician', p. 440.

Yet whilst the article critiques medicine when it is used as a set of generalised theories, it also suggests that the subjective body might not always be in control of these effects. The conception of the air, or wind, as a force that 'rushes of itself' into the body figures the material experience of breathing as spontaneous, or uncontrollable. Breathing is less a steady inhalation and exhalation of air continuing unnoticed beneath our direct sensual experience, as Carel and Eigen argue, and more a surprise or assault. The materiality of breathing air, in this article, is realised as an external force that acts upon the body rather than flows through it or works quietly in unison with it:

> The winds operate on the human body, in the first place, inasmuch as they change the gravity and properties of the atmosphere; but in this respect they do not act in reality as winds. The second effect is, that which they produce inasmuch as they are air in motion[101]

This 'air in motion' is the aforementioned rush into the lungs, and therefore anticipates the healthy or unhealthy effects of the 'winds' as something thrust upon the body unexpectedly and entering it from the outside. The wind frequently appears in Clare's poetry as this healthy 'air in motion'. In 'Summer Images' (1830), he is alert to the transition of seasons as that which stirs up the atmosphere and is marked by shifts in the air and winds, an occurrence noted in 'The Physician', too:

> Essential as it is that we should live in a pure air, if we would remain healthy, so essential is it that there should be winds to purify our atmosphere of the many noxious vapours […] In Spring, the warm breath of the milder breezes opens the bosom of the earth, which was closed throughout the winter.[102]

[101] 'The Physician', p. 440.
[102] 'The Physician', p. 437.

Clare's seasonal airy movements in the poem are in sympathy with this sense of 'air in motion' as they carry health along with them:

> A wild & giddy thing
> With health robust from every care unbound
> Comes on the zephers wing
> & cheers the toiling clown
> (*MP*, III, ll. 4-7, pp. 147-48)

Later on in the poem, Clare charts the movement of this healthy wind again, this time with a stronger sense of it impacting upon the body as a physical sensation:

> Here I can live & at my leisure seek
> Joys far from cold restraints – not fearing pride
> Free as the winds that breath upon my cheek
> Rude health so long denied
> (ll. 64-67, p. 151)

Health travels through winds, breezes and airs elsewhere in Clare's poetry. In 'Angling' (1832) 'gentle whispers on the southern wind / Brings health & quiet to the anglers mind' (*MP*, IV, ll. 11-12, p. 338); in 'Alpins Harp New Strung' (1808-19) 'health infusd on breezes team / & dips refreshing in the stream' (*EP*, I, ll.39-40, p. 236); in 'Spring' (1819-20) he declares 'How sweet to wander now the very breeze / Fans health upon the milkmaids blushing cheek' (*EP*, II, ll. 37-38, p. 461); whilst in 'Hymn: The Lord of life he reigns above' (1842-64), the wind is steered by divine purpose rather than natural, organic motion: 'The rain his bounty ever brings / The wind his health diffuses wide' (*LP*, I, ll. 9-10, p. 522). The ideas expressed in 'The Physician' seem to circulate within poetic instances such as these,

where health is not always an internal state, but sometimes a visitation or force carried by the winds to meet the body as a physical sensation. It is both embodied, felt on the face in blushing cheeks, and disembodied, floating about on the winds ready to be encountered in the natural world. The article in 'The Physician' strips the concept of health being carried on the winds of its universal, metaphorical status in order to argue for it as a real material force that can act upon the body – albeit in potentially unhealthy ways.

There are other moments when Clare engages with the breath, especially in relation to health, self-consciously as something that can be formally controlled or guided in different ways. The word 'aeolian' is as key for Clare as it was for Keats for conflating the metaphorical, poetic, and bodily components of the breath. In 'Come Hither Isabel' (1842-64), its connections to poetic inspiration and song are emphasised by the musical framework Clare sets up around the wind as a bringer of health:

> The wind shall wake its song for thee
> The sweet aeolian wind
> That sets the leaves in dancing glee
> And leaves rich health behind
> (*LP*, II, ll. 13-16, p. 1021).

The word appears again in the third stanza of 'The Invitation' (1842-64) as Clare draws breath and health together in the movement of the winds:

> I'll gaze upon thy happy face
> Thy comely shape thy eye shall charm
> As in the early spring we trace
> The healthy breath of field and farm
>
> There is music without ere a bird
> There is bloom without ere a flower
> For eolean winds we oft have heard
> And the grass blooms fresher every hour

(*LP*, I, ll. 5-12, p. 469)

Clare uses the word again in 'Summer Images': '& see the uncradeled breeze refreshed & strong / With waking blossoms play / & breath eolian song' (ll. 124-126). In all of these usages, the word 'aeolian', which in itself carries a self-conscious reference to poetic craft and 'song', is deployed as a metrical ambiguity in order to draw attention to the materiality of breath and, therefore, health. In all of these extracts, formal discrepancy accompanies moments when the movement of air, be it breath or wind, is made visible somehow, or presents itself in tangible ways. Whether registered through dancing leaves, as a 'trace' (a word which implies both the visible remnants of 'healthy breath' as well as the act of tracing that breath), or the movement of 'blossoms', breath, and the health it ushers in, are revealed as a material force.

There is a text in Clare's library that makes explicit connections between breath and health and their importance as embodied sensations. In *The Air* (1835), Robert Mudie aims to provide wide-reaching coverage of the air and its various manifestations as the atmosphere surrounding all human life, the weather, and, crucially, as that which allows us to breathe easily and healthily.[103] In his study, he asserts the importance of thinking about the air in material terms, not just as an immaterial 'spirit', but something which has a direct role to play in the maintenance of a healthy body:

> In its original meaning it is very nearly synonymous with 'breath' or with 'spirit', when that word is used in a material sense. It is proper to attend to this material sense of the word spirit, as distinguished from immortal spirit, or that which has none of the properties of matter, and is not in itself under any of the laws of matter, or subject to the material contingencies of change, dissolution, or death. We often use the word in

[103] Robert Mudie, *The Air* (London: Thomas Ward & Co, 1835). See *Catalogue*, no. 314, p. 31.

> this material sense: thus we say, that we are in good spirits, when all the functions of the body are going on in a healthy and vigorous manner.[104]

Through his formal manipulation of healthy breath, Clare can be seen to 'attend' to its 'material sense', taking seriously the idea that poetry can affect the breath of the reader through rhythm, sound, and pace as much as it can represent visceral and life-like descriptions of health-giving breaths and breezes in the natural world. Furthermore, Mudie goes on to argue that potentially irregular or uncontrolled motions of the air will always serve the function of providing health:

> It matters not to what action the air may be subjected, whether it remain breezeless or tranquil, whether it awaken the surface of the earth with refreshened zephyrs, whether it howls in storms, or whether it sweep in the desolation of hurricanes; for, in each and in all of those states it is equally healthy, equally ready, and equally gentle and yielding to the lungs, or other breathing apparatus, of every creature.[105]

If Mudie suggests that any movement of the air and therefore any breathing experience will be healthy, whether it is controlled or uncontrolled, regular or irregular, then Keats offers Clare a model of poetic composition and a sense of form as embodied, through which to shape, or expose, these healthy breaths in poetry. I use the word 'expose' because, through his investment in the breath as a material sensation, Clare uses the formal manipulation of breath to bring health to the forefront of experience.

In *The Enigma of Health* (1993; trans 1996), Hans-Georg Gadamer makes a similar argument to Carel and Eigen: that health is essentially 'enigmatic'. By this, Gadamer means that health does not 'objectify' itself to our everyday bodily experience, but exists beneath

[104] Mudie, *The Air*, p. 2.
[105] Mudie, *The Air*, p. 97.

conscious awareness, much like the tension between the lived and the biological body set up in Carel's phenomenological study. In order to meaningfully interrogate health, therefore, we have to find ways to objectify it for ourselves, to bring it into our experiential awareness so that we can reflect upon it. For Gadamer, the breath is one of the key ways into such reflection, significantly because it is inherently rhythmic:

> These reflections are bringing us closer and closer to what really constitutes health. It is the rhythm of life, a permanent process in which equilibrium re-establishes itself. This is something known to us all. Think of the processes of breathing, digesting and sleeping. The cycle of these three rhythmic phenomena helps to produce vitality, refreshment, and the restoration of energy […] However, we cannot actually hope to gain full control of these rhythmic functions which take place as an integral part of ourselves […] This is one of the greatest enigmas we experience in our lives.[106]

What Clare might be up to in his formal manipulation of the breath, then, is seeking to find a way to de-mystify health, to make it appear as a state to be directly experienced rather than hidden by bodily secrecy or the limits of our own sensate awareness.

For example, in 'Pastoral Liberty' (1832), Clare extends the understanding of the poet as a mere vessel through which inspirational breath flows, by embedding the experience of this breath in a form that is alert to its materiality:

> O for the unshackled mood as free as air
> & pleasure wild as birds upon the wing
> The unwronged impulse won from seasons fair
> Like birds perennial travels with the spring
> Come peace & joy the unworn path to trace
> Crossing ling-heaths & hazel crowded glen
> Where health salutes me with its ruddy face
> & joy breaths freely from the strife of men

[106] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Enigma of Health: The Art of Healing in a Scientific Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 114.

(*MP*, IV, ll. 1-8, p. 303)

Here, Clare brings breath down from the heights of metaphorical inspiration and embeds it in a close, embodied encounter with the natural world. Furthermore, it is the action of breathing in the air of his natural environment that produces an encounter with health. In wanting to evoke the 'unshackled mood as free as air', Clare plays with metrical regularity, and deliberately emphasises this ambiguity to direct the breath of the reader in a material way. Rather than shorten 'the' to create 'th'unshackled' and thus retain an even number of syllables, Clare keeps the words distinct so that 'unshackled' has the possibility of being sounded fully.

Clare's treatment of the breath in 'Pastoral Liberty' also highlights another important technique he employs when drawing connections between breath, health, and the body in natural surroundings. That Clare possessed a view of health as a force external to the body is evident in his frequent representations of it as being carried through the air, or 'winds', and meeting the body unexpectedly in outdoor places. In 'Pastoral Liberty', this process of meeting health in the natural world is figured as a passing through, a 'crossing' over to 'the unworn path'. The act of walking through the landscape becomes mapped onto the experience of breathing, as crossing over into different territory facilitates the sudden 'salute' of health and the free-breathing that comes with it. Likewise in his sonnet sequence 'Footpaths' (1832), passing through defined areas and territories in the natural world is accompanied by an awareness of breathing:

> Now almost hid in trees a little gate
> Cheats us into the darkness of the wood
> We almost think the day is wearing late
> So dreamy is the light that dwells around
> & so refreshing is its sombre mood

We feel at once shut out from sun & sky
All the deliciousness of solitude
While sauntering noisless oer the leafy ground
The air we breath seems loosing every trace
Of earth & all its trouble & the mind
Yearns for a dwelling in so sweet a place
From troubles noise such stillness seemeth bye
Yet soon the side brings some unwelcome spire
To bid the charm of solitude retire
(*MP*, IV, ll. 43-56, p. 319)

In this sonnet, the place where breath appears is crucial, for it marks both a formal and experiential transition or 'crossing'. Located in the sonnet's volta in line 51, this formal turning point gives way to an embodied, or rather disembodied, shift. 'The air we breathe seems loosing every trace' places the attention on the breath, and embodied sensation, at the same time as it starts to dissolve and loosen that embodiment's 'trace' in the world.

In 'Wanderings in June' (1821), the bodily disorientation that occurs through the act of breathing is brought into direct relationship with health. Furthermore, it provides an example of how Clare blurs the boundaries between body and world at a local formal level:

No tumult here creates alarm
No pain our follies find
Peace visits us in every calm
Health breathes in every wind
(*MP*, I, ll. 133-136, p. 311)

Clare draws attention to the fragile boundary between self and world in these lines, facilitated by an inward breath. 'Health breathes in every wind' can either be read as another instance of health being carried in the wind, to be inhaled by those who encounter it, or it can give agency to health itself, which 'breathes in every wind'. Clare encounters the breath of health like this again in 'The Breath of Morning' (1832), where he declares:

> How beautiful & fresh the pastoral smell
> Of tedded hay breaths in this early morn
> Health in these meadows must in summer dwell
> & take her walks among these fields of corn
> I cannot see her – yet her voice is born
> On every breeze that fans my hair about
> (*MP*, IV, ll. 1-6, p. 250)

The boundary between body and environment becomes mingled in these lines, turning on the breath. There is either a direct sense experience taking place, where Clare's speaker can smell the 'tedded hay breaths' in the morning, or, this first-hand sensation becomes displaced as the 'tedded hay breath(e)s in'. This feeling of displacement is further heightened by the location of health as dwelling outside of the body. It is out of sight, just perceptible 'on every breeze that fans my hair about'. The same confusion occurs in 'Tis autumn now & harvests reign' (1840-41):

> Tis autumn now & harvests reign
> Brown swelling hills & hollow vales
> The sudden shower sweeps oer the plain
> & health breaths in the shivering gales
> (*LP*, I, ll. 1-4, p. 12)

The breath comes to represent, then, both a feeling of continuity between the self and the external world, and also surprises and disruptions within that connection. If Gadamer defines health as something that cannot be felt within oneself, but is a feeling of 'being in the world', then Clare develops this even further. His breath-boundaries, with their subject-object discrepancies, work to mingle the self with the world, forcing health to objectify itself externally as something to be experienced: the wind, the air, the movements in the natural world that these bring about. This in turn invites the subject, whether the speaker in Clare's poems or the reader, to feel the sensation of healthy breath in an embodied way. Clare

inherits from Keats an understanding of poetry and healthy bodily potential as connected through the breath, and develops this to make health a more direct encounter in both the external world and as a part of material sensation. One crucial context that requires further discussion is the role that environmental medicine played in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in thinking through these boundaries – what constitutes them and how they come to be interlocked. If the breath materialises for Clare as a tie to the world and the health to be found in it, then the following and final section will look more closely at how he encounters the specific aerial effects of his own local environment and their medical and cultural associations.

'your vile fenny atmosphere': Atmospherics and Climatic Vulnerability

In 1822, Clare was repeatedly 'poorly'. He uses the word in a letter to his publisher, James Hessey, about the most recent edition of the *London Magazine*, which Hessey had posted to him to encourage his own writing efforts. Lamenting his current condition, he writes:

> I have been very poorly in fact very bad all this month but I hope ere long to be myself agen – I have not yet lookd over the Mag: but with the encouragement in your letter shall quickly begin at least as soon as I loose this confounded lethargy of low spirits that presses on me to such a degree that at times makes me feel as if my senses had a mind to leave me Spring & Fall such feelings it seems are doomd to be my companions but it shall not overpower me as formerly with such weak & terrible dreads and fears of dropping off[107]

Here are the beginnings of a descriptive language for a complaint that confuses the distinction between self and world. This language is borne out of Clare's sense of his symptoms as recurring with the changing seasons. Recognising a chronic, seasonal pattern in his affliction

[107] Letter to James Augustus Hessey, 16 March 1822, *Letters*, p. 234.

also gives rise to a more unsettled identification with atmospheric shifts, as his description of what his condition feels like draws on a meteorological metaphor. The 'lethargy of low spirits' that 'presses' onto him figures illness as a psycho-physiological atmospheric event exterior to the body and mind; it is not located within them but influences them from the outside.

Weather offers Clare a vocabulary that might make his confusing 'indisposition' legible at the same time as it obscures his body and mind from him. Each relapse is made as predictable as the seasons but brings with it a hazy dissociation, where the physiological and psychological faculties denoted by the 'senses' become unstable and potentially absent. This experience seems to recur, as Clare reports in a letter to Thomas Inskip from August 1824: 'what it is I cannot tell it even effects my senses very much by times'.[108] Trying to trace the arc of Clare's symptoms and their recurrence across his correspondence discloses a tension between diagnosis and prediction; the question of *what* he has is often unanswerable, and so small comfort can be found instead in figuring out *when* it is likely to occur. The seasons provide a way for Clare to map his internal suffering onto an exterior framework, offering him some way out of his self-fixation towards a connection with natural rhythms. Even if those rhythms generate 'doomd' bouts of discomfort and distress, their regularity lends structure and temporality to these episodes so they do not 'overpower' him. The 'spirits' themselves, however, are more unsettling and amorphous, destabilising the poet's hold on himself and on the external world.

Despite the ontological confusion that 'spirits' seem to bring about, Clare draws partly on an established trope in order to explore his disorienting experiences. As Arden Reed argues, Romantic writers inherited and developed a tradition of 'meteorological

[108] Letter to Thomas Inskip, 10 August 1824, *Letters*, p. 300.

rhetoric' in their representations of hazy or bewildering states of being.[109] Theories of atmospheric influence on both individual and national health had already become culturally embedded through popular medical texts. Clare's bringing together of mind, body, and atmospheric influences speaks to the opening of George Cheyne's *The English Malady* (1733), whereby the 'moisture of our air' and 'the variableness of our weather' are listed first in a series of factors that beget a 'Class and Set of Distempers' and 'nervous Disorders' particular to the English population.[110] Clare's assessment of the causes of his condition, as well as the sensations it produces (lethargy, low spirits, weakness), makes him a typical Englishman by Cheyne's criteria. One of Cheyne's three primary causes of 'nervous disorder' or 'distemper' is prolonged exposure to the 'injuries of the weather', resulting in 'weak' fibres, 'flabby and flaccid' muscles, 'lowness of spirits', and 'melancholy'.[111]

These diagnoses not only pinpoint the effects that shifts in weather and climate might have on the body and mind, but they also trace their relationship through a unifying vocabulary: the low atmospheric pressure, or 'depression', that unsettles weather systems to produce more harmful winds ('spirits') and precipitations is mirrored by an unhealthy 'lowness' of mood and psychophysiological fatigue.[112] Mind and body are not simply affected by climatic influences; they also share their terms, movements, and forms. Going back further than Cheyne reveals another key text that takes weather and atmospheric effects as essential coordinates for mapping the nature of melancholic and nervous disease. Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy (*1621) is founded upon the humoural model of human physiology, and so 'spirits' are present as a collection of three crucial substances that

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[109] Arden Reed, *Romantic Weather: The Climates of Coleridge and Baudelaire* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1983), p. 17.
[110] George Cheyne, *The English Malady: or, a treatise of nervous diseases of all kinds, as spleen, vapours, lowness of spirits, hypochondriacal, and hysterical distempers* (London: G. Strahan and J. Leake, 1733), pp. i-ii.
[111] Cheyne, *English Malady*, p. 24.
[112] See *OED*, 'depression', *n.*, sense 5.c.

circulate round three specific organs ('brain, heart, liver; natural, animal, vital').[113] As in Cheyne's text, they also foster a slippage between the contained body and the outer world through their susceptibility to changes in the weather. In his discussion of 'air' as one of the causes of melancholy, Burton observes 'if it be impure and foggy, it dejects the spirits, and causeth diseases by infection of the heart […] Such as is the air, such be our spirits; and as our spirits, such are our humours'.[114] Burton's axiomatic phrasing here describes an inevitable chain of connection and influence between self and world, marrying the two through a sense of shared constitution and temperament. He unites the infectious matter of climate with affectivity: his 'infection of the heart' is at once physiological and emotional, as is the dejection of spirits. Burton and Cheyne's works are just two examples of the vocabulary offered by the intertwining of medicine, climatic effects, and mind-body relations that can be heard in Clare's self-diagnosis.

In *Confronting the Climate: British Airs and the Making of Environmental Medicine* (2010), Vladimir Jankovic charts the development of environmental thinking about health and illness across the eighteenth and nineteenth century. He argues that the developments in meteorological observation and recording processes from the Enlightenment onwards bred a new medical culture where the notion of 'exposure' and vulnerability to climatic effects took on a new urgency in the face of more modern standards of living:

> People were thought of as inhabiting 'native' climates in which the qualities of local air were as much about social identity as about medical conditions […] Climate, health, and society were interlocked in a way that made any suffering part of the natural course of things: people were sick because they inhaled miasmas or were exposed to unhealthy vapours, smells, and winds […] this belief atrophied during the eighteenth century. Physicians increasingly found that disease reflected an

[113] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), ed. Holbrook Jackson, 3 vols. (London: The Folio Society, 2005), I, p. 162.
[114] Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, pp. 257.

> 'unnatural' susceptibility to accidental changes in the physical space of everyday life.[115]

Along with the renewed realisation that climate and the atmosphere were a major influence on the health of both individuals and society came an investment in measuring and predicting those climatic effects and in creating better standards of living to reduce the risk of exposure to the elements. Consequently, vulnerability to atmospheric shifts and weather events emerged as a new scheme of disorders. Jan Golinski argues that, borne out of the impulses of the Enlightenment to try to study the weather for the means of improvement and social control, grew the perception that atmospheric susceptibility was due to a loss of mental autonomy – a symptom of the 'decadence of modern society' and also 'the cultivation of personal sensitivity in manners, moral behaviour and aesthetics'.[116] Indeed, Clare's incoming correspondence often reads as an index for the manner in which weather becomes a kind of shared social language for discussing matters of health. On the one hand, there is the awareness that different shifts in weather and season might bring about different symptoms or disorders. Yet on the other is the adoption of weather as a form of polite short-hand for the expectation of recovery or the wish that this should be so. Take, for instance, a letter from John Taylor in April 1824:

> Dr Arnold wrote at my Request to say how you were, & from his account I anticipate your complete Recovery ere long. I am sure you have been very seriously ill, & can well believe that your Sensations are not yet of an encouraging Nature; but by Degrees, as the Spring & Summer advance, you will find all unpleasant Symptoms fade away. And the Resolution you have taken to do a little Work on the Milton

[115] Vladimir Jankovic, *Confronting the Climate: British Airs and the Making of Environmental Medicine* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 6-7.
[116] Jan Golinski, *British Weather and the Climate of Enlightenment* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

> Estates will more than all Physic tend not only to your complete Restoration to Health, but to its Preservation.[117]

There is an element of false assurance to Taylor's remarks here; his assertion that he is 'sure' Clare has been 'very seriously ill' reads more like an attempt to placate what he perceives as his client's perpetual worry and anxiety than a knowledgeable assessment of his condition. So when Taylor then assures Clare that 'as the Spring & Summer advance, you will find all unpleasant Symptoms fade away', he seems to be adopting a shared register in which feelings and behaviour are predicted to comply with the 'temperate' shifts in season rather than succumb to any adverse effects that would be out of kilter with the social body.

Letters from other correspondents also often refer to the weather as either the cause or the hopeful cure of Clare's symptoms. In April 1820, Taylor wrote 'I'm very sorry to hear you have taken cold, and much wish you would have some advice and not let your cold turn to a cough; but this very fine weather will have removed your cold I trust before my present Recommendation arrives'.[118] A month later he wrote again: 'If your shivering fits are going off pay no further Regard to them: you will soon be restored I hope to perfect Health, especially as the finest season of the year is coming on'.[119] Eliza Emmerson also expressed her concern: 'In your letter of some weeks back, you complained of a bad cold – I fear you have been labouring under the effects of it […] I however hope the fine season before us, may be productive of health, happiness & continued prosperity to you'.[120] In November 1825, Thomas Inskip wrote:

> I do most earnestly hope and pray that you may have in some degree, at least, recovered; the weather has I think been heretofore in favour of an invalid, I mean

[117] John Taylor, letter to John Clare, 3 April, 1824, *Letters*, p. 290.
[118] MS Eg. 2245, f. 90.
[119] MS Eg. 2245, f. 126.
[120] MS Eg. 2245, f. 111.

> favourable for English weather, for England has the most variable climate in the World, and seems intended by Providence to be the Theatre of Elementary Strife, where Sun – Wind – Cold – Heat – Wet, are never masters above an hour at a time'.[121]

The seasons offer a cyclical narrative of recovery and relapse, from which the individual and society can conduct a hopeful forecast of what might be or try to predict when a bout of illness may be about to recur.

This social language and temporal framework is evident in William Hone's *Every-Day Book* (1826-27). An almanac of sorts, Hone's text is an anthology of literature, essays, folk holidays and traditions, and meteorological predictions for each month based on past observations. It is divided up into the months of the year, with each month prompting a particular cultural memory or custom as well as tracing what climatic changes should occur and, significantly, the effects these changes might have on the health of the nation. Clare was sceptical of the reliability of weather predictions. In his journal, he records purchasing a new copy of 'Moors Almanack', observing that 'its fresh budget of wonderful predictions on the weather and the times utterd with such earnest ambition of pretending truth that one shoud think the motto "The voice of the heavens" etc means nothing more or less then the voice of Moors Almanack'.[122] Yet whilst wary of the 'pretending truth' of textual forecasts, Clare was keen to be published in Hone's *Every-Day Book.* Mina Gorji argues that Hone's text would have appealed to Clare in its intentions to preserve rural and folk customs, providing an apt arena for the reception of his work amongst a readership for whom Spenser's pastorals were still a hugely popular reminder of a shared rural heritage.[123] He was indeed successful, and Hone published an edited version of 'Summer Morning' in his 1826-27 volume. It is the

[121] MS Eg. 2247, f. 138.
[122] *By Himself*, p. 201.
[123] Mina Gorji, *John Clare and the Place of Poetry* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), p. 55.

combination of specific atmospheric observations alongside a more general apprehension of seasonal shifts that perhaps made Clare's work appeal to Hone. The version of 'Summer Morning' in *Every-Day Book* opens with the revolution of a new day, 'The cocks have now the morn foretold, / The sun again begins to peep' (ll. 1-2), only to zoom in on the specific qualities of the dew to be experienced at that time of year and, moreover, that time of day:

> The shepherd, whistling to his fold,
> Unpens and free the captive sheep.
> O'er pathless plains at early hours
> The sleepy rustic sloomy goes;
> The dews, brushed off from grass and flowers,
> Bemoistening sop his hardened shoes
>
> While every leaf that forms a shade,
> And every floweret's silken top,
> And every shivering bent and blade,
> Stoops, bowing with a diamond drop.
> But soon shall fly those diamond drops,
> The red round sun advances higher.
> And, stretching o'er the mountain tops,
> Is gilding sweet the village-spire
> (ll. 3-16)[124]

Two temporal frameworks of monthly custom and daily atmospheric shifts meet in these lines, and the poem provides a space in which to trace the detail of minute climatic occurrences that might otherwise be missed.

Significantly, being published in Hone's *Every-Day Book* meant that Clare's work was assimilated into a text that partially served the purpose of predicting healthy or unhealthy climatic effects. Throughout the anthology, Hone frequently quotes from a 'Dr. Forster', being Thomas Forster, the author of *Researches about Atmospheric Phenomena* (1813) and

[124] Clare, 'Summer Morning', in William Hone, *The Every-Day Book* (London: Hunt and Clarke, 1826), p. 962.

Observations on the Casual and Periodical Influence of Particular States of the Atmosphere on Human Health and Diseases (1817). Hone collated what he saw as the most useful extracts from Forster's texts. For example, the entry for January 19th reads:

> Dr. Forster, the scientific author of a treatise on 'Atmospheric Phenomena', and other valuable works, has included numerous useful observations on the weather in his recently published 'Perennial Calendar' […] He observes, in the latter work, that after certain atmospheric appearances on this day in the year 1809, 'a hard and freezing shower of hail and sleet came with considerable violence from the east, and glazed everything on which it fell with ice […] It may be observed that in both the above descriptions of similar phenomena, the east wind is recorded as bringing up the storm. It often disturbs the nervous system and digestive organs of many persons, causing headaches, fevers, and other disorders […]'. In the truth of these observations as regards health, he who writes this is unhappily qualified to concur from experience; and were it in his power, would ever shun the north-east as his most fearful enemy. There is something very remarkably unwholesome in the east winds and a change to that quarter.[125]

In the entries for May, Forster appears again:

> Rule of Health for May: The month of May is called a 'trying' month, to persons long ailing with critical complaints […] 'As a rule of health for May', says Dr. Forster, 'we may advise early rising in particular, as being essentially conducive to that blessing. Everything now invites the sluggard to leave his bed and go abroad. Milton has given such a lively description of morning scenes as must rouse every lover of the country from his couch'[126]

From considering the specific texts that Hone sought to collate in his almanac, a picture emerges not only of the kinds of popular theories of atmospheric effects on health and illness that Clare would have encountered, but of how his poetry might register this mode of

[125] Hone, *Every-Day Book*, p. 133.
[126] Hone, *Every-Day Book*, p. 126.

forecast. Take, for example, the first half of one of his middle-period sonnets, 'The blossom burthened ever welcome May' (1820s-1830s):

> The blossom burthened ever welcome May
> Again with natures folk keeps holiday
> Trees hide themselves in green & happy birds
> Sings sweeter songs then can be breathed in words
> The very winds sing sonnets to the sky
> & sunshine bids them welcome – so that I
> Feel a new being as from healthier climes
> & shape my idle fancies into ryhmes
>
> (*MP*, II, ll. 1-8, p. 134)

Recalling the entry from Hone about May being a 'trying' month, Clare's sonnet turns on the collective anticipation of seasonal shifts and a change in one's state of health. Although self-confessedly wary of the predictions of almanacs, the poem here registers the cyclical recurrence of healthy effects as inherent within shared customs and 'holiday'. 'Feel a new being as from healthier climes' stretches the iambic pentameter into 11 syllables, and extends the breath in its attempt to foster a change in mental and physical health. Such formal discrepancy registers the effort of this undertaking; the sonnet offers both a marker of recognised seasonal effects at the same time as it reveals the predictable aspirations towards health as potentially laboured.

Perhaps the slightly uneasy welcoming of a new, healthier season in the above lines stems from Clare's need to negotiate the relationship between climatic shifts on a national, cultural level and at the level of his own local atmospherics. Attending to the specificities of Clare's environment reveals that some of the atmospheric effects he was exposed to gained a medical and cultural reputation as particularly unhealthy. Eliza Emmerson and her husband, despite her complaints about the noxious atmosphere of the city, were always keen for Clare

to leave Helpston and come and visit them in their house in London for periods of respite. Emmerson wrote to him in June 1825, asking after the health of one of his daughters, also named Eliza:

> How is the health of my poor little namesake? She, too, cannot escape the ague-like effects of the season, and your vile fenny atmosphere. I sincerely wish both for your children's sake & your own you could quit the flats & bogs of Helpstone[127]

Here, Emmerson expresses a common contemporary attitude towards Clare's locale, which is that marsh and fen-lands were more conducive to the spread of disease and illnesses due to the unhealthy atmospheres and vapours that rose from their moist, watery ground. An emphasis on local as well as national climate meant that fens and marshes gained a lot of attention for being a particularly unhealthy blot on the landscape. In *Matter of Air* (2010), Steven Connor draws out what he sees as two key Romantic and nineteenth-century attitudes towards the air. The first is air as a kind of inspirational 'radiance' that falls from above: a 'Romantic haze' or mist that both 'diffuses and retains radiance'.[128] The second is more pathological: the 'vaporous sensibility' where 'mists and fogs are held to be the unhealthy halitosis of the ground […] full of infection, as opposed to the ethereal lucidity of the upper air'.[129] Connor asserts a distinction here between above and below, healthy and unhealthy that recalls the topographical navigations of 'Midsummer' at the start of this chapter. Even though the ploughman is in a field and not in direct contact with fen or marsh, it becomes significant that health does not emanate from the dizzying mountain heights where more radiant airs might reside, but from the ground, there to be breathed in by those who have close contact with the earth. Caroline Hannaway's tracing of the Hippocratic influence on

[127] MS Eg. 2247, f. 219.
[128] Connor, *Matter of Air*, p. 178.
[129] Connor, *Matter of Air*, p. 179.

eighteenth- and nineteenth-century environmental medicine also asserts the unhealthiness of fens and marshes, compounding a distinction between high and low, air and earth: 'Locale is significant in the equation of towns and airs. The unhealthiest waters are marshy stagnant waters; slightly less unhealthy are spring waters from rocky sites […] the best waters flow from high places and earthy hills'.[130] In *Rural Rides* (1830), William Cobbett recalls an encounter with a mass of fog on the journey from London to Newbury, but is assured by its resemblance to more innocuous clouds formed from above rather than risen from below: 'I do not think that they are by any means injurious to health. It is the fogs that rise out of swamps, and other places, full of putrid vegetable matter, that kill people'.[131]

What Emmerson refers to as the 'ague-like effects' is 'fen-fever', a malarial condition reported to induce fevers and shivering fits. Fenwick Skrimshire was Clare's Peterborough doctor (he was also the doctor who signed off on Clare's committal papers to Northampton asylum in 1841). In his treatise, *The Village Pastor's Surgical and Medical Guide* (1838), he lays out not only the daily routines and duties involved in local parish healthcare, but also the specific medical complaints that arise from the surrounding local environment. The fens again emerge as a hotbed of illness and disease. He writes of cholera that it is 'a very common disease in the autumnal season, and particularly in our fenny districts'.[132] He also writes of 'the prevailing fevers of our fenny country' – a particular complaint that he traces is a 'remittent fever', characterised as 'a marked recurrence of fever, taking place once, or more frequently twice, daily'. Of this fever, he states that 'in our marshy country it is never an uncommon occurrence, and […] in some seasons, when ague and remittent fever occur more

[130] Caroline Hannaway, 'Environment and Miasmata', *Companion Encyclopedia of the History of Medicine*, 2 vols., ed. W. F. Bynum and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1993), I, p. 293.
[131] William Cobbett, *Rural Rides* (London: William Cobbett, 1830), p. 127.
[132] Fenwick Skrimshire, *The Village Pastor's Surgical and Medical Guide* (London: Hatchard and Son, 1838), p. 320.

than usually, it is almost a constant occurrence'.[133] It appears that Skrimshire's best remedy for this complaint was removal from the harmful environment altogether:

> where the patient has continued to reside in an aguish district, or has remained exposed to the same source of malaria which induced the original attack […] nothing effects so certain, so sudden, and so permanent a recovery, as change of air, by which I mean a lengthened removal to what we fen men call the high country.[134]

In Mudie's *The Air*, the fens appear again as ultimately generating an unhealthy atmosphere:

> The swamp and the fen, in whatever climate they may be situated, are not fit places for human habitations […] The fens of our own country, in former times they shook numbers of the people with ague, and are still not without some instances of that malady.[135]

Clare was certainly alert to the fen-land that surrounded his local environment as a potential site of atmospheric contagion. In 'The Fens' (1832-35), the landscape is figured as provoking shudders, chills and the ague, with fearsome creatures lurking beneath murky waters:

> Wandering by the rivers edge
> I love to rustle through the sedge
> & through the woods of reed to tear
> Almost as high as bushes are
> Yet, turning quick with shudder chill
> As danger ever does from ill
> Fear's moment-ague quakes the blood
> While plop the snake coils in the flood
>
> (*MP*, V, ll. 1-8, p. 27)

The fens were also a place where Clare encountered air and atmospherics in a deluding or fantastical form. His essay on 'The Will O Whisp or Jack A Lanthorn' reveals his awareness

[133] Skrimshire, *Surgical and Medical Guide*, p. 238.
[134] Skrimshire, *Surgical and Medical Guide*, p. 259.
[135] Mudie, *The Air*, p. 137.

of the unhealthy reality of his surroundings working in tandem with a more imaginative reworking of it. He states:

> I have often seem these vapours or what ever philosophy may call them but I never wit nessd so remarkable an instance of them as I did last night which has robd me of the little philosophic reason-[in]g which I had – about them I now believe them spirits but I will leave the facts to speak for themselves […] now these things are gennerally believd to be vapours rising from the foul air from bogs and wet places were they are generaly seen and being as is said lighter then the common air they float about at will[136]

Here, contagion and the spread of disease are transformed into a moment of bewilderment and enchantment. Whilst not resisting the knowledge of his surroundings as undesirable or a potential threat to health, Clare finds in them the potential for revision and re-telling that might reframe how he encounters them.

How might Clare reconcile or reimagine his unhealthy environment in relation to his frequent aspirations towards health as that which can be breathed in from his natural surroundings? In 'The Hedge Woodbine' (1819-32), Clare challenges and plays around with the healthy and unhealthy division between different kinds of air:

> The common woodbine in the hedge row showers
> A multitude of blossoms & from thence
> The tinctured air all fragrance on the sense
> Flings richest sweets that almost over powers
> & faintness pauls the taste which goes away
> When some old ballad beautifully sung
> Comes through the hedge with crowded fragrance hung
> From merry maidens tossing up the hay
> To list the sunny mirth we inly feel
> That none but beautys self could sing so well
> & pastoral visions on our fancys dwell
> Our joys excess joys inmost thoughts consceal
> The wood bine hedge – the maids half toil half play

[136] *By Himself*, pp. 251-52.

> -Words like to clouds obscure & wear away
>
> (*MP*, IV, ll. 1-14, p. 350)

What is most significant here is Clare's use of the word 'tinctured' to describe the air that is flung on the senses. It evokes a kind of synaesthesia: a tincture can mean a tint of colour, a hue or dye, as well as a taste or flavour. But it also has a strong pharmaceutical connotation in that to make a tincture is to make a solution out of a material substance (for example, laudanum was a tincture of opium) that can be infused. The air takes on a medicalised, perhaps pain-relieving or health-giving quality in this sonnet then, bound up in an experience of sensorially overwhelming beauty. However, in the manuscript version of this sonnet, Eric Robinson and David Powell have noted that, down the edge of the page are written three lines that Clare might have intended to replace the last lines. If we bring these lines into play, we get a collision between this healthy, tinctured air and a purified aesthetic experience, and the reality of the fens' atmospheric effects. The sonnet's ending with the new lines would read:

> & pastoral visions on our fancys dwell
> A settling moister spatters all around
> Refreshing fragrance of enchanting smell
> Reaks from the dripping ground
>
> (MP, *IV*, p. 350, ll. 1-4)

Here, spattering moisture and potentially noxious 'reaks' rise up from the ground, and also from the bottom of the sonnet, to create a heady mix of the healthy and unhealthy. Conspiring with this collision of airs, some of the lines in this sonnet, especially those dealing with an experience of inhalation, are made to be metrically stretched, ambiguous, or clipped. 'Flings richest sweets that almost over powers' contains the possibility of an extra syllable to be stressed on the word powers, elongating the breath to either take in its effects or push the

breath's limits to enact this overpowering sensation. Similarly, when 'A settling moister spatters all around', 'settling' has the potential to disturb the syllable count of the line and make the breath stumble over this new, potentially unhealthy addition to the atmosphere. And finally, on the alternative last line, we only have six syllables in 'Reaks from the dripping ground', and the breath is cut short. Clare's direction, or perhaps misdirection, of the breath in this sonnet lends an embodied materiality to his negotiation of different, conflicting senses of air and their healthy or unhealthy connotations. By bringing the reality of his local climate into relationship with an ideal, perfumed, inspirational air, he could be seen to recuperate his unhealthy atmosphere as well as challenge assumptions about the pestilential environment. What we are offered is an air both reaking and refreshing, and it becomes hard to tell where the healthy ends and the unhealthy begins. Clare's innovative approach to the healthy and pathological associations of his local environment is taken up further by the following chapter.

Chapter Three

'this is my indisposition': Health In and Out of Place

One of the most persistent narratives surrounding Clare's admittance to High Beech asylum in 1837 is that his final unravelling was caused by his move from Helpston to Northborough in 1832. Frederick Martin is one of a number of commentators who popularised this narrative. In his early biography, Clare is depicted as a weak and disoriented figure led away 'gently' to a miserable fate, 'walking mechanically with eyes half shut, as in a dream'.[1] What Martin emphasises as most catastrophic for the poet's mental and physical health is Clare's removal from the natural specificities of his everyday surroundings: 'here he knew every shrub and every inch of ground, and, through many year's converse with nature, had come to look upon the most minute objects with intense feelings of love'.[2] Whilst Martin's biography has long since given way to more measured accounts of the poet's life, Northborough continues to signify as a pivotal transition in Clare's mental and physical health that rests on intense local attachment.[3]

Jonathan Bate's account of the move employs a cartographical metaphor that traces a relationship with place beyond habit or affection: 'he was going out of his knowledge, away from the parish of Helpston that had mapped the contours of his very being'.[4] Self is conjoined with place to the point of psycho-physiological dependency here; 'being' is fleshed out into a physicality, the 'contours' of which are defined and upheld by the boundaries of a

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[1] Frederick Martin, *The Life of John Clare* (London, 1865), p. 246.
[2] Martin, *Life*, p. 244.
[3] See John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730-1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 174; Tim Chilcott, *'a real world and a doubting mind': A Critical Study of the Poetry of John Clare* (Hull: Hull University Press, 1985), p. 108; Roger Sales, *John Clare: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 65; Eric Robinson, David Powell and P.M.S Dawson, 'Introduction', *John Clare: Poems of the Middle Period, 1822-1837*, vol. 3, ed. Robinson, Powell and Dawson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. xxii; Robinson, Powell and Dawson, 'Introduction', *John Clare: Northborough Sonnets*, ed. Robinson, Powell and Dawson (Manchester: Carcanet, 1995), p. x.
[4] Bate, *John Clare*, p. 387.

local topography determined by the limits of 'knowledge'. In the introduction to the volume of Clare's poems he edited in 1908, Arthur Symons draws on a different metaphor that is equally expressive of Clare's being as dependent on a specific place:

> He could not endure that anything he had once known should be changed […] He kept his reason as long as he was left to starve and suffer in that hut, and when he was taken from it, though to a better dwelling, he lost all hold on himself. He was torn up by the roots, and the flower of his mind withered. What this transplanting did for him is enough to show how native to him was his own soil, and how his songs grew out of it.[5]

These metaphors, the cartographic and the uprooted, define the scope of this chapter. Bate's sense of Clare's self as mapped onto and delimited by the land, and Symons' image of the poet's mind as an uprooted plant, offer a model of the relationship between health and place – one where health is constituted by a sense of being securely in place, and is compromised by an experience of dislocation. But Clare's poetry frequently challenges connections between health and rootedness and illness and displacement. This chapter explores how Clare negotiates the premise of healthy emplacement. Taking into account the structural shifts and placings of his poetry, such as line-endings and sonic progressions, it will explore how these formal arrangements come to figure the relationship between place and the healthy body and mind. The discussion is framed by two medical contexts relevant to Clare's reading of health and place – phrenology and botany – and presents the two disciplines as constructing a form of 'topographical medicine' that draws together the mind, the body, and places in the external world. How Clare might use his own poetic placings to register, resist, or rework these topographical bounds is at the heart of my enquiry.

[5] Arthur Symons, 'Introduction', *Poems by John Clare* (London: H. Frowde, 1908), pp. 3-24 (p. 17).

Contrary to Martin's depiction of a devastated figure being forcibly removed from his home, Clare's own accounts suggest that he was looking forward to moving to Northborough, and was impatient to do so.[6] In late 1831 and early 1832, relocating to a bigger cottage held the promise of a new beginning for the poet and his family. Economic independence, subscriptions for a new volume of poetry (that would later become *The Rural Muse* (1835)), and, crucially, better health were all on the horizon. Clare wrote to Taylor from Helpston 'I am going to leave here & commence cottage farming […] of one thing I am certain that if health keeps on my side I shall become an independent man'.[7] As his flitting drew nearer he wrote again:

> altho I have had some difficulties to leave the woods & heaths & favourite spots that have known me so long […] my wishes have grown into resolves to better my self & I feel that I am commencing with a good opportunity […] I am looking at a sunny prospect – (there may be clouds & where is the sky without them) & I think that I shall yet live to see myself independant of all but old friends & good health & as the best way to end well is to begin well my desire is to start upon a new leaf […] all that remains is to make a beginning.[8]

Clare also wrote to his friend Marianne Marsh about the move, anticipating its curative benefits:

> as for myself I have just fell in with a bad cold & I cannot shake it off sufficiently to get out for I have been so subject to illness laterly that I dread every hazard that may tend to renew it & under that feeling perhaps incur more danger of illness than if I had no fear of it – I am going from Helpstone at Spring to a cottage at Northbro' – where I hope that excersise will keep me in health & then I shall have a pathway to contentment[9]

[6] For discussions of Clare's enthusiasm about the move to Northborough, see also Andrew Hodgson, 'Clare on the Wane', *English* (2015), pp. 296-311 (p. 296) and Simon White, 'John Clare's Sonnets and the Northborough Fens', *John Clare Society Journal* 28 (2009), pp. 55-70.
[7] Letter to John Taylor, October 1831, *Letters*, p. 550.
[8] Letter to John Taylor, January 1832, *Letters*, p. 561.
[9] Letter to Marianne Marsh, January 1832, *Letters*, pp. 559-60.

Here the poet is captivated by the possibilities of movement and transformation. Most striking is how he associates peripatetic tropes, the 'prospect' and the 'pathway', with the expectation that his health will return and, furthermore, remain. In one way, faced with upheaval and displacement, Clare finds comfort in adopting the register of pedestrian literature.[10] His expression recalls that of the 'Valetudinarian' at the opening of Thelwall's *The Peripatetic* (1793), who seeks to overcome unhealthy stasis and confinement by setting out on a 'pedestrian expedition, in quest of health and recreation'.[11]

Clare's expedition is smaller in scale, yet it embraces the alliance of health and mobility that pervades both the literature and medicine of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. As the developments in climatic medicine discussed in the previous chapter show, travel and health were allied in medical thought as well as cultural consciousness, where movements between country, city, and coast as well as between continents were frequently prescribed and represented as curative. It is less the climate of specific regions that is of interest for this discussion than the emphasis that health-tourism placed on relocation as restorative for both the body and mind. As Jeremy Black argues, the Grand Tour of the eighteenth century accompanied by the increasing popularity of spa resorts in Britain and Europe resulted in a 'fusion of two of the more important developments in upper-class activities in this period: tourism and travelling for health'.[12] Granted, the wandering route to health taken on foot by Thelwall's valetudinarian is not completely akin to the larger scale mobility of those who relocated to a more restorative part of the country or sailed overseas for healthier climes. What these forms of travel share, however, is an impulse that situates

[10] For sustained treatment of the enduring influence of peripatetic literature in the nineteenth century, see Anne D. Wallace, *Walking, Literature, and English Culture: The Origins and Uses of Peripatetic in the Nineteenth* Century (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Jeffrey Cane Robinson, *The Walk: Notes on a Romantic Image* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989); Robin Jarvis, *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997).
[11] John Thelwall, *The Peripatetic*, ed. Judith Thompson (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001), p. 78.
[12] Jeremy Black, *The British and the Grand Tour* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), p. 86.

health at the end of a journey, and necessitates a movement between places. Reading Clare's anticipation of the move to Northborough within a tradition of health expeditions opens up the suggestion that he is participating in an established culture of mobility at the same time as he is being forced to relocate for reasons beyond his control. These two positions lend his letters immediately preceding the 'Northborough period' both a hopeful impetus and a sense of resistance.

Whilst the promise of an easy path to health is important both as a conceit and as a material possibility of movement for Clare, it is undercut by the false starts into which he writes himself. He is eager to be in motion, yet his writing expresses frustration at being held up, at being caught at the juncture between staying and going. In striving to put his best foot forward, Clare falls into circularity at times: 'the best way to end well is to begin well' has a reverse logic to it, so that although it expresses a desire to move onwards, it doubles back on itself to end up at the beginning. Similarly, his assertion that 'all that remains is to make a beginning' discloses an underlying hesitancy where 'remains' pulls against the forward momentum. Whilst his illness manifests as an inability to 'get out' and move beyond the bounds he has anxiously imposed upon himself, the remedy that Clare seeks is not without its own lingering attachments, or is certainly difficult to put into words without upsetting the distinction between the straightforward 'pathway' he imagines and the stasis he wishes to escape.

When Clare and his family finally moved to Northborough, he did not experience the miraculous recovery for which he had hoped. In September 1832 he wrote to Taylor 'I am in fact worse off then before I entered on the place'.[13] As he began to communicate a period of 'melancholy' and decline between 1832-37 in much of his correspondence, Clare repeated a

[13] Letter to John Taylor, 6 September 1832, *Letters*, p. 592.

particular term to describe his state of body and mind.[14] In a letter to Henry Edmund Carrington in 1833, he wrote 'I have for the last few years suffered severely from *indisposition* & have been at times incapable of either writing or reading yet I hope I am better & shall wear out of it'; to George Reid in 1834 he wrote again 'I am sorry to say that I have suffered so much lately from severe *indisposition* that I am careless almost of either censure or praise' (my emphases).[15] Whilst Northborough continues to signify as a pivotal experience of alienation and displacement in Clare's biography, one has to look further back in his letters to find his first usage of 'indisposition', and to see its resonance as a term expressing a conflicted relationship with place that has a direct connection to mental and physical health.

Prior to his move to Northborough, Clare was attentive to his attachment to his local environment, to the point where he expressed an awareness that it might differ to that of other people in ways potentially unhelpful or even unhealthy. As he writes in a letter to Taylor:

> was People all to feel & think as I do the world coud not be carried on – a green woud not be ploughd a tree or bush woud not be cut for firing or furniture & everything they found when boys would remain in that state till they dyd – this is my indisposition[16]

Again, 'indisposition' is the most significant term here, conveying both a sense of locatedness, a 'position' in the world, as well as the suggestion that this position comes with the potential for disorder and difficulty. Whilst being a catch-all term for illness that was popular during the eighteenth and nineteenth century, Clare's use of indisposition seems to move beyond medical generalism to take full advantage of the word's connotations.[17] Definitions of indisposition in use during Clare's moment of writing include 'want of

[14] For 'melancholy', see for example his letter to Eliza Emmerson, 13 November 1832, *Letters*, pp. 603-4.
[15] Letter to Henry Edmund Carrington, 26 December 1833; Letter to George Reid, 16 November 1834, *Letters*, p. 610, p. 618.
[16] Letter to John Taylor, 7 March 1821, *Letters*, p. 161.
[17] *OED*, 'indisposition', n., sense 3.

adaption to some purpose, or to the circumstances of the case; unfitness, unsuitableness, incapacity, inability'; 'want of apt arrangement or orderly placing'; 'disordered bodily condition; ill health, illness, ailment'; 'the state of not being mentally disposed, or "in the mind" to something, or to do something'.[18] 'Indisposition' therefore brings the mind, body, and a sense of place and orientation into relation with one another, but in a way that unsettles any notion of harmonious union. Clare's use of the word draws connections between his psycho-physiological state and his environment that invite both strong attachment and a more pathological dependency. This is not to suggest that Clare reaffirms the narrative about his unhealthy inability to adapt to any other places, but rather that he is highly perceptive of the fragile boundary between healthy and unhealthy forms of attachment, and turns to a definition of his mental and physical state that holds both in tension.

In its medical sense, 'indisposition', or to be 'indisposed', implies a bout of illness that is temporary, not permanent.[19] Clare's adoption of the word, however, stresses the idea of 'position', of being positioned or placed in a certain way, and consequently defines a state where change or recovery is not possible: 'would remain in that state till they dyd'. The term's spatial dimensions thus impress upon his perception of both health and illness as emplaced, and of recovery as a form of mobility that might never occur. Clare's reference to his 'indisposition' in this letter to Taylor shows that Northborough is only a local example of an uneasy relationship between health and place that permeates his writings. His locational reading of indisposition provides the conceptual framework for this chapter, indicating as it does the importance of place as both an organising and a disrupting principle in Clare's understanding of what health is and how it is constituted.

[18] *OED*, 'indisposition', n., senses 1, 2, 3, and 4.
[19] *OED*, 'indisposition', n., sense 3.

‘As when health used to go’: Poetics of Displacement

The following lines form a fragment from Clare’s middle-period poetry. They are dated 1832-37, and offer an initial platform for thinking about how health and place might interrelate poetically:

> The mind will dream and cling
> To pleasant things
> That come again with spring
> As when health used to go
> Down little paths and spy
> Cowslips so nigh
> That as we wandered bye
> Would pat agen the shoe
>
> (*MP*, V, ll. 1-8, pp. 197-98)

Its status as a fragment marks it immediately as an oddity, ephemeral and difficult to place within a larger body of work. The editorial decisions surrounding these lines attest to the problem of how to classify and locate them: J. W. Tibble added them to the end of a longer poem, entitled ‘The Early Daisy’, whilst Eric Robinson and David Powell isolate them, adhering to their manuscript position over the page from the stanzas Tibble edited heavily.[20] These print conditions add an extra context of dislocation to a fragment that already places and displaces health in strange ways. The mind, the body, and the location of health all share a complex interrelation: in the space of eight lines, Clare’s subject travels from the clinging ‘mind’, to the bodily contact of cowslips on his feet, via a ‘health’ that seems to be distributed between mental and physical experience. The opening ‘mind’ is endowed with a tactile capacity through its ability to ‘cling / To pleasant things’, a metaphorical holding on

[20] See *The Poems of John Clare*, ed. J. W. Tibble, 2 vols., I (London: J. M. Dent, 1935); *Poems of the Middle Period*, V, pp. 195-198. Robinson and Powell cite the manuscript as Pet. MS A59, and the poem and fragment cover pages 76-77.

that anticipates a more embodied form of attachment. Rhyme offers a formal echo of this mental attachment, too, as the sounds of 'cling' are reiterated across the three opening lines ('cling', 'things', 'spring'). Clare threads another triple rhyme through lines 5-7 ('spy', 'nigh', and 'by'), resulting in an effect of security and rootedness achieved through repeated sound. Mind, body, and the natural world, with health as their vehicle, achieve a form of unison as the former's attachment to 'pleasant things' becomes mirrored in the physical sensation of 'cowslips' brushing up against the subject's shoe.

There is something of Coleridge's sense of the 'coinstantaneous' relationship between subject and object in these lines.[21] Experience and knowledge are formed through a dialectic of self and world, each affirming and co-creating the other. John Middleton Murry's assessment of Clare as a 'self-forgetful' poet who favours a descriptive immersion in the objective world around him is somewhat dated now, but there persists a critical investment in his works as privileging a form of materialism over the egotistical or idealist visions of nature in, for instance, Wordsworth's poetry.[22] In this line of argument, Alan Vardy suggests that Clare, unlike Wordsworth, deliberately does not 'recuperate the objects of nature into the aesthetic construction of the self'.[23] Whilst there may be no overt appropriation of nature as a representation or index of inner experience in the above lines, they do reveal Clare to be captivated by the entangled relationship between the self and the natural world. The self is hardly forgotten or faded into the background here, but examined intensely as forming a mind and a body that are as much constructed by their outer environment as they are the vehicles through which such an environment can come into being. Juliet Sychrava's comparison of

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[21] S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press), I, p. 255.

[22] John Middleton Murray, *Countries of the Mind: Essays in Literary Criticism* (London: W. Collins sons & co 1922), p. 104. For discussions of the differences between Clare and Wordsworth's poetic projects, see James McKusick, 'Beyond the Visionary Company: John Clare's resistance to Romanticism', *In Context*, pp. 221-237; Tim Chilcott, *A real world & doubting mind: A Critical Study of the Poetry of John Clare* (Hull: Hull University Press, 1985); Erica McAlpine, 'Keeping Nature at Bay: John Clare's Poetry of Wonder', *Studies in Romanticism* 50.1 (2011), pp. 79-104.

[23] Alan Vardy, *John Clare, Politics, and Poetry* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 24.

Clare and Wordsworth's participation in a 'Romantic idiom' claims that Clare, unlike Wordsworth, 'never articulates exchange between subject and object'.[24] This is because, for Sychrava, Wordsworth takes pains to describe the interactions between subject and object in his poetry, whereas Clare, because his verse is 'grammatically ambiguous', instead moves 'from one to the other without distinction'.[25] This is argued as a radical move on Clare's part – a rejection of an idiom that asserts a distinction between subject and object in the first place. What the above fragment shows, however, is that the ambiguity of Clare's line-endings is a form of articulation that does not completely reject the 'Romantic idiom' so much as appropriate it into a poetics of place and displacement.

Alongside the mental and material correspondence in Clare's verse there lie suggestions of dissonance. He unsettles the subject-object union by avoiding the use of possessive pronouns: referring to 'the mind' and not 'my mind', for example, imposes a sense of the subject's distance from their own mental faculties; likewise 'the shoe' is at a remove from 'my shoe'. This feeling of displacement stretches further into line four's comparison of mental attachment to 'As when health used to go'. The line is unsettling for the way health is figured both as an independent agent and as a potential departure, unstable and likely to 'go' away from the subject at any given moment. Rather than a physical or mental state or feeling located in the body or mind or, indeed, dependent on the union of these faculties, health is represented as redrawing these psycho-physiological bounds. It is distributed beyond the subject, able to move freely 'down little paths', to observe the surrounding flora and, in turn, to be observed by the 'we' that 'wandered by'.

Clare holds up this unnerving mobility of health through a form of poetic placing that plays with the transitive and intransitive potential of the line. The word 'go' further endows

[24] Juliet Sychrava, *Schiller to Derrida: Idealism in Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 207.
[25] Sychrava, *Schiller to Derrida*, p. 208.

health with the potential to leave the body and mind, and its location at the end of the line suspends the action in a pause. The reader is left disorientated and wondering where health will 'go' to, before the 'down' of the following line puts it back into place. 'Cling' is also subjected to this suspension of action, made intransitive as it hangs at the end of the line awaiting its direct object. These two verbs are brought into relation with each other through Clare's formal placing, and the result is a flitting between clinging and going, between staying in one place and moving towards another. The return to physical contact at the end of the fragment, when the cowslips 'pat agen the shoe' of those that wander by them, puts the subject into a place where these clingings and goings are recursive, occurring over and 'agen'. That the healthy subject might become the locus for such repeated tension guides the enquiry of this chapter. Bound up in the provoking of departures and meetings, health becomes a fulcrum around which psycho-physiological boundaries are navigated - caught between the mind that clings and the body (or embodied action) that goes, and registered by a poetic form that displaces such actions across lines.

Christopher Ricks draws attention to how the line endings of poems do not create straightforward separations, but rather interrogate the relationship between the parts and wholes of poetic form and the subjects it figures:

> No fragmentation into separateness; but also no dissolution within a greedily engrossing unity. Such a commitment asks an analogous literary feat: that the relationship between the line of verse and the passage of verse be just such a relationship. The poetic achievement is itself to embody the values to which the poet has allegiance. The separate line of verse must not be too simply separate, and yet it must have its individuality respected.[26]

[26] Christopher Ricks, *The Force of Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984; 1995), p. 91.

Giorgio Agamben's study of the 'end of the poem' offers a way of thinking about Ricks' ideas of fragmentation and unity in relation to a sense of being in place. Agamben is concerned both with the end of the poem proper and with the indeterminacy of line endings, suggesting that the latter is most often brought to our attention through enjambment – a moment that gives rise to 'opposition between a metrical limit and a semantic limit'.[27] Enjambment is, for Agamben, the primary distinguishing feature between poetry and prose. Poetry interrupts syntax in service of metre, disrupting sentences and ideas as they tumble over into subsequent lines that feel like starting over even though, as Ricks suggests, they may feed into a cohesive whole. Agamben then reminds his reader that the very word 'verse' is derived from the Latin term '*versure*': 'indicating the point at which the plow turns around at the end of the furrow'.[28] Read with this in mind, versification and line endings in particular are realised as a form of mobility, and lent the potential to carve out a sense of space and place on the page. They capture a physical movement that is not straightforwardly linear, but is instead a constant negotiation between venturing forward and looping back. This back-and-forth movement traces the relationship between separateness and unity that concerns Ricks, as the lines of poems gesture towards departures that then turn back in. While Ricks refers to Wordsworth's line-endings in the above passage, the same could be said of Clare's versification and placing of verbs. The term 'embody' is particularly significant in regard to the poetic relationship he sets up between health, mind, body, and place in the fragment with which this section started. If the poem can 'embody the values' of the poet, then it could be argued that what Clare values is an experience of health that is both embodied and disembodied, located simultaneously within mental and physical bounds and in

[27] Giorgio Agamben, *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 110.
[28] Agamben, *End of the Poem*, p. 111.

the external environment. This is a slippage that he is able to dramatise through the displacing potential of line endings.

Throughout Clare's poetry, health appears frequently as an encounter that is met or stumbled upon in natural places and spaces, rather than an internal state. In 'Summer Ballad' (1819-32) there is 'green health in every place' (*MP*, IV, l. 26, p. 141); in 'A Raphsody' (1842-1864) there is 'health mid growing crops' (*LP*, II, l. 35, p. 993); in 'Love of the Fields' (1832) the 'woodman abides in the old forest grey / Amidst the green temple of health' (*MP*, IV, ll. 35-36, p. 111); whilst in 'To Health' (1819) it has a ubiquitous presence in the natural world, and can be found in 'woods', 'hills', 'the russet heath' and 'weedy waters' (*EP*, I, ll. 32-47, pp. 25-26). The following sonnet ('Mild health I seek there wither art thou found', 1830s) further illustrates Clare's concern with health as located in places outside of the self:

> Mild health I seek thee wither art thou found
> Mid daiseys sleeping in the morning dew
> Along the meadow paths where all around
> May smells so lovely thither would I go
> Where art thou envious blessing now the cold
> Is gone away & hedge & wood is seen
> All lovely & the gay marsh marigold
> Edges the meadow lakes so freshly green
> My straining eye so anxious to behold
> Thee up & journeying on the swallows wing
> To see thee up & shining everywhere
> Among the sweet companions of the spring
>
> (*MP*, II, ll. 1-12, p. 250)

Here health is dispersed widely, unrestricted by both psychophysiological and topographical bounds. It is not portrayed as static, but captured instead through variously located positions of involvement with the surrounding world: 'mid', 'along', 'around', 'journeying', 'everywhere'. Clare avoids placing health within himself or the subject's being, and does not express any wish that this should be so: rather, he offers another instance of the tension

between wanting to keep something in place and to allow it to move on. His subject's desire to 'behold' health conflates these two impulses: 'behold' contains a sense of the embodied or haptic that hints at wanting to hold on to health physically whilst at the same time surveying its journey upwards and outwards into places 'everywhere'. Shortening the sonnet to twelve lines also enacts a form of holding on, condensing the poetic space to emphasise a sense of 'straining' against health's dispersal. There is a constant exchange between freedom and containment in this sonnet as its line endings defy its bounded nature. The verb 'go' appears again in an intransitive sense, and this time it is the subject and not health who might 'go' to an unspecified place. The 'where' of the following line sets up the possibility that the subject might go to where health is hiding itself, although the questioning nature of 'where art thou' (not 'where thou art') undercuts this with uncertainty, and leaves the 'go' open to other, potentially unknowable locations.

As these formal junctures disrupt any straightforward sense of journey or direction in the sonnet, this disruption extends to the nature of health itself. Whilst health becomes contingent on a location that is either constantly shifting or never fully revealed, it is also set up as that which is sought after and, at the same time, as that which is capable of its own modes of seeking; health is pursued in this sonnet, yet in the previous fragment health departs from the subject in order to search and 'spy' the cowslips that occupy its path. As Frederic Gros argues, walking in the natural world within a Romantic literary and philosophical tradition has repeatedly been represented as provoking moments of 'excesses'. Gros describes these moments as 'surfeits of fatigue that make the mind wander, abundances of beauty that turn the soul over, excesses of drunkenness on the peaks, the high passes (where the body explodes)'.[29] Clare not only brings these sensations of a blurred, expanded and divided self into a specific relationship with health, but also explores the potential for poetic

[29] Frederic Gros, *A Philosophy of Walking*, trans. by John Howe (London; New York: Verso, 2014), p. 20.

form to register and incarnate the lived experience of what it means to find your health somewhere outside of the parameters of your own body and mind, or for health to lead the body and mind away from themselves.

'To Health' instigates this kind of search, where health is such a ubiquitous presence that it confuses any sense of direction between who is looking and who, or what, is being found. Even the title of this poem contains a hidden notion of the journey, presented as a straightforward ode but also hinting that the poem will trace the experience of being taken 'to' health. It comes as a surprising jolt, then, when health suddenly transforms into an accomplice as well as the object of this quest:

> With her I search the woodland shade
> Beset in briery wild among
> With her I tred the tufted glade
> Transported by the woodlarks song
>
> With her I wander where the sheep
> In groups display a chequer'd shade
> Where weedy waters winding creep
> Nor will she follow clods disdain
>
> (*EP*, II, ll. 41-48, pp. 25-26)

Here health is not only a feeling or encounter that needs to be sought out, but is 'with' the subject, alongside him as he 'search[es]', 'wander[s]' and is 'transported' through the natural world. The kinds of places that health leads the speaker into are noticeably specific and out of the way: the 'woodland shade', 'briery wild', 'tufted glade' and 'weedy waters' are all places that have to be uncovered, or require straying from a pedestrian path. Clare makes the poem take the lead as alliteration guides the speaker into each of these places. 'Beset' leads to 'briery', 'tred' to 'tufted', 'wander to where' and 'where' to 'weedy waters winding'. Tracing the search for health in his poems therefore calls for attention to both the kinds of

places that health is thought to be found, and the ways in which these places motivate a poetics that adapts to health's constantly shifting locations in order to guide us through them.

The Poem as Space and Place

The sense of place has become both a pervasive and problematic concept within Clare studies. It has been interrogated continuously by critics, especially since John Barrell's important close study of Clare's 'very individual sense of place' borne out of his desire to write 'locally'.[30] For Mina Gorji and Richard Cronin, place means suggestively both the specific places in the (predominately) natural world that Clare writes of and from, and also his position in the literary marketplace, urban social circles, and rural community he found himself drawn to and repelled by simultaneously.[31] These two understandings of place often intersect and overlap, as Fiona Stafford suggests in her discussion of regional identity and 'naming' as 'a way of placing people socially as well as geographically', an action that results frequently in 'double-edged attribute'.[32] Clare's advertisement as the 'Northamptonshire peasant poet' is a prime example of the double-bind Stafford recognises. Yet it is Clare's regionalism that has also driven interest in him as a figurehead of Romantic environmentalism and ecology. For James McKusick, Clare's poetry saw 'one of the inaugurating moments of ecological consciousness in English literature', specifically because 'his ecological vision emerges from […] commitment to his local environment'.[33] Whilst a sense of place grounded in ecological specificity has become crucial to readings of Clare's emplacement, it also opens up another form of environmental perception. In 'The Heath'

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[30] Barrell, *The Sense of Place*, pp. 114, 119.
[31] See Mina Gorji, *John Clare and the Place of Poetry* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008); Richard Cronin, 'In Place and Out of Place: Clare in *The Midsummer Cushion'*, *John Clare: New Approaches*, ed. by John Goodridge and Simon Kovesi (Peterborough: The John Clare Society, 2000).
[32] Fiona Stafford, *Local Attachments: The Province of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 82.
[33] James McKusick, *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 79-80.

(1842-64) pleasure is taken not only in the speaker's ability to identify and witness rabbits, daisies, and kingcups, but also in the way that they occupy space:

> The rabbits from the furze would squat, and run;
> The daiseys filling every open space;
> And crowds of kingcups golden as the sun,
> Shone on the molehills of that happy place.
>
> (*LP*, I, ll. 5-8, p. 317)

Both a material and immaterial exchange occurs in these lines. The 'daiseys filling every open space' in a way that satisfies the observer could also be said to instil feelings of 'fulfilment'. That is, they transform the material observation of occupied space into an emotionally full perception of place; it becomes a 'happy place' as much as a delineated area. Similarly, in 'The Return of Spring' (1842-64), Clare observes 'How lovely green and level meadows lye / Filling with flowers of spring day following day' (*LP*, ll. 11-12, p. 786). The appreciation of filled space and natural arrangement develops further a way of seeing guided by the language of the Picturesque in these instances. Fiona Stafford argues for the importance of the Picturesque as an aesthetic category that captured Clare's eye for composition and the painterly qualities of his poetry; it is the 'power to unsettle clear divisions' and the 'resistance to boundaries' within the Picturesque that speaks to his particular sense of visual arrangement.[34] Clare's pleasure in surveying filled space is not necessarily the result of enforcing spatial bounds and divisions upon the world around him, but rather an appreciation of an expansiveness kept in check. There is a delight in seeing the 'daiseys filling every open space' because there is also a security in knowing that this space is

[34] Fiona Stafford, 'John Clare's Colours', *New Essays*, pp. 17-37 (p. 22). For a sustained discussion of Clare's relationship to the Picturesque see also Timothy Brownlow, *John Clare and Picturesque Landscape* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

defined, a sentiment emphasised by Clare's choice to punctuate the line with a semi-colon rather than let the 'daiseys' drift into the kingcups in the following line.

Clare's considerations of filled space flag up an important distinction that occurs in the perception of the environment and our position within it. This distinction is between space and place – the former being a container-like shape or area that is 'filled', the latter being a more complex matrix of location, perception, and cultural and socio-economic contexts. In his study of the development of place in philosophical thought, Edward Casey argues that the concept of place gradually expanded to include the more 'cosmic and extra cosmic' theory of space that escalated in seventeenth-century physics.[35] The specificity of place and its meaning was assimilated into a much larger system of space and time, which held consequences for the way we relate to our environment that Casey argues philosophers still debate. This 'getting back into place' or 'recovery of place' concerns thinking about the human need to be in place, the consideration of specific locations that are our 'places', and the experiential relationship we have with those places.[36] There is more at stake in what Casey calls human 'implacement', than, as Tim Ingold argues, the 'mere fact of occupation'.[37] Clare's admiration for animals and natural matter that are capable of 'filling every open space' is arguably not the same as his consideration of his own place in the world, and yet he brings these two modes of being in place together in his thinking. In 'The Heath' there is a sense that the 'daiseys filling every open space' are not simply static objects occupying an area of land, but rather fulfilling their purpose as 'daiseys'. Their 'filling' is held up as a purposeful action similar to that of the rabbits as they engage with their place by squatting and running, so that being still and taking up space is revealed to hold the potential

[35] Edward Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), p. x.
[36] Edward Casey, *Getting Back Into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 3.
[37] Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling, and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 186.

of implacement: it can foster a meaningful connection with place whilst simultaneously remaining as a more simple instance of 'filling'. Indeed, the four lines taken from 'The Heath' convey a transition from the word 'space' to 'place', suggesting that they cannot be separated easily in Clare's perception of the natural world and himself within it.

Elsewhere in his poetry Clare reveals an interest in exploring and confusing the distinctions between space and place. In his late sonnet 'I Am' (1842-64), which shares its title with his more famous asylum poem, he declares:

> I was a being created in the race
> Of men disdaining bounds of place and time:-
> A spirit that could travel o'er the space
> Of earth and heaven, - like a thought sublime
> (*LP*, I, ll. 7-10, p. 398)

Considering space and place together becomes a way to transgress boundaries here, to expand the possibilities of fixed localities. Alongside the critical trend to read Clare as a poet dedicated to the local is an emergent impulse to disrupt this category and its dominion across his works. David Higgins, for example, explores Clare as a poet 'always fascinated by dislocation' and the capacity to transcend 'the merely local even when while rooted in it'.[38] This expansion is perceived at a cosmic, celestial level in 'I Am', but can also be found in poems that are more firmly on the ground. In 'A Hill-Side House' (1832-37), the observation of domestic wildlife offers a way into feeling at 'home': 'The cocks & hens that fill a little space / Are all that look like home about the place' (*MP*, V, ll. 11-12, p. 310). What might appear as a reductive or restrictive experience of place, 'home' being no larger than the space that can be filled by cocks and hens, can also be interpreted as an expansive perception,

[38] David Higgins, *Romantic Englishness: Local, National and Global Selves, 1780-1850* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 86.

where this ‘little space’ transgresses its dimensions to become an encompassing ‘all’ to those who encounter it.

The consistent negotiation between space and place is important for this chapter’s consideration of the poem as a space that can be formally sculpted in order to evoke an experience of place, within which an experience of health might be located. Indeed, a dual apprehension of space and place becomes mentally curative in ‘The Nursery Garden’ (1842-64):

> The nursery grounds, all stirred with the mild breeze,
> My mind from lonesome weariness relieves,
> […]
> I love the nursery, ‘tis a pleasant place,
> To spend one’s leisure hours, on summer’s day,
> To mark the various trees, throughout the space
>
> (*LP*, II, ll. 3-27, pp. 925-26)

The mental relief that comes from an apprehension of the dynamics of space and place is characterised by a sense of elongated time. The mind here is reminiscent of the earlier mind that ‘clings’ to its surroundings, as commas interrupt the progress of nearly every line and suspend action for a brief period. The space of the poem accommodates the time spent in certain places, then, as it enacts the lingering moment in time that the mind needs to find relief. In his philosophical study of the differences and relationship between space and place, Yi-Fu Tuan suggests that ‘place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other’.[39] Thinking of the poem as a site of interrelation between space and place offers a means to consider how such opportunities for freedom and attachment arise. In the above lines, Clare constructs a form of sanctuary where a sense of spatial freedom coexists with the security of a fixed location. Before considering further how such a poetic

[39] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), p. 3.

architecture can be brought to bear on the experience of health for Clare, however, it is important to introduce a key medical framework that maps the body and mind onto the demarcations of place.

Local Treatment: Topographical Medicine and Clare's Rapturous Borders

Topographical medicine incorporates both a 'topographical' approach to the body and mind as a series of interrelated sites or locations, and an exploration of how topography, that is, the specific elements of land, environment or any locality, has a direct effect on the health and illness of the body and mind. Anatomy is one of the most significant examples of topographical medicine, dividing the body up into regions and sites that have their own specific functions.[40] Writing in 1793, Thomas Beddoes suggested that the 'anatomical knowledge of a surgeon […] is perfectly analogous to subterraneous geography', capturing how the body becomes mapped onto apprehensions of place in the medical imagination of the period.[41] A detailed discussion of the rise of anatomy in particular during this period lies outside the scope of this chapter, but the ways in which the body and mind were treated as an environment and divided up into different regions provides a platform for assessing what kinds of medical contexts Clare might have been aware of, contexts that drew connections between the healthy body and mind (both as analogous to places and in relation to places). The discussion of the relationship between breath and health in the previous chapter provides an example of one such theory – the vapours and miasmas that were thought to travel in the air, breezes, and winds with healthful or debilitating effects envisaged a direct connection

[40] The *OED* definitions of topography mention anatomy specifically as an example of the word's medical associations: '*Anat*. The determination of the position of the various parts and organs of the body; regional anatomy', 'topography, n.'.
[41] Thomas Beddoes, *Observations on the Nature and Cure of Calculus, Sea Scurvy, Consumption, Catarrh, and Fever, together with Conjectures upon Several Other Subjects Physiological and Pathological* (London: J. Murray, 1793), p. 156.

between the body and different places through the breath. The hygiene and sanitation reforms sparked by Edwin Chadwick's campaigns and report on the sanitary conditions of the labouring classes in 1842 were also topographical, citing the hygiene conditions of towns, villages, houses and workplaces as the fundamental cause of illness.[42]

The sanitation reforms that considered place and location such crucial factors in the health of individuals came rather late in Clare's poetic career – he was re-admitted to Northampton Hospital by the end of 1841, but, of course, the systematic regulation of asylum conditions under moral management also made explicit connections between place, environment, and the health of patients. W. A. F. Browne's 1837 treatise is particular about the placing of asylums: 'the locality in which the building is erected may be made to contribute to the cure of insanity, and to the enjoyment of those under treatment'.[43] Browne's ideal location for an asylum was halfway between town and country, a location that would secure 'an unpolluted atmosphere, a retired and peaceful neighbourhood'.[44] This concern with the specifics of place consequently subjected patients to experiences of displacement. Controlled access to the supposed freedom of rural 'prospects' only emphasised, as Susan Piddock argues, the presence of 'the external world while they reside within the walls of the asylum'.[45]

Clare felt deeply this tension between illusory freedom and captivity. Letters and poems from his asylum years communicate his reactions to how he has been placed by moral management. He writes to his son Charles in 1847: 'Frederic and John had better not come unless they wish to do so for it's a *bad Place* and I have fears that they may get trapped'.[46]

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[42] Edwin Chadwick, *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* (London: W. Clowes and Sons, 1843).
[43] W. A. F Browne, *What Asylums Were, Are, and Ought to Be* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1837), p. 182.
[44] Browne, *What Asylums Were*, p. 181.
[45] Susan Piddock, 'The Moral Environment: Tuke, Hill and Browne 1813-1838', *A Space of Their Own: The Archaeology of Nineteenth Century Lunatic Asylums in Britain, South Australia, and Tasmania* (New York: Springer, 2007), pp. 49-76 (p. 55).
[46] Letter to Charles Clare, 15 June 1847, *Letters*, p. 654.

The sentiment is directed at Northampton asylum in general for the imprisonment it symbolises (he requests in a subsequent letter 'in your next say when Johnny is coming to fetch me away from this Bastile'), but his comment also suggests that the efforts to build asylums in the most curative environment possible cannot account for the feelings and experiences of patients that construct their own perception of place.[47] This is echoed in his 1848 letter to his wife, Patty:

> I write this in a green meadow by the side of the river agen […] the confusion and roar of Mill dams and locks is sounding very pleasant while I write it and its a beautiful Evening the meadows are greener than usual after the shower and the Rivers are brimful I think it is about two years since I was first sent up in this hell and not allowed to go out of the gates there never was a more disgraceful deception than this place[48]

From the perspective of Clare's confinement, the careful topography of asylums and the attempt to practice moral management through its geography are exposed for their inadequacies as well as their misappropriation of the curative specifics of place. Whilst he is able to sit in the 'meadow', his use of the present tense to transcribe his immediate experience of this place away from the asylum fails because it is ultimately dominated by the restrictions of the institution: even this moment of 'pleasant' recovery becomes a 'deception'. There is also a stark contrast between the capacity of the natural world to transgress its own borders – the river is 'brimful' with the threat of overflowing – and Clare's perception of himself as a prisoner denied such fluidity of movement. A later remark in the same letter betrays another deception from which Clare suffers. He claims that he has seen 'many' of Patty's 'little Brothers and Sisters at Northampton weary and dirty with hard work some of them with red hands but all in ruddy good health'.[49] This imaginary visitation (Patty never

[47] Letter to Charles Clare, 7 November 1849, *Letters*, p. 665.
[48] Letter to Patty Clare, 19 July 1848, *Letters*, p. 657.
[49] Letter to Patty Clare, 19 July 1848, *Letters*, p. 657.

visited Clare in Northampton, let alone any of her relatives) could be interpreted as an attempt to locate health in a place where he feels himself to be without it. As an image of 'good health', even this compensatory apparition is out of place within the asylum environment.

Clare's letters from Northampton asylum reveal a figure both wary of, and suffering within, a system that tried to order the nature in which place and health are related. An environment that was designed to provide a healthy balance of town and country, freedom and regimen, became instead a 'bad place' that disoriented him and made health a hallucinatory spectre rather than a substantial presence or felt state. Outside of asylum culture, the delineations of landscape and environment were integral to the diagnosis of diseases, to how practitioners conceived of their patients, and to the make-up of the medical profession. A treatise by John Conolly in 1833 was concerned with the observable effects of 'circumstances, in all localities, which are productive of disease or conducive to health'.[50] Conolly's aim in this treatise was to argue for the importance of the local 'country practitioner' as equal to the metropolitan physician. His argument was territorial in more ways than one, calling for close attention to local topography as well as to protecting the status of the practitioner who traverses it. [51] As Dorothy and Roy Porter have argued, the role of the medical practitioner in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was subject to shifting regulations and boundaries, both legal and geographical.[52] The tripartite hierarchy of physician, surgeon and apothecary, and their corresponding guilds and societies, was only sustainable within certain bounds. Outside of London, where the policing of medical practice and discrimination against those not affiliated with the Oxford, Cambridge, and the Royal

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[50] John Conolly, *A Proposal to Establish Country Natural History Societies, for Ascertaining the Circumstances, in All Localities, Which Are Productive of Disease or Conducive to Health* (Worcester: H. B. Tymbs and H. Deighton, 1833).
[51] Conolly, *A Proposal*, p. 3.
[52] Dorothy Porter and Roy Porter, *Patient's Progress: Doctors and Doctoring in Eighteenth Century England* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1989), p. 18.

Colleges both continued and was challenged by the rise of unlicensed 'irregulars', such strictures could not be maintained in areas where the need for medical care outweighed the need for official credentials.[53] The consequence of these loosened regulations, accompanied by the increasing marketization of medicine whereby patients became consumers, was a complex rural medical demographic. In any given town or parish, physicians, surgeons, apothecaries, the newly born general practitioners, and often unwanted 'quacks', all competed to administer their brand of care. Conolly's treatise can therefore be read as an advert for the services of his 'country practitioner' as well as a critique of the depersonalised approach of physicians. It is a defence of local medical practice that portrays the practitioner as possessing an especial knowledge of his immediate surroundings and their effects on the health of those under his care:

> These advantages are principally connected with the intimate acquaintance which the country practitioner gradually acquires concerning every circumstance connected with a certain limited locality. He not only becomes thoroughly familiar with the natural scenery, the character of the surface, and the climate of his own district, but he knows the occupations, the habits, the characters, even in their minutest traits, of all his patients, and almost of all his neighbours.[54]

The practitioner is akin to the topographer here, and the observational skills that aid him in surveying the landscape and its minute details can seemingly transfer over to the treatment of patients. Both have distinctive qualities, a 'character', that are held up as relational, so that familiarity with one leads logically to an understanding of the other.

Conolly makes a bold suggestion about the composition of a person in this passage, claiming that he can be known completely as a landscape or area of ground is known. 'Character' is bestowed with a kind of empiricism that assumes it can be freely observed – it

[53] Porter and Porter, *Patient's Progress*, p. 17.
[54] Conolly, *A Proposal*, p. 3.

is assumed to be analogous to the more indelible, physical markings on the 'surface' of natural materials, not capable of deception or concealment but totally visible. His mention of the practitioner's 'certain limited locality' and 'the climate of his own district' is also suggestive of certain bounds being placed upon the patients as specimens of a particular landscape. On the one hand, being restricted to a 'certain limited locality' implies the potential for a higher quality of care on the part of the practitioner, being responsible only for his marked out territory and those who inhabit it. On the other hand, there lies the possibility that the strict mapping of this 'local' medicine tarried over into how the body and the minds of patients were considered. Conolly goes on to argue that:

> His opportunities, for instance, of ascertaining to what extent the soil, the situation, the climate, the exposure, the water of his district, the habitual diet, the occupations, and the moral character of the individuals who reside in it, influence the health of the body or the mind of individuals or the general population.[55]

Dividing and ordering his locality into separate influences such as soil, water, and climate, the practitioner also starts to draw the boundaries that define and control the health of the patient: he becomes fragmented into an individual within a population, and a separated body and mind. Furthermore, the isolation of the 'moral character' as a factor that influences the health of individuals, or might have the capacity to infiltrate the more 'general population', reveals an undertone of regulation and judgement that goes beyond observing the connections between organic surroundings and physical and mental symptoms. The country practitioner might be creating his own medical landscape as much as monitoring a pre-existing one, forging parameters that are moral as well as geographical.

[55] Conolly, *A Proposal*, p. 4.

In *The Parish* (1820-27), Clare is critical of the dominion the 'doctor' has within the civic borders of the community, and is wary of aligning the body with a governed area of land:

> Next comes a name who spite of all controuls
> Reigns oer the bodys ills as Ralph the souls
> A mighty doctor – what so thickly sown
> That een the Parish can a doctor own
>
> (*EP*, II, ll. 643-46, p. 723)

The 'reign' of the doctor is aligned to the spiritual reign that dictates the bounds of a parish, the church being the civic centre of that population. Consequently, the artificial, or unnatural, nature of such medical rule is already implied and is in the same vein as the division of local land into parishes that is run by a select few whose governance, in Clare's opinion, is unrepresentative and unjust. It is significant, then, that he should employ the imagery of over-sown seeds or uncontrollable plant-life in his discussion of this seemingly unwanted doctor. Contrary to Conolly's country practitioner, who is represented as the only person fit to preside over the place under his care, this doctor is figured as out of place, being present 'spite of all controuls', perhaps even trespassing. This reversal of an imposed medical order to one that might be there by mistake, spilling over from the city or growing unexpectedly and uncontrollably, reveals Clare's suspicion of the country practitioner who might try to dictate the healthy and unhealthy borders of the bodies he treats. Indeed, the status of the doctor becomes unsettled further as *The Parish* unfolds. His position as a misplaced figure casts him in the role of a travelling quack who has outstayed his welcome and deceived his patients with disastrous consequences:

> Then why thus linger in the worst of towns
> To cure & hear the praise of foolish Clowns

> But fools perhaps may be thy only gain
> To feed thy pockets & encrease thy fame
> […]
> So Dr Urine in thy nest remain
> & till the dull dark age of fools be past
> As conjuror & Water Doctor reign
> Then drop into thy grave – a Quack at last
>
> (*EP*, II, ll. 703-714, p. 725)

Lingering too long in one place changes him from a 'doctor' to the somewhat comical 'Dr Urine', and eventually to a 'Quack', as Clare overturns defiantly the hierarchical distinctions between practitioners, and collapses them together as a more homogenous, unwanted intrusion on both the human body and the local surroundings which shape and maintain that body.

Whilst the doctor in *The Parish* might be a caricatured example of medical interference in Clare's specific locality, one of his own physicians, Fenwick Skrimshire, classed himself as a figure similar to Conolly's country practitioner. His epistolary aid to providing medical care within a rural community, *The Village Pastor's Surgical and Medical Guide* (1838), provided specific instructions and boundaries relating to the kind of healthcare that could be administered. As in *The Parish*, medical and spiritual care are conflated – indeed, the pastor is deemed most fit for the role of surgeon and physician, because he is 'better prepared to […] comprehend the limits, within which it is intended to be applied in practice'.[56] These limits are revealed to be both ethical and topographical: the pastor's familiarity with the perimeters of his parish serve him as well as his 'judgement' and 'position in society'.[57] Like Conolly, Skrimshire's approach to understanding the health or illness of individuals and how to treat them is often related directly to the precise topography

[56] Fenwick Skrimshire, *The Village Pastor's Surgical and Medical Guide; in Letters from an Old Physician to a Young Clergyman* (London: John Churchill and Hatchard and Son, 1838), p. v.
[57] Skrimshire, *Surgical and Medical Guide*, p. vi.

of the Northamptonshire area, particularly the fens and marshes that characterise the landscape. Skrimshire's approach to village medicine encourages a consideration of the experience of health and illness within a system of margins and regulations. It is important to note that Skrimshire is deliberately trying to avoid writing a health manual full of complex lexis or medico-scientific terminology. Through his use of the epistolary form, he makes it clear from the outset that his aim is to be 'free and familiar', and to communicate 'useful knowledge' rather than theoretical medical ideas.[58] Therefore, much of the treatise is concerned with the 'local treatment' of immediate symptoms as opposed to a sophisticated understanding of the body as a holistic, interconnected system. Areas of the body become split off and 'localised' in order to be treated:

> He will soon, if not at first, complain of some *local pain*, and the seat of this will mainly direct you in forming an opinion of the precise nature of the case […] if the patient has of late experienced a fall or blow upon the head, let your apprehensions be alive to inflammation of the brain of a more *local character* […] the *local treatment* is the same as in other congestions, and the internal remedies are those recommended in bilious fevers' (my italics).[59]

Here, 'local medicine' becomes more than a practitioner who is familiar with the impacts of the immediate environment on the body; it is also a method of systematising the body itself into a series of localities, some healthy, some not, and managing the borders between them.

How might Clare's poetics of place avoid or redress this form of systematisation? A poem from his proposed 1835 volume *The Midsummer Cushion,* 'The Robin's Nest' (1832), provides an initial way into addressing this question. The poem traces in detail the experience of 'filling a space', but in relation to a specific natural locus. I quote a substantial

[58] Skrimshire, *Surgical and Medical Guide*, p. v.
[59] Skrimshire, *Surgical and Medical Guide,* pp. 98-349.

part of it here, for the lines unfold various affective engagements with place that develop to figure health as a dislocating encounter as well as a bodily and mental state or feeling:

> Where natures glory ever breaths & lives
> Seated in crimping ferns uncurling now
> In russet fringes ere in leaves they bow
> & moss as green as silk – there let me be
> By the grey powdered trunk of old oak tree
> Buried in green delights to which the heart
> Clings with delight & beats as loath to part
> The birds unbid come round about to give
> Their music to my pleasures – wild flowers live
> About as if for me – they smile & bloom
> Like uninvited guests that love to come
> Their wild & fragrant offerings all to bring
> Paying me kindness like a throned king
> Lost in such extacys in this old spot
> I feel that rapture which the world hath not
> That joy like health that flushes in my face
> Amid the brambles of this ancient place
> Shut out from all but that superior power
> That guards & glads & cheers me every hour
> That wraps me like a mantle from the storm
> Of care & bids the coldest hope be warm
> That speaks in spots where all things silent be
> In words not heard but felt
>
> (*MP*, III, ll. 10-32, pp. 532-33)

These lines work up to a sense of how health and place come to be associated for Clare, and of how he might both perceive and construct healthy places. The words used to indicate the location and position of this place, and the subject's location within it, indicate a movement from outside to inside. 'Where' in line 10 indicates both a specific location, and an as yet unrealised sense of longing to be in that place which is affirmed by the declaration of line 13: 'there let me be'. Then, in line 23, there is a jump to 'this old spot', a movement from the outside positions of 'where' and 'there' to the present inside of 'this'. Line 26 progresses this

movement as Clare's subject becomes further entangled 'Amid the brambles of this ancient place'. 'Amid' takes him beyond simply 'this […] place' to the very centre of it, the sudden transition of which smooths over the surely uncomfortable experience of fighting through 'brambles' to get there. Having his subject placed 'amid' his environment offers another important mode of being in place. It can mean to be 'in the middle, in the midst' of an act or place, and also 'surrounded by, among' objects.[60] The subject is indeed the centre-point of this poem, situated both in the middle of 'this old spot' and also surrounded by 'birds' who 'unbid come round about' and 'wild flowers' that revolve 'as if for me'. Yet 'amid' can also mean to be 'between', which in relation to 'The Robin's Nest' opens up the way in which Clare evokes a sense of the subject merging with his surroundings, not separate from them but in a 'between' place where physical boundaries merge into one another.[61]

This indeterminate placing of the subject in 'The Robin's Nest' confuses not only where the subject is, but where health comes from, too. Yi-Fu Tuan discusses a form of this subjective dislocation in *Topophilia* (1974), where he examines the relationship between topophilia and health in terms of shifting physical and mental boundaries:

> From time to time we are infused by a sense of physical well-being so strong that it overflows and embraces, as it were, a part of the world […] Characteristically this feeling depends less on external circumstances than on the internal state of the subject.[62]

Tuan's suggestion that we are 'infused' by a sense of physical wellbeing would suggest that this feeling has not occurred internally, but enters the body from an external source. However, he also compromises this suggestion by arguing that the 'feeling' of health has to

[60] *OED*, 'amid', adv. and prep.
[61] *OED*, 'amid', adv. and prep.
[62] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environment, Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974; repr. 1990), pp. 98-99.

depend foremost on the 'internal state of the subject'. One of Clare's journal entries examines the internal state of being devoid of health while physically confined: 'A wet day did nothing but nurse my illness Coud not have walkd out had it been fine'.[63] He is barred from encountering health in the external world by his own lack of wellbeing; the ill body defines its own limits, and health cannot cross them from outside. Yet the more relational exchange Tuan sets up – the taking in of health followed by an overflowing connection to the external world – speaks to the shifting boundaries of self that Clare employs in 'The Robin's Nest'.

In the poem, Clare's subject interacts with 'this old spot' in intimate, bodily terms. Lines 13-16 depict an intense physical attachment, but one in which the body seems to move outside of itself into the external world:

> there let me be
> By the grey powdered trunk of old oak tree
> Buried in green delights to which the heart
> Clings with delight & beats as loathe to part

The haptic nature of 'clings' gives agency to a part of the body, the heart, which is usually internalised (much as the mind has the capacity to 'cling' onto its surroundings in the earlier fragment). As such, the body is projected outwards and entangled in its surroundings; it enacts Tuan's 'embrace' of the surrounding world. The separation of 'heart' and 'clings' across their respective lines creates a formal gap that registers the effort of clinging on and at the same time seems to mark the shift of the heart from something internal to something external. Indeed, these four lines work to displace the word 'me' in line 13. Where does the 'me' go? Does it stop by the old oak tree? Does it continue onwards to become 'Buried in green delights', which in itself suggests a deep immersion in the environment, but one that

[63] *By Himself*, p. 177.

brings the potential for self-effacement? Does ‘let me be’ mean ‘leave me alone’? Or does it mean the more philosophically loaded let me ‘be’? Ending the line with ‘be’ also hints at an adjective that could be inserted but has been suspended, leaving the subject just to ‘be’ without any state or feeling to move into. The absence of punctuation cues in these lines creates at once a synthesis between them all – none are separated, all of them have the potential to run into one another – and a separation, for at the same time there is nothing that deliberately links them together. By the time ‘the heart’ appears, the ‘me’ is separated from it on the page and is prefaced by ‘the’ rather than ‘my’. Clare’s unpunctuated lines play with subject and object, collapsing them together but in doing so estranging the self (‘me’) from the body. They also make reading the poem a displacing experience, as the lines have to be attended to separately in order to make choices about how they connect to each other. Crucially, this estrangement prefigures the encounter with ‘health’ that follows.

When Clare’s subject feels ‘that joy like health that flushes in my face’, he experiences both an internal sensation (the flush occurs ‘in’ the face) and an external force or, to use Tuan’s term, infusion (health flushes into his face from the outside). These lines also echo the image in lines 11-12, where ‘natures glory’ is ‘Seated in crimping ferns uncurling now / In russet fringes’. The ‘russet’ recurs in the supposedly red ‘flush’ in the face, and the slow reveal of this colour from within the seat of an uncurling fern creates the impression that the flush of health was here waiting for him amid natural phenomena even before he arrived. The bodily sensation of health that Clare imagines has its imprint in the specific plant-life and colour of place, and this ties the healthy body to the natural world at the same time as it makes them slightly separate mirrors of each other. Perhaps what makes the place inhabited in ‘The Robin’s Nest’ a ‘good place’ and not a ‘bad place’ is a lack of regulation or prescription about how that place should be interacted with; it extends an invitation of mental and physical transfiguration, where the body and mind can transgress their own boundaries.

In ‘On Visiting a Favourite Place’ (1832), this sense of transformation is explored in relation to a feeling of continuity. I return to this poem from chapter one to focus not on its apprehension of health as a ‘voice’, but to consider how, alongside ‘The Robin’s Nest’, it also hangs its representation of health on experiences of mental and physical displacement:

> Health greets me for I hear her voice
> Hope – peace are comrades once again
> Joy stoops for flowers that say rejoice
> & shall such friendships cheer in vain
> When last I roamed these bleachy swells
> Of hills & hollows all was here
> Oer which the heart in rapture dwells
> Peace love & quiet everywhere
> & nought is changed since last I came
> Then can I help but be the same
>
> With verses dancing on my tongue
> The raptures of a heart at ease
> A fondness & a taste for song
> & love for places such as these
> A mind oerflowing with excess
> Of joys that spring from solitude
>
> (*MP*, III, ll.11-26, p. 562)

The overflowing embrace of topophilia can be gleaned here from the ‘love for places’ that spills out into ‘A mind oerflowing with excess / Of joys’. Clare’s line break again places and displaces, and the ‘joys’ of the mind are written into a separate line to register the overflow of feeling.

Simon Kövesi has argued that Clare’s perception of local places is analogous to Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘rhizomatic’ way of being. For Kövesi, Clare avoids the onward march of ‘linear’ progress through his use of ampersands and a poetic aesthetic that represents ‘ongoing processes which deny fixed subject positions, which are always

becomings and never happenings […] never still, never resolved, never completed'.[64] Whilst Kövesi reveals a radical poet whose perception of place strays away from any kind of idealised model of fixity, he perhaps does not pay enough attention to the value Clare places on a feeling of rootedness. The rhizome's lateral and continuously moving root system stands in contrast to Clare's partial preference for fixed rootedness, a difference his poem 'On Visiting a Favourite Place' registers by setting the idea of the evolving self alongside the structure of the poem as a framework that can be returned to repeatedly. Clare's claim that 'nought is changed since last I came / Then can I help but be the same' suggests a rhetorical question, but also an implication of agency for the subject, entering into a place that always remains the same in order to undergo an experience of displacement and perceived bodily transformation. The poem becomes a way to stay in place, or to keep a place, that can be visited again and again; health as an experience of continuity as well as relational 'excess' and 'rapture' is held in play in this poem, and there is as much an encouragement of repetition and return as there is the potential for rapturous transportation.

A word that holds further connotations of both continuity and a way of inhabiting place in the poem is 'dwells'. By placing this word next to 'rapture', Clare invites a re-consideration of what dwelling might mean for him. How can a heart that is 'in rapture', moving between places or physical planes, also dwell? Dwelling is temporally and spatially complex: to dwell could mean to reside in one place for a long time, a place one might refer to as a 'dwelling'. It could also mean to be in place for a shorter time, to merely dwell for a while rather than to take up permanent residence. Dwelling also supposes a connection between the mind and the body. Just as one physically dwells in a place, so can one mentally dwell on a thought or emotion. In this way, dwelling as a thinking, feeling state, as the action

[64] Simon Kövesi, 'John Clare &…&…& Deleuze and Guattari's Rhizome', *Ecology and the Literature of the British Left: The Red and the Green*, ed. by John Rignall and H. Gustav Klaus (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 75-88 (pp. 86-87).

of being in place, and as an inhabitable structure, becomes a kind of borderland between internal self and external world, taking the mind and body beyond their own boundaries and giving them the potential to become inhabitable places themselves. Perhaps Clare's suggestion that the heart can dwell 'in rapture' is not so unimaginable after all, if rapture signifies a mental and bodily state that can be both transitory and spatially realised and experienced. Dwelling, as the next section of this chapter will argue, is a way of being in place that can be examined in relation to the topographical impulses of nineteenth-century medicine and medical science. Besides the writings of Skrimshire, which provide a way into thinking about how topographical medicine was utilised and integrated into Clare's particular vicinity, there is another medical, or pseudo-medical, context specific to the poet that has not yet been traversed by critics: phrenology. In the next part of this chapter I explore phrenology as an example of a medicalised attempt to consider health as a cohesion of self and world that is both reliant on specific places, and also informs the regulation of how health and place are related.

Dwelling, Pausing, and Passing: Placing the Healthy Mind

Within scholarship on Clare's poetics of place, the Heideggerean concept of dwelling as a poetical way of being in place has been highly influential, as have Gaston Bachelard's phenomenological expositions of space and place, especially nests.[65] Jonathan Bate's reading of Clare's 'nest poems' as Bachelardian 'round' spaces is a helpful exploration of how certain

[65] Martin Heidegger, 'Poetically Man Dwells', *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Collins, 1975), pp. 211-227; Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1964), pp. 90-104. For examples of the influence of these two thinkers on Clare scholarship see Sarah Guyer, 'The Poetics of Homelessness', *Reading with John Clare: Biopoetics, Sovereignty, Romanticism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), pp. 79-99; Timothy Morton, 'John Clare's Dark Ecology', *Studies in Romanticism*, 47.2 (2008), pp. 179-193; Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (London: Picador, 2000), p. 157; Catherine Rigby, *Topographies of the Sacred: The Poetics of Place in European Romanticism* (Charlottesville; London: University of Virginia Press, 2004), p. 243.

shapes and structures constitute health and wellbeing for Clare.[66] He argues that nests offer a place of respite, not just because of their neat, intimate forms, but because of the mode of interaction they evoke: 'In the poetry of Clare […] a nest is the small round thing which is the natural world's analogue of the human idea of home'.[67] Hugh Haughton's take on nests is not as cosy as Bate's, but also argues for them as a model of poetic form. He suggests that 'Clare is […] more aware of the precariousness of the nest' even as he is drawn to it as expressive of 'how form itself is a model of being in the world'.[68] Haughton's recognition of nests as 'precarious' in Clare's understanding is more revealing of a mode of dwelling in his poetry that might evade notions of rootedness or fixity. Indeed, Bachelard is careful to avoid a phenomenological reading of the nest as a comfortable stasis. He instead characterises the nest as a space forged by constant movement on behalf of the bird that inhabits it:

> It is by constantly turning round and round and pressing back the walls on every side, that it succeeds in forming this circle […] The house is a bird's very person; it is its form and its most immediate effort, I shall even say, its suffering.[69]

If Clare's poetic form can be taken as 'a model of being in the world', then this form might enact a mode of dwelling that, by necessity, resists staying still or fixed in one position and, furthermore, is sensible of how this might invite wellbeing and suffering to co-exist. The constant 'turning' of the bird in Bachelard's phenomenology of the nest speaks to Agamben's recognition of the line-endings of verse as turning points. Clare's amazement at the Woodlark's nest, and at the bird's tendency to fly off when startled by intruders only to return

[66] Bate, *The Song of the Earth* p. 157.
[67] Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, p. 157.
[68] Hugh Haughton, 'Progress and Rhyme: 'The Nightingale's Nest' and Romantic Poetry', *In Context*, pp. 51-86 (p. 72).
[69] Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 101.

again, opens the nest out from a static space of refuge to a site of constant traffic. He observes how '& this in sooth oft puzzled me – they go / Far off & then return -' ('The Wood Larks Nest' (1832), *MP*, IV, ll. 25-26, p. 322). Clare captures these flitting moments of departure and return by fragmenting the bird's trajectory across two lines, casting it out and then looping it back in again. It is not just the form of the nest itself, but the comings and goings it provokes that shape the poet's poetics of space and offer a mode of restless dwelling.

Whilst Clare is fascinated by the interactions between animals and the places and spaces they create for themselves in the natural world, phrenology sought to investigate human attachment to place. Phrenology gained prominence in the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century as a popular pseudo-science that sought to map behaviour, characteristics, physical appearances, intellectual capacity, and moral attributes onto corresponding material 'organs' and 'faculties' in the brain that could be discerned via examination of the skull.[70] The impulse behind the phrenologists' aim to map the mind onto the body in this way can be classed as topographical. As Sally Shuttleworth and Jenny Bourne Taylor argue, nineteenth-century mental science sought a 'materialist science of the self which rejected the dualistic division between mind and body', and 'was at once fascinated and perturbed by those hidden inner regions that remained beyond conscious control'.[71] The endeavour to locate, and control, these 'inner regions' gave rise to a conceptual language of space and place, as the mind and the body were mapped, bounded, and explored for their limits. Phrenology played a key role in trying to pin down where the human mind was located, and in doing so imposed what Foucault would term a 'grid of empirical knowledge' upon it, an artificial materiality

[70] See Anne Harrington, *Medicine, Mind, and the Double Brain: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 7-8.
[71] *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts 1830-1890*, ed. by Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. xiv.

that gave the mind a form, which in turn permitted it to be divided, ordered, and regulated.[72] The mind was envisaged as a particular kind of space, frequently illustrated as a kind of grid in itself, with partitions and tables drawn over the skull to mark out where each of its 'organs' resided. The topographical elements of phrenology go beyond conceptual or visual similarities, however. The phrenological concept of 'inhabitiveness' was considered as the organ that dictated how the mind and the body engaged with places in the external world; this organ frames a way of thinking about how Clare's reliance on certain places in the natural world for healthy feeling was being taken seriously as an empirical truth – and as potentially pathological – by some pseudo-scientific thinkers.

'Inhabitiveness', sometimes classed as 'Concentrativeness' in phrenological treatises, is a term through which the mind and body are tied explicitly to places in the external world, in either healthy or unhealthy ways. It could be considered a term used for distinguishing why, as Clare has it, 'there are some / Within whose bosom nature find a home' ('Pleasures of Spring', *MP*, III, ll. 189-90, p. 52), and some who do not undergo such intense connections with their surroundings. Johann Gaspar Spurzeim, in *Lectures on Phrenology* (1837), defined inhabitiveness as 'the feeling which dictates the choice of habitation […] or the disposition which induces individuals to live in certain situations'.[73] Sidney Smith, in *The Principles of Phrenology* (1838), argued for the role inhabitiveness played in a person's reliance on the external world's continuity, stability, and even a sense of 'eternity':

> the faculty hitherto called Inhabitiveness, or Concentrativeness, is the propensity of pursuit or the instinct of object, the desire of doing, or being, exactly what the individual has done or been before, the love of continuity, of endurance, of sameness, of permanency of occupation, emotion, feeling, existence'.[74]

[72] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 1970), p. 76.
[73] J. G. Spurzeim, *Lectures on Phrenology* (London: Edward Portwine and J. T. Cox, 1837), p. 40.
[74] Sidney Smith, *The Principles of Phrenology* (Edinburgh: Simpkin, Marshall & Co, 1838), p. 98.

Already, the assertions made by Spurzeim and Smith throw up a particular relationship between the individual and place that is not immediately apparent in Clare's poetics of place and health, but at the same time offers some room for comparison.

Clare held well-formed opinions about the meaning of instinct and whether it could be truly observed or fixed into a neat definition. In his prose, he considers it primarily as an animal faculty, and his writings on the topic come out of his observation of animal behaviours. These behaviours lead him to consider instinct as a 'natural sympathy' that 'may not be properly defined in words'.[75] He is also suspicious of what he perceives as a human tendency to 'fall into sentimentalitys' when observing instinctive actions such as birds building their nests.[76] The aim of phrenology to try and locate instinct within the human brain might therefore be open to a similar danger, making certain kinds of human behaviour, such as the places one chooses to inhabit, into an animalistic tendency that sentimentalises those who possess a larger 'organ' for this behaviour as perhaps lacking other more intellectual faculties. What Clare values about instinct is that it is different from, and perhaps more favourable than, the comparative 'reason' of human thought and behaviour because it cannot be measured materially or quantified: 'The instinct of the animal world is a most wonderful faculty & not to be accounted for its conclusions are nicer then mathematical acurasy it seems even to be stronger then human reason'.[77] The idea of locating instinct within a specific material 'organ' of the brain that can be measured and observed would seemingly not have appealed to Clare's sense of a more 'natural sympathy' that is forged out of the relationships animals build with their own habitats over time, rather than logical, mappable certainties. Charles Caldwell's definition of 'inhabitiveness' in *Elements of*

[75] *Natural History Prose*, p. 91.
[76] *Natural History Prose*, p. 91.
[77] *Natural History Prose*, p. 91.

Phrenology (1824) as '*love of place*, i.e. a preference as to place of abode' comes closer to a kind of early topophilia in that it suggests a level of agency on behalf of the subject (who knows what feeling will come from inhabiting certain places), even as it maintains a sense of the immeasurable or unknowable (in its figuration of this connection as a 'love' or a 'preference').[78]

The debate among these phrenologists about how to define inhabitiveness and, indeed, where to locate the organ in the brain, threatens to destabilise their assertions about the relationship between the embodied mind and place. Even within the system seeking to map the precise locations of behaviours and mental functions, inhabitiveness is elusive and cannot be pinned down within an agreed locale. In his autobiographical writing, Clare gives an account of his visit to Jean DeVille, a renowned nineteenth-century phrenologist, whilst he was staying in London in 1824:

> one of the greatest curiositys I saw then was Devilles the Phreneologists collection of heads himself excepted he is a kind simple hearted good humourd man Phreneology is with him something more then a System it seems the life and soul of his speculations he is never weary of talking about it or giving 'Lectures on Heads'.[79]

What follows is an account of a consultation with DeVille. It is unclear whether Clare is providing a transcript of his own meeting, or one he observed, or is speculating on how such a meeting might develop, yet the passage is remarkable both for the phrenological terms Clare is able to recall, and his sceptical reaction to DeVille's topography of the mind:

> he mostly begins with 'Why Sir I shoud say heres order very strong – or wisa wersa the want of it heres plenty of constructivness – I shoud say your fond of mathematics and heres ideality I shoud say that you have a tallent for poetry I

[78] Charles Caldwell, *Elements of Phrenology* (Lexington: Thomas T. Skillman, 1824), p. 8.
[79] *By Himself*, pp. 150-151.

> dont say that you are a poet but that you have a tallent for it if applied heres the organ of collor very strong I should say you are fond of fine colors and wisa wersa where theres the organ of form without color nothing showy is likd of here is benevolence wery prominent I shoud say you seldom pass a beggar or street sweeper without dropping a copper heres weneration very high I shoud say you are religious (the subject perhaps is worldly minded and remains silent) I dont say you're a Christian mind but you have a veneration for the deity thats sufficient for our system heres combativeness very large[…]I should say that things being put out of order displeases you very much and that you are often tempted while at table to put a spoon or knife and fork in its place[…[heres ideality too (he is a poet) no I shoud not say that I shoud say he has a talent for it if put into action are you a poet Sir (yes) aye aye the systems right[…]he then in smiling silence waits your decision of his remarkable prophecy and hard and earthlike is that soul who can return an harsh and unbelieving opinion on the system[…]his perdictions are so cautiously utterd with so many causes for the liklihood of failures in nice points that even failings them selves in his lectures strike as convictions[80]

Whilst Clare's mockery of DeVille suggests he is unconvinced by phrenology's attempts to fix a person's mind and character into defined locations, his closing observations could be argued to redefine the nature of such systematic placing. By claiming that 'even failings them selves […] strike as convictions', he reimagines phrenology not as a precise topography of the mind, dedicated to what can be found and proved, but rather a mode of searching that, as long as it has 'conviction' behind it, is free to encounter 'failings' and lose its way. The search for health that Clare sets up in his poems is often characterised by this sense of wilful failing: in 'Mild health I seek thee wither art thou found' the speaker does not arrive at any clear destination, but traces instead the act of looking and passing through; and in 'The Robins Nest' the subject has to surrender to becoming 'lost' before health can be located. The suggestion that one has to avoid being 'hard and earthlike' in order to accommodate the logic of phrenology recasts it as a system that is more flexible than it may appear, making the mind a place where the boundaries can shift rather than become 'hard' and immovable.

[80] *By Himself*, pp. 151-152.

Yet whilst Clare might have been able to accept the failing 'convictions' of phrenology within his scepticism, he was later made into an example of inhabitiveness that is not so accommodating. In his mid-century study of phrenology, James P. Browne embedded a discussion of Clare in the same chapter he devoted to inhabitiveness, and in doing so made prescriptive assumptions about how his mind, poetry, and local surroundings relate to one another. For Browne, inhabitiveness is 'the sense of local attachment' that is 'without a doubt a function of […] the brain'.[81] Furthermore, this sense of local attachment is separated from the intellectual capacities for Browne. He argues:

> it will be seen at once that there does not exist the slightest affinity between the simple affection of man's animal nature, called Inhabitiveness, and the high intellectual qualities that have been and still are supposed by many to depend upon the salient development of this one organ […] indeed, the region of the head which we are now considering has no more claim to the rank of a concentrator of the intellectual powers than any other predominating organ. A large organ of Ideality, or the sense of poetic beauty, for instance, in unison with lofty sentiments and ardent feelings concentrated the whole mind of Burns upon the composition of poetry, while he was laboriously following the plough. Bloomfield, in the shoemaker's garret, and poor John Clare, on the farmer's threshing floor, were led by an overpowering instinct to pursue the same course.[82]

Here, Browne separates what he sees as 'animal nature', a feeling of attachment to places in the natural world, and the 'intellectual powers', which find their outlet in the 'composition of poetry'. A person does not need to possess inhabitiveness in order to create poetry, nor does poetry have any direct connection to the sense of local attachment. Furthermore, although inhabitiveness is argued to reside directly in the brain, it does not appear to influence the workings of the mind: Burns's 'whole mind' is perceived to be occupied by poetic composition, whilst his body engages with place in an unintellectual way. Similarly, Clare's

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[81] James P. Browne, *Phrenology; and its Application to Education, Insanity, and Prison Discipline* (London: Bickers & Son, 1869), p. 80.
[82] Browne, *Phrenology*, pp. 83-84.

poetic 'instinct' is not figured as the pursuit of a material 'course' through his surroundings, but a separately mental one that is disconnected from any attachment to place. Browne underestimates, then, the extent to which these poets do not separate physical attachment to place and the mental work of poetry, but see both as interrelated and inextricable. In Clare's early poem 'Helpstone' (1809-13), it is an exploration of the mind's attachment to its local surroundings that guides his enclosure epic:

> Nay e'en a post (old standards) or a stone
> Moss'd o'er by age & branded as her own
> Would in my mind a strong attachment gain
> A fond desire that there they might remain
>
> (*EP*, I, ll. 89-92, p.159)

In 'The Lamentations of Round-Oak Waters' (1818), too, the mind is not depicted as an internal faculty removed from the poet's physical environment, but 'naturally' bound up in it. The speaker recalls how the 'mind did naturally bend / Towards my pleasing stream' (*EP*, I, ll. 71-72, p. 230). Whilst Browne holds Clare up as an example of inhabitiveness, his discussion separates the mind from the body, and fails to consider how being in place and the composition of poetry are connected in Clare's thought and practice.

Clare did not only use poetry to discuss the inhabitive feeling of local attachment, but also to formally shape the experience of it. George Combe's discussion of inhabitiveness is useful here, for even though he does not discuss Clare directly, his distinction between the healthy and unhealthy manifestations of inhabitiveness return to a word that is frequently used to consider the relationship between Clare's poetry and place. 'Concentrativeness', a word interchangeable with inhabitiveness, is set out in Combe's series of 'organic laws' and principles in *The Constitution of Man* (1828) that must be obeyed in order to maintain mental and physical health. Combe sets out the 'uses' and 'abuses' of concentrativeness as follows: '*Uses*: It gives the desire of permanence in place, and renders permanent, emotions and ideas

in the mind – *Abuses*: Aversion to move abroad; morbid dwelling on internal emotions and ideas, to the neglect of external impressions'.[83] The word 'dwelling' here recalls the nest-like state of being in place favoured by Bate and Haughton in their discussions of Clare's inhabiting tendencies. However, the definition of the healthy connection between the embodied mind and place dictates a specific type of engagement. The healthy mind can be attached to place, and desire permanence within it, but must ultimately not realise this desire and keep moving so as to avoid crossing over into 'morbid dwelling', figured here as an unhealthy stasis and, ultimately, a retreat of the mind into itself and away from the 'external impression' of place to which it was initially attached. Skrimshire also used this language of dwelling in his discussion of insanity and mania, the categories he applied to his assessment of Clare's own mental health. His treatise states:

> A fit of insanity in persons predisposed to this most distressing malady sometimes comes on so suddenly, and particularly in the night-time, that the patient, having retired apparently in his usual health, jumps out of bed in the middle of the night under some imaginary alarm […] seeks refuge from some imaginary danger, or dwells with horror on some supposed dreadful risk incurred, or injury sustained.[84]

Skrimshire's spatial conceptualisation of insanity as a mind that 'dwells' speaks to Combe's definition of 'morbid dwelling', and so signifies a retreat to a mental place that has no connection with the external, rational world. Taking these definitions of unhealthy mental dwelling into account, I will now turn to some of Clare's poetry to consider how he might figure, or refigure, dwelling into a healthy way of being in the world.

In 'The Flitting' (1832), Clare expresses an idea of when dwelling is morbid or harmful and when it is not:

> I dwell on trifles like a child

[83] George Combe, *The Constitution of Man Considered in Relation to External Objects*, 8th edn (Boston: Marsh, Capel & Lyon, 1837), p. 52.
[84] Skrimshire, *Surgical and Medical Guide*, p. 197.

I feel as ill becomes a man
& still my thoughts like weedlings wild
Grow up to blossom where they can
They turn to places known so long
& feel that joy was dwelling there
So home fed pleasures fill the song
That has no present joys to heir

(*MP*, III, ll. 57-64, pp. 481-82)

Here, the lack of control over mental dwelling is brought into relationship with the kind of topography that the system of enclosure displaced and tried to regulate. Dwelling on the wrong thing – 'trifles' – amounts to being in the wrong place, as 'weedlings wild' were in the newly divided and regulated landscape. Yet Clare's deft navigation of mental and natural place in these lines does not condemn the weeds as disorderly, nor does it retain its sense of dwelling as a precursor to feeling 'ill'. Clare's thoughts 'turn to places', a move that contains a double meaning. His thoughts both turn towards places, they focus their attention on different places than the one he finds himself in at that moment, and they turn *into* places, in that thinking as dwelling results in the mental construction of place, and a recuperative place too. The transformation of thoughts into places thus allows for a new joyful 'dwelling'. It also reintroduces Clare's playful approach to location: '& feel that joy was dwelling there' is not a straightforward line. It could either mean the location of joy (joy was dwelling *there*), or that the feeling of joy is bound up in the act of 'dwelling there' (a 'there' which might lie outside the bounds of the poem). Placing 'there' at the end of the line also suspends it for a time, incarnating the lingering action that is perceived to make dwelling unhealthy. In 'The Meadow Grass' (1832), a poem to which I return from the introduction to this thesis, Clare creates this kind of suspension again, but significantly alongside an anticipation of healthy sensation:

Theres something more to fill the mind

Then words can paint to ears & eyes
A calmness quiet loves to find
In these green summer reveries
A freshness giving youth to age
A health to pain & troubles dear
The world has nought but wars to wage
Peace comes & makes her dwelling here

(*MP*, III, ll. 65-72, p. 557)

Again, the spatial dimensions of dwelling are brought into play as it is made into a place that in turn can 'fill' the subject within in it with 'health'. The mind is also imagined as a space waiting to be filled with healthy feeling, and, through Clare's placing of 'mind' and 'here' at the end of their respective lines, can be brought back into a relationship with dwelling that is not morbid or unhealthy. It is not clear in this stanza if the 'here' of line 72 refers to a place in the outer world, or to the 'mind' in line 65, making them appear interchangeable for Clare. The poetic construction of dwelling not only collapses the boundaries between self and world, but also reconceptualises mental dwelling as potentially healthy.

The way in which 'The Meadow Grass' encourages periods of retreat into such quiet, contained places also calls attention to the temporal element of dwelling. If the poem becomes a way to make a dwelling, then perhaps, as in 'On Visiting a Favourite Place', it encourages not continual residence (the 'morbid' side of dwelling), but periodic visits. This is where the suspension of 'here' feels significant, for it both inserts a deliberate pause at the end of the line, inviting the reader to dwell intermittently, but can also feed over to the next stanza, beginning 'I feel so calm I seem to find / a world I never felt before' (ll. 73-74). Dwelling acts as both a temporary pause and facilitates the passing over into another 'world', perhaps both mental and external. Consequently, the poem holds both supposedly healthy and unhealthy engagements with place in tension, as it encourages an experience of staying in one place at the same time as moving to the next. That dwelling is the state upon which this pausing and passing turns suggests that Clare seeks to have both options, allowing the body

and mind to attach to places and to move on from them. In 'Field Thoughts' (1832) this experience of staying in place and moving through it is made simultaneous:

> Field thoughts to me are happiness & joy
> Where I can lye upon the pleasant grass
> Or track some little path & so employ
> My mind in trifles pausing as I pass
> The little wild flower clumps by nothing nurst
> (*MP*, IV, ll. 1-5, p. 311)

The 'trifles' recall the same kind of mental occupation that occurs in 'The Flitting', making dwelling an act that echoes through these lines even if it is not mentioned directly. The phrase 'pausing as I pass' offers another instance of a verb being made both transitive and intransitive, as to 'pass' is turned into a pause by the line break that separates it from its direct object, the 'little wild flower'. Being able both to pause and to pass provides a way to be at once emplaced in the local environment, observing its natural detail, and also employed in one's own thoughts. This is a combination often found in Clare's poems, where the subject's embodied mind and the external world meet each other in a moment of mutual pausing and passing. In 'Dawnings of Genius' (1817-19) the 'genius' experiences 'pausing' and sauntering simultaneously: 'Thus pausing wild on all he saunters by / […] & dwells on somthing which he cant explain' (*EP*, I, ll. 33-36, p. 452); in 'A Ramble' (1818-20) Clare figures 'taste' as 'That longing pausing wish that cannot pass / Uncomprehended things without a sigh' (*EP*, I, ll. 47-48, p. 502); in 'The Progress of Ryhme' (1824-32), pausing and passing becomes the basis for the speaker's attentive poetics, 'Nor could I pass the thistle bye / But paused & thought it could not be / A weed in natures poesy' (*MP*, III, ll. 90-92, p. 495); whilst in 'On Labour' (1808-19), the 'rounds' of the ploughman are interspersed with moments when he 'Will feel delighted when he turns his eye […] / & oft will make a pause & stand to see / The passing clouds the cottage brook or tree' (*EP*, I, ll. 4-7, p. 141). In these

instances, Clare often uses the poetic turning point of the end or beginning of a line as that which brings the mind and the external world briefly together, keeping them in place but also permitting them to pass along.

'Greensward' (1819-32) develops this specific poetic navigation of place into a condition for encountering the health that resides there:

> Rich healthiness bedyes the summer grass
> Of each old close - & everywhere instills
> Gladness to travellers while they pause & pass
> The narrow pathway through the old molehills
>
> (*MP*, IV, ll. 1-4, p. 293)

By making the ability to 'pause & pass' the condition through which one can encounter health, Clare redraws the boundaries between unhealthy stasis and healthy movement. Furthermore, he characterises his seeking after health as a process that might necessitate such moments of pause in order to find it, as in 'The Field Cricket' (1832):

> A chittering sound of healthy happiness
> That bids the passer bye be happy too
> Who hearing thee feels full of pleasant moods
> […]
> I often pause to seek thee when I pass
> Thy cottage in the sweet refreshing hue
>
> (*MP*, IV, ll. 7-16, p. 323)

The poem offers a mode of searching for health that turns it into a specific space and place able to hold these two possibilities together at once. That is, it provides the subject with room to pass and pause, to seek and dwell, all of which become actions that dissolve, or manipulate, any idea of a fixed boundary between health and illness. Clare avoids the prescriptive conditions of phrenology's healthy 'inhabitiveness' whilst at the same time playing with them, placing the mind and the body into moments of dwelling that both carry

the threat of his 'indisposition' and incorporate it into a way of being in and out of place at the same time. With the poem established as a place that guides the search for health, but that gives the subject moments of 'pause' in which to conduct this search, I now turn my attention to another medical context behind Clare's poetic engagements with health and place: botany. Where phrenology seeks to map the location of the mind, botany maps the behaviour and characteristics of the plant world, one to which Clare was intimately related. Specifically, botany provided the poet with a guide to where to locate health in his external world, but, as the following section considers, it is a field that unfixes any secure sense of where the body and mind end and this external world begins.

'one common Herb at Home': Botanical Medicine and The Search for Health

In 1827, Clare received a letter from the poet, George Darley, in which he expressed his dismay at Clare's poor state of health:

> I was sorry to hear from Taylor yesterday that you were not in good health. What can be the matter with you, so healthfully situated and employed? Methinks you should live the life of an oak-tree or a sturdy elm, that groans in a storm, but only for pleasure. Do you meditate too much or sit too immovably?[85]

Like the quotation from Symons at the start of this chapter, in which Clare's disordered mind is imaged as an uprooted plant, Darley draws upon the vegetal as he questions whether the poet's health is dependent on a specific way of being in place. The 'sturdy' rootedness of oak and elm trees here offers a model of being 'healthfully situated' for Darley. The trees are imagined as capable, in the face of 'storm' or suffering, of finding 'pleasure', with the implication being that Clare should have no reason to become undone by his illness if he was

[85] MS Eg. 2246, f. 217.

properly settled in his surroundings. However, Darley's final question seems to suggest an awareness that this model of arborescent stability might not translate so easily into human wellbeing. Whilst he admires the located fixity of trees, he suggests that Clare's suffering might be caused by sitting 'too immovably' – an unhealthy version of the trees' rootedness. When read alongside Symons's suggestion that Clare's mental and physical and health was dependent upon being rooted into his locality, Darley's image has more room for manoeuvre. The trees emerge as possessing a relationship to place that embraces a degree of mobility – the physical disruptions of stormy weather – without becoming detached completely. By looking more closely at how plants and place interact in Clare's explorations of botany, this section considers how he might have received Darley's call to attend to the vegetal as a model of healthy emplacement.

In discussions of Clare as poet who is suspicious of systematic ways of thinking and imposing order upon the natural world, his engagement with botany is the most frequently cited example of his scepticism. Within a complex, 'dark system' of classification that obscures the 'real' or idiomatic names of plants behind Latin orders of classes, genera and species, Clare's devotion to his local terminology is often heralded as an innovative and radical linguistic feat.[86] The sustained debate about the extent of the poet's botanical knowledge has covered much ground: critics readily discuss the relationship between poetry and botany, bolstered by the knowledge that Clare was well-read in the science (having had access to the botanical volumes in the library at Milton Hall), that he forged long-standing friendships with other keen and skilled botanists, such as Joseph Henderson (head gardener at Milton Hall) and Thomas Porter (a friend from childhood who shared a love of flora), and that, for all his suspicion of the Linnaean system, he was able to identify hundreds of species

[86] See Marilyn Gaull, 'Clare and 'the Dark System', in *In Context*, pp. 279-94.

of plants and flowers and catalogued them both in his poetry and prose.[87] The volumes that Clare cites as the most valuable or helpful to him for these observations and collections, however, reveal an appreciation of botany that brings it into a direct relationship with health. As his personal library collection shows, he owned several contemporary volumes of 'flora': guides to the plant-life within a particular region or habitat written to help readers identify species and learn the classification system so they can record what they find. James Edward Smith's *A Compendium of the English Flora* (1829) and James Maddock's *The Florist's Directory* (1822) sit alongside Elizabeth Kent's *Flora Domestica* (1823) as well as gardening manuals such as John Abercrombie's *The Gardener's Companion* (1818 edition) and *Practical Gardener* (1823 edition), Thomas Hogg's *The Growth and Culture of the Carnation, Pink etc* (1824), and Issac Emmerson's *The Culture & Management of the Auricula* (1819).[88]

These volumes demonstrate a range of approaches to plant-life, offering both Linnaean models of classification, such as Smith's treatise, as well as alternative 'systems' by which to recognise plants. Kent's volume, for instance, intersperses its instructions for caring for flowers in pots with quotations from poems referencing the flower in question, some of which are from Clare's compositions. For Kent, Clare was an exemplary botanist: 'none have better understood the language of flowers than the simple-minded peasant poet, Clare, whose volumes are like a beautiful country, diversified with woods, meadows, heaths, and flower-gardens'.[89] Kent also took an interest in Clare's health, writing to him in 1823: 'I

[87] For sustained discussions of Clare's botanical knowledge and its relationship to his poetry, see M. M. Mahood, 'John Clare: bard of the wild flowers', in *The Poet as Botanist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 112-146; Theresa M. Kelley, 'Clare's Commonable Plants', in *Clandestine Marriage: Botany and Romantic Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), pp. 126-158; Douglas Chambers, '"A love for every simple weed": Clare, botany and the poetic language of lost Eden', in *In Context*, pp. 238-258; Marilyn Gaull, 'Clare and "the Dark System"', in *In Context*, pp. 279-294.

[88] As in David Powell, *Catalogue of the John Clare Collection in the Northampton Public Library: With Indexes to Poems in Manuscript* (County Borough of Northampton: Public Libraries, Museums and Art Galleries Committee, 1964), pp. 26-32.

[89] Elizabeth Kent, *Flora Domestica, or, The Portable Flower Garden; With Directions for the Treatment of Plants in Pots; and Illustrations from the Works of the Poets* (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1823), p. xxii.

have heard from Mr Hessey that you have been harassed by the sickness of some of your young family; I hope that source of care has ceased long since, and that your own health is improving'.[90] Yet whilst Kent's work as well as those above are cited as impressive or influential for him, it is Clare's references specifically to herbal volumes that are the most significant in relation to the concept of health. In his autobiographical prose, the poet cites the herbal catalogues of John Hill as those which stirred him to seek out the plant-life in his local environment:

> Hills Herbal gave me a taste for wild flowers which I lovd to hunt after and collect to plant in my garden which my father let me have in one corner of the garden and on happening to meet with Lees Botany second hand I fell to collecting them into familys and tribes but it was a dark system and I abandond it with disatisfaction[91]

An important distinction is set up here between the love of the 'hunt' and the search that herbal volumes instill, and the 'disatisfaction' with classification systems that botanical taxonomies introduced. By figuring the kind of texts that sought to instruct the reader specifically in the relationship between plants and one's physical and mental health as those which inspired him the most to go out and search for those plants, Clare avoids a more systematic kind of botany that might distance the reader from a material engagement with place.

An enthusiasm for the pursuit of plants as much as their classification is clear from letters that Clare sent in 1824, attesting to his new-found passion for fern-collecting. He wrote to Charles Abraham Elton, telling of his latest amusement that had been helping to assuage his 'anxiety': I am now amusing myself when I am able at hunting the woods for the

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[90] MS Eg. 2245, f. 245.

[91] *By Himself*, p. 61. M. M. Mahood suggests that Clare is referring to John Hill, *The Useful Family Herbal* (London: W. Johnston; W. Owen, 1754) (see Mahood, p. 120). However, Eric Robinson and David Powell suggest that it is Hill's *The British Herbal* (London: T. Osborne and J. Shipton, 1756) (see *By Himself*, p. 295). In this chapter I will not make a claim for either work being the definitive reference, for I wish to compare entries in both for the purposes of my argument.

Diferrent sorts of Ferns of which I am making a collection'.[92] He then wrote to Henry Francis Cary: 'I forget to tell you my present occupation when my illness alows me to join with any you woud not guess it – I have always had a great fondness for wild flowers - & I am now passionatly bent after collecting 'English Ferns' & whenever I am able I make journeys about the woods'.[93] For Clare, these ventures seem to necessitate a pre-existing state of health or recovery ('when my illness alows me'). This sense of constitutional health as the prerequisite for an engagement with the vegetal is echoed by Henderson in a letter he sent in 1835. In an attempt to rouse the poet from the 'indisposition' that had befallen him after the move to Northborough, he wrote: 'with respect to flowers I have some good things in store for you, which I will send when the season is more favourable for planting, so you must make haste & get better, to be able to attend to them'.[94] However, whilst Clare and Henderson foreground health as the condition for searching for and attending to plants, the poet also invests in the search itself as a curative process. In 'Walks in the Woods' (1832), for example, he recounts the pleasures that attend wandering through woodlands in pursuit of plant life:

> Cornel & thorn & spindle tree
> & hazel with the nuts in bud
> & crab & lime that well agree
> To make a host underwood
> It doth ones spirits good to go
> Through beds of fern that fan below
> (*MP*, III, ll. 109-114, p. 571)

The repetitive ampersands here create a forward impetus that drives the lines onwards in sympathy with the subject's mobile perspective. The intransitive 'go' also enacts a form of

[92] Letter to Charles Abraham Elton, 18 December 1824, *Letters*, p. 310.
[93] Letter to Henry Francis Cary, 30 December 1824, *Letters*, p. 314.
[94] MS Eg. 2249, f. 297.

'going through' as it is resolved into its transitive sense in the following line, enacting the reparative search for ferns that Clare attests to in his letters. M. M. Mahood claims that 'Hill's book, despite the pleasure it often expresses in the beauty of a flower, was of small use as a flora: it is a survey, arranged alphabetically, of those plants, as often as not exotics, that Hill held to have curative properties'.[95] Whilst true in one sense, Mahood's suggestion that Hill's work was less 'useful' to Clare is perhaps approaching the work from the wrong perspective. This herbal volume did not simply 'list' the curative properties of plants, but offered a lead into the places where they could be found and, more importantly, inspired the desire to go to these places in order to locate them. It is therefore crucial to an understanding of how botany influenced Clare's understanding and exploration of how plants offer a way into considering the relationship between health and place.

Indeed, the introduction to Hill's *The Useful Family Herbal* (1754) outlines his opinion towards botanical practices and how they engage with the plant-life in a given environment. Defining the 'study of plants' as that which necessitates the 'search of remedies for diseases', Hill argues for herbals as those which are the better guides for this search, because they guide the reader around their local habitat and uncover the wealth of cures that can be discovered.[96] For Hill, it is

> a Matter of more Consequence, and a Subject of more Satisfaction, to have discovered the Virtues of one Herb unknown before, than to have disposed into their proper Classes sixteen Thousand […] And in this View he will regard a Culpeper, as a more respectable Person, than a Linnaeaus or a Dillenius.[97]

Presented as a method of discovery more valuable than the sorting of plants into classes, Hill posits his herbal as a more useful kind of botany because it is concerned with discovering the

[95] Mahood, *Poet as Botanist*, p. 120.
[96] John Hill, *The Useful Family Herbal* (London: W. Johnston and W. Owen, 1754), p. vi.
[97] Hill, *Useful Family Herbal*, p. iv.

properties of what might lie within the bounds of the local. The supposedly more intellectual pursuit of cataloguing exotic specimens may add to one's knowledge of classes and species, but these specimens may never be seen for themselves or be beneficial to local inhabitants. He is disparaging towards those who would rather uproot plants from their 'foreign' locations purely for academic exercise, arguing that:

> Plants brought into our Stores with so much Expence, and kept there with so much Pains, may fill the Eye with empty Wonder: But it would be more to the Honour of the Possessor of them, to have found out the Use of one common Herb at Home, than to have enriched our Country with an Hundred of the others.[98]

Hill's mention of 'Culpeper' introduces another significant herbal text, Nicholas Culpeper's *English Family Physician* (1652), important not only as another medical botanical text Clare encountered (his childhood friend Richard Turnill's mother was apparently 'skilld in huswife phisic and Culpeppers Herbal'), but for its presence in his poetry as an aid to a particular kind of local healthcare.[99]

In his portrayal of herbal medicine in 'The Village Doctress' (1823), Clare draws on Culpeper to present a different mode of care to that provided by the 'quack' or the country practitioner in *The Parish*. Located in a 'hut' that is unassuming ('the meanest in the street') and on the peripheries of the community, the doctress does not trespass upon a locality that is not hers, but 'dwells' amongst a body of natural medical knowledge to which only she is privy (*MP*, III, ll. 1-19, pp. 330-31). Clare's use of the word 'dwells' to describe the inhabiting behaviour of the doctress already alerts us to an engagement with places in the natural world that defies borders and a sense of fixity. Indeed, Timothy Ziegenhagen argues

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[98] Hill, *Useful Family Herbal*, p. vii.

[99] *By Himself*, p. 51. Robinson and Powell cite the edition that Clare refers to as most likely to be Nicholas Culpeper, *English Family Physician or, Medical Herbal Enlarged, with Several Hundred Additional Plants, Principally from Sir John Hill*, 2 vols., ed. by Joshua Hamilton (London: W. Locke, 1792), see *By Himself*, p. 292.

that the doctress's medical practices, which include herb-gathering and the concoction of remedies out of plants that grow in her local vicinity, necessitate re-drawing the artificial boundaries enforced by enclosure in order to uncover places that contain hidden remedies.[100] Alongside her transgression of these topographical boundaries is a certain privileged access to the bodies and minds of the patients not necessarily granted by other kinds of practitioner. Although she is 'ignorant in signs & lures / That skill of conjuring quack so recommends' (*MP*, III, ll. 64-65, p. 333), the doctress has a special proximity to the kind of medicine she administers, appropriating it across the borders of her own body, 'Phisic seemed oozing from her finger ends' (*MP*, III, l. 68, p. 334). In turn, the care she bestows is permitted intimate access to other bodies:

> Charms for the ague wrapt with mystic care
> From the too curious eye of prying wight
> That shivering patients in their bosoms wear
> For many a hopeful day & restless night
> Untill at last with wondersome delight
> They miss the shivering fit & pleased confess
> The wonder working charm hath acted right
>
> (*MP*, III, ll. 28-36, p. 332)

These 'charms' are taken willingly into personal bodily space, placed 'in' the bosom, yet also hidden from the 'curious' eye of others. By making the work of herbal medicine hidden in this way, patients are also distanced from their own bodily symptoms in the process of healing: they 'miss the shivering fit' in a sudden instant, as if this element of their illness becomes lost or goes away from them unnoticed rather than being cured in plain sight. The doctress enacts a form of care that is at once effective but not completely revealed to those

[100] Timothy Ziegenhagen, 'Medicine, Poetry and Enclosure in Clare's "The Village Doctress"', *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 42.1 (2009), pp. 179-190.

who seek it, so that their bodies undergo a form of displacement when they submit to her cures.

The doctress's knowledge of herbal medicine comes predominately from 'Culpeppers Herbal' (l. 46), a text that Clare cites deliberately because it draws upon methods of collecting and thinking about plants in relation to the healthy body that became more obscure with the introduction of botanical classification systems. To claim that Culpeper and Hill's texts are totally unsystematic would be inaccurate, for they do indeed sort plants into orders and species. They also provide specific and complex instructions for when certain plants should be gathered and how they should be stored, and so illustrate a reciprocal relationship between body, time, place, and astrological movements. Culpeper arranges all of his entries around a tripartite system of 'time', 'place' and 'government and virtues', which provide explicit details about the phases of planets and the moon, and their interactions with the growth and properties of medicinal plants. 'Common Agrimony', for instance, is accompanied by these instructions: 'flowers in July and August, and the seed is ripe soon after […] Agrimony is an herb of Jupiter, and under the sign Cancer. The leaves may be used fresh or dried'.[101] However, this system is one based on a material connection between the body in need of care and the place in which a corresponding remedy can be found, rather than an abstract method of naming that severs its objects from their material context. The health-giving herbs for which the doctress is always on the 'search' give away their direct connection with the bodily ailment they serve through the names Clare gives them:

> & self heal flowering in a russet husk
> & scurvy grass that pursy grannys prize
> With dwarf heath mallows smelling faint of musk
> Bogbean too shining in its mozzly dyes
> Brooklime that on the shallow water lies
> With famous eyebrights slightly pencilled flowers

[101] Culpeper, *English Family Physician*, p. 134.

> Infallable for weak shortsighted eyes
> These strange to schoolboys in flower seeking hours
> Who think them worthless all to her own mighty powers
> (*MP*, III, ll. 127-135, pp. 337-38)

'Self heal', 'scurvy grass' and 'eyebrights' all incarnate a sense of the body part, or curative action, to which they correspond. Clare has not invented these terms for plants: they can all be found in Hills' and Culpeper's texts. Eyebright is described as 'common in our hilly meadows […] flowers in August […] is famous against disorder of the eyes'; scurvy grass is 'so eminent in the cure of scurvy, that it is thence named in our language. The juice is taken in the spring; and no way is better'; and self heal is described as a 'principal […] wound herb'.[102] These names not only serve as more direct guides towards where health-giving remedies can be located in the natural world, leading the reader to exact spots such as bogs, heaths, and 'shallow waters'. They also collapse the distinction between the body and its environment by mapping different regions of the body onto different topographies that have to be sought out. The mimicry of the 'eyebright' is not purely a linguistic association, but also carries the sense that one's eyes will be found again along with this plant and the 'infallable' cure it offers. In 'The Wild Flower Nosgay' (1820), too, there is a sympathy enacted between the 'primrose' flower and the speaker who is drawn to it: 'The jaundice'd tincturd primrose sickly sere / Mid its broad curdl'd leaves of mellow green / […] That one by one enticed my patient hand' (*EP*, II, ll. 25-32, p. 410). The air of sickness seems to transfer between the primrose and the owner of the 'patient' hand, with this word suggesting both a careful attention and an altered status as a 'patient' in need of this care in return.

If herbal medicine figures plants as a way to draw the body into sympathy with the natural world, and even to lead the healthy body back to itself, then Clare's depiction of 'health' itself as one particular herb disturbs any notion of this search as being

[102] Hill, *The British Herbal*, pp. 122-362.

straightforward. In a letter to John Taylor, he defines health in such a way that not only displaces it outside of the parameters of the body, but also figures health as difficult to locate and sporadic in making its presence known: 'Health […] is the root of happiness & like the plant "Barrenwort" it seldom produces a blossom'.[103] Douglas Chambers argues that 'Barrenwort […] is in fact an interesting instance of Clare's engagement with botany. A southern European import […] it is so little known in England that it appears neither in Grigson's *An Englishman's Flora* […] Nor does it appear in Elizabeth Kent's *Flora Domestica'*.[104] This assessment itself evidences a problem of location – Chambers is looking in the wrong place for Barrenwort and Clare's engagement with it as a manifestation of displaced health. In the later edition of Hill's Herbal (*The British Herbal* 1756), Barrenwort is indeed cited as an elusive plant, deemed native to Britain but rarely seen and possessing unknown properties: 'Of this genus there is but one known species […] It has been said to be a native of this kingdom, but not truly […] Its virtues are not certainly known'.[105] Culpeper also defines the Barrenwort as scarce and hard to locate:

> A singular and very pretty plant, native of England, but not very common […] it grows in damp and dark woods, for it shuns the sun, in which light it bears no flower […] This plant is very scarce in England, therefore its virtues are not so well ascertained as some of more plentiful growth.[106]

From all of the rich botanical information Clare was able to glean from the medical herbals, why does he choose to figure health as a plant that has one of the scantest entries in both volumes? Theresa Kelley argues for Clare as the poet of 'commonable plants', adhering to his own system of naming in order to avoid the more taxonomic 'fixed positions in a

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[103] Letter to John Taylor, 15 September 1825, *Letters*, p. 347.
[104] Douglas Chambers, 'A love for every simple weed: Clare, botany, and the poetic language of lost Eden', p. 248.
[105] Hill, *The British Herbal*, p. 228.
[106] Culpeper, *English Family Physician*, I, p. 175.

systematic grid'. For Kelley, Clare 'delights in plant names that seem ready to fly or creep off toward some other kingdom of nature'.[107] Bestowed with a similar threat of desertion, health is made deliberately to seem hidden, unavailable, dislocated outside of the body and with no proper guide as to where it can be found. If his poems are so often figured as a sites where the search for health can be undertaken, then Clare appears to be playing with the rules of this search, making health both scarce and unmappable. However, the earlier edition of Hill (*Useful Family Herbal* 1754) offers a significant insight into Clare's knowledge of the Barrenwort plant:

> It was an opinion with the Old Writers, that this Plant produced no Flowers; but the Occasion is easily known. When it stands exposed to the Sun, it seldom does flower; we see that in Gardens where it is planted in such situations, for it will stand many years without flowering; but our woods favour it, being dark and damp: the Old people saw it in Warmer climates, and under an unfavourable Exposure. They called it from the Circumstance, as well as from its Virtues, by a name, which expressed being barren and fruitless.[108]

The scarcity of the Barrenwort flower is attributed to looking for it in the wrong place. Taken out of its natural environment and transplanted into a garden, it will not thrive or make its flowers known. But sought out in the correct place and this elusive plant can be 'easily known'. Perhaps one of the conditions of Clare's search for health, then, is looking in places where you might not expect to find anything. In 'A Ramble' (1818-20), he reclaims a seemingly 'barren' landscape as that which can produce flowers under the attentive gaze of those who know how to look properly:

> As rugged & as barren as it seems
> This heath too has its beauties
> Brush we on Unheeding rude assaults
> Of Brambles' pertinent & catching finger

[107] Kelley, 'Clare's Commonable Plants', p. 128.
[108] Hill, *Useful Family Herbal*, pp. 25-26.

> So sweetly wild & perminant of hue
> & heaths low creeping in their pinky bloom
> & here beside the dead bents rustling tuft
> A blossom hides it beauties from the world
> & such a one as natures happiest hand
> Neer took a tool to scoop & hollow out
>
> (*EP*, I, ll. 81-90, p. 503)

There is a deceptive echo of 'health' in the word 'heath' here, as the poem leads towards the promise of something to be found in the 'barren' landscape. The condition of the unlikely 'blossom' continuing to reside in this place is that it will not be artificially displaced by a 'tool to scoop & hollow out'. Health as an occupier of 'barren' space and places, then, might divert, elude, and resist coming back with those who try to seek it. The poem offers a way to keep such places open, becoming a 'here' that both protects and leads towards the places where health might be hiding.

By defining health as the 'root' of a plant that 'seldom produces a blossom', Clare is able to hold a sense of continuity and spontaneity together at the same time, 'planting' health in poems that permit it to be discovered over and again as it 'flowers' in the moment of reading. This reading of health is illuminated by Elaine Scarry's focus on flowers and plants in her discussion of the relationship between poetic imagery and the mental work of imagination. For Scarry, flowers are one of the most prominent images that tie the mind to the material world when we try imagine them. She argues that:

> […] the imagination […] longs to be able to bring about things sensorially present in perception […] the daydreamed blossom […] expresses the capacity of the imagination to perform its mimesis so successfully that one cannot be sure that an act of perception has not actually taken place […] The flower, no doubt, makes visible the […] movement of the imagination, its wilful re-encumbering of itself, its anchoring of itself in the ground – its aspiration, in other words, to rival material reality in its vivacity.[109]

[109] Elaine Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 43.

Perhaps the discovery of flowers for Clare enacts this kind of 'wilful re-encumbering', where the imaginative mind becomes 'anchored' to the blossom it wills into creation. The search for the 'blossom' of health might not only necessitate looking for it in unexpected places, but also enacts a reciprocal relationship between the mind and the material world that rests on the flowers which appear in poems. In 'The Forest Flower' (1842-64), Clare brings the embodied mind into relationship with the act of searching for health, materialised as an elusive bloom:

1
There's a flower in the wilderness blooming unknown
Though thousands are near it, it blossoms alone
The trees and the bushes hide it from view
And the paths disappear ere they come where it grew

2

Though left to itself 'tis a beautiful flower
Enjoying the dews and the drops of the shower
Yet solitude petrifies love into stone
And the forest flower's healthy hour blossoms alone

3

But go when the summer is gone from the wood
In vain do we look for the place where it stood
Tis gone like a thought from the heat of the brain
And none may be like it to blossom again

(*LP*, I, ll. 1-12, p. 510)

Although not specifically named as the 'Barrenwort' flower, its location in the midst of the 'wood' and the scarcity of its blossom echo Hill's description. It is also, however nameless, an emblem of health that mimics Clare's representation of it as a flower that is crucial but fleeting. The poem offers a route towards this 'healthy' blossom, locating it in the central

stanza in a formal mimesis of its location within a hidden space. Yet it also incarnates the difficulty of approaching this space: the line 'And the paths disappear ere they come where it grew' is left suspended with no formal punctuation, trailing off into the white space of the page in its own gesture towards disappearance. The confusion of tenses in this line also disorientates the reader, as the present tense 'disappear' leads into the past tense 'grew' and the absence it signifies.

That Clare aligns this experience of fruitless searching in the material world with a 'thought' that carries the threat of being suddenly 'gone […] from the heat of the brain' creates a mutual relationship between the embodied mind and the place it inhabits. He opens the mind up to an experience of losing and displacement in its efforts to find the image of health and, in Scarry's terms, 'bring about things sensorially present in perception'. However, there is also a sense in this poem that it is precisely because the mind has the capacity to imagine a place or an image (the flower) into material existence that the 'healthy hour' of the blossom might never be completely gone. Scarry's argument that the poem can become a place through which mimesis of the material world brings about an 'act of perception' speaks to this poem's wilful rendering of the search for health manifested in the image of the flower. Clare develops the instructive guide towards health laid out by herbal medical texts into a poetic mode of looking that can mentally create what it wants to find. The words 'flower' and 'blossom', and variations thereof, are threaded throughout this poem, holding in tension their status as a marker of health that is always being missed, and an image of it that recurs again and again in the moment of reading. Clare might figure health as an 'uncommon' flower, but searching around the bounds of poetic space becomes the common way of finding it.

Conclusion

‘Clare is in the heart of being, where being is the most healthy’

(Geoffrey Grigson)[1]

One of the last recorded letters that Clare sent from Northampton General Asylum was to his daughter, Sophia, in October 1852:

> I am very glad to hear from you, and that the family are in good health – I hope that Charles will soon be better, and that he will be very soon able to write me a letter, and give me the same good news of my family which will be always dear to me I am happy at all times to hear of their welfare I am very happy to inform, that I also am in very good health, and I think that I never have felt myself in better You must not suppose me to be at all ailing, because this is not in my own writing but a Gentleman who is here is very fond of writing […] You will understand it is only, that I do not write so fluent & quick as he does that I have asked him to write for me[2]

Clare’s concern in this letter that his handwriting, or rather the absence of it, could betray a state of ill health attests to his ongoing sensitivity to health as a communicable form. On the surface is the worry that a letter not in his hand will suggest he is too ill to write for himself. Yet beneath this is an underlying sense that the text itself, and its appearance on the page, can evidence the health of the writing subject. Clare asks the ‘Gentleman’ to write for him, not because he cannot, but because he is anxious to present a form of writing that can be recognised as produced by the healthy individual he claims to be.

It has not been the aim of this thesis to assert that health can be evidenced by the form of Clare’s poetry, or indeed of his prose. Rather, I have offered an appraisal of the

[1] Geoffrey Grigson, ‘Introduction’, in J.W. and Anne Tibble, *John Clare: A Life* (London: Michael Joseph, 1932), pp. i-xxii (p. xx).
[2] Letter to Sophia Clare, 8 October 1852, *Letters*, p. 682.

significance of health as an under-explored physical and mental state evoked across his works in order to argue that it is a vital category through which we should read his formal experiments. I have therefore contended that the process of 'reading health' across Clare's poetry has to take place at the level of form in order to appreciate his innovative and nuanced approach to the medical, social, and cultural understandings of the healthy circulating in his contemporary moment. Rather than treating the poem as an artefact of health or illness, formal experimentation instead offers a way of reading ideas of the healthy and the pathological as interconnected in Clare's thought: they are bound up with the process of composition and formal arrangement, but freed from having to fall either side of a fixed binary. Turning to this final letter by way of conclusion is not an attempt to undercut such nuances in Clare's explorations of health across his works. In his desire to present a healthy version of himself on the page, he does not negate his skilful negotiations of poetry's relationship to the idea of health. Instead, I suggest, he reveals a tension that sits at the heart of this relationship. Health remains of material importance to Clare even as it becomes subject to the revisions and re-workings that form allows; for all of his poetic manoeuvres that challenge prescriptive and ideal models of health, he still wants to be healthy.

How do we attend to health as both a real, material concern and as a site of formal play and ambiguity? This is a question that Clare poses to the reader who wishes to trace health and its figurations across his works. The introduction to this thesis noted Derrida's treatment of Plato's *pharmakon* as a term that helpfully draws on the false distinctions between health and illness in order to uncover a post-structuralist approach to writing and language as textual play. Whilst not framed explicitly as a post-structuralist or deconstructionist examination of Clare's poetics, this thesis has approached his works via a methodology that can account for how health inspires a textual mode that defies determinacy. By adopting a method that privileges the close-reading of Clare's formal experiments

alongside a historicist approach to definitions and theories of health and illness in his contemporary moment, supplemented by phenomenological and contemporary theoretical approaches to these mental and physical states, I have sought to demonstrate his poetics as a site that unsettles and unfixes definitions of the healthy and unhealthy. Although this way of reading Clare's treatment of health showcases both the unexplored extent of his engagement with medical, social, and cultural ideas of health as well as his formal prowess, it could be argued that it risks losing sight of health as a pressing need for the poet, one which his labouring-class status threatened more so than for his Romantic contemporaries. In other words, asserting form as Clare's most important heuristic tool regarding health might be seen to abstract it into mere metaphor, where forming health 'on the page' bears no relation to addressing the hardship and need for care that impinged on his own life and that of his rural community. However, I contend that, far from an exercise in abstraction, form offers Clare a sense of the material, where shaping health on the page becomes a means of shaping it in the body, the mind, and the surrounding world.

Clare scholarship continues to grapple with an opinion about his poetics that stems from his initial nineteenth-century reception as the 'Northamptonshire Peasant Poet'. This line of thinking proposes that he is first and foremost a poet who writes from direct observation and experience, and whose works are 'a mirror of things rather than a window of the imagination'.[3] Whilst this assessment of Clare might seem outdated in current critical responses to his work, Nicholas Birns traces the continuing need for an approach that frees him 'from the denunciation of his poems as direct and unreflective'.[4] Although Clare's attention to the specificities of his local surroundings has elevated him for critics working within the Environmental Humanities, it has in the past signified as the basis for an artless or

[3] Robert Lynd, 'Unsigned review: *John Clare: Poems Chiefly from Manuscript'*, *Nation* 28 (1921), pp. 581-582 (p. 581).
[4] Nicholas Birns, 'The riddle nature could not prove: Hidden Landscapes in Clare's Poetry', *In Context*, pp. 189-220 (p. 190)

'self-taught' aesthetic that is empty of referents other than his immediate locale because of his class. The tracing of his nineteenth-century reception in chapter two demonstrates how what was supposedly thought of as healthy in Clare's verse – that his poems 'breathe of nature in every line' – also served to keep him in his place as a peasant poet. His naturalism may have been framed as an antidote to the Cockney poetics perceived to be mangling classical tradition, but it was also a classed reading of the limits of his poetic capacities. One of the main tasks of Clare scholarship has therefore been to uncover and assert his intellectual points of contact and deep engagement with a wealth of literary traditions, in order to rescue the poet from the narrow readings generated by his class position. At the same time, *New Essays on John Clare* (2015) opens with a call from Simon Kövesi and Scott McEathron to reassert class as the bedrock of Clare criticism, lest we risk erasing the material conditions at work behind his verse and so misread his relationship to emergent scholarly fields. Kövesi and McEathron are sceptical of what they perceive as the 'academic decadence' that can arise when a 'critical subject-position of relative privilege' is applied to a 'working-class object of study'.[5] The return to class that they call for is not, however, proposed as a stripping away of the readings that these 'critical subject-positions' have enabled – a return to Clare simply as a raw respondent to his immediate surroundings – but rather a suggestion that any critical agenda has to attend to how class informs Clare's relationship to their enquiry.

The introduction to this thesis laid out the task that Clare's status as a labouring-class poet poses to a consideration of health in his work. It traced the difficulty of locating Clare's precise textual engagement with medical theories, whilst at the same time arguing that regimen and self-governed healthcare were the most pervasive and influential strands of medical culture that he encountered. Clare therefore complicates the figure of the middle-class hypochondriac by placing self-awareness and self-fashioning at the centre of his

[5] Simon Kövesi and Scott McEathron, 'Introduction', *New Essays*, pp. 1-14 (p. 3).

understanding and experience of health. Attending to his engagement with nineteenth-century medical culture reveals that health is one of the key areas in which he does not fit comfortably into a specific class category. The folk-medical practices of his rural community sit alongside the care administered by local general practitioners, practitioners working in London such as Dr Darling, well-meaning literary friends and acquaintances, the Reverend of Clare's local church and his family, Parish relief, a large body of periodical literature on health and medicine, and the moral management of High Beach and Northampton asylums. As I have argued throughout, poetry offers Clare a way of registering and synthesising these different ideas and influences into his own individual interpretation and exploration of health, as well as a crucial means of contesting and reworking them. However, whilst the relationship between poetry and health is borne out most significantly in these formal and imaginative encounters, beneath this is a more pragmatic association, whereby it is Clare's very status as a poet that opens up his access to different strands of healthcare and ideas of mental and physical health. He is thus an important case-study for considering how the pursuit of health in this period is a classed aspiration, and for the wider role that poetry as a profession might play in fostering or aiding it.

Indeed, as Kövesi and McEathron observe, the level of care that Clare was able to receive as a poet with wealthy patrons and metropolitan publishers lifted him above his labouring-class peers (the admissions ledger for High Beach lists his dual profession as 'Labourer & Poet'), to the point where the asylum so often considered a dark turning point in his mental deterioration also conversely offered a healthier standard of living: 'It is both no surprise and a sharp irony that Clare never ate as well or as regularly as he did in the asylums […] so that by the time the only known photograph of Clare was taken in 1862 in

Northampton, he looks healthily bulky'.[6] This observation lends new meaning to the letter from Clare to his family cited at the beginning of this conclusion. His declaration that he is 'also […] in very good health, and I think I never have felt myself in better' seems incongruent with his immediate context, more a case of wish fulfilment than an accurate account of his state of mind. Yet the material circumstances of Northampton asylum did appear to improve Clare's physical health. Dr Thomas Prichard wrote to Earl Spencer in 1865 whilst he was still superintendent of the asylum, claiming 'Poor Clare is in good health but the state of his mind has not improved'.[7] Similarly, Dr Edwin Wing's casebook detailing the treatment of Clare during his last years at Northampton states in one entry that he 'was somewhat improved in general health lately, but mentally there is but little change'.[8] To both of these practitioners, it seems that Clare's 'health' is the sum of the physical problems that Kövesi and McEathron assign to his class, most notably malnutrition and the deleterious effects of poverty. Once he is in receipt of care usually assigned to wealthier patients, he becomes 'healthy' by their physical standards. To read Clare as finally in 'good health' at the end of his life is therefore perhaps to define health as only bodily and, moreover, as a form of class mobility.

Even the observations of both Prichard and Wing, however, show that an assessment of Clare in relation to health is more complicated than this. The divide they conceive between his mental and 'general' physical health, where one can improve whilst the other worsens, attests to the need for a more expansive and nuanced approach to the subject that can attend to Clare's own representations of how the two interrelate. His letter home confirming his state of health for his family could in one sense read as an account of the

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[6] Jonathan Bate, *John Clare: A Biography* (London: Picador, 2003), p. 407; Kövesi and McEathron, 'Introduction', *New Essays*, pp. 2-3.
[7] Bate, *John Clare*, p. 470.
[8] Arthur Foss and Kerith Trick, *St Andrew's Hospital: The First 150 Years (1838-1988)* (Cambridge: Granta, 1989), p. 146.

positive effects of the routines and care facilities at Northampton. Yet his turn of phrase also invites consideration of the more complex construction of health that he puts forward. The slippage between 'think' and 'felt' unsettles the distinctions that Prichard and Wing enforce between Clare's mental and physical health, gesturing instead towards a more inclusive non-dualism. He forges a vocabulary of interconnection between the body and mind that makes them inseparable in the experience and expression of healthiness. Beyond this emphasis on mind-body relations is the further implication that the physical health Clare feels is a result of mental influence – he is able to 'think' himself into a state of wellbeing – a reading that unravels some of the confidence in his assertion and suggests that perhaps his declaration of health cannot be taken at face value. 'I am very happy to inform, that I also am in very good health, and I think that I never have felt myself in better' is not a sentence that reads as fluent prose. The commas hinder its progress, registering the effort of expression, whilst the inversion 'I never have felt' destabilises the sense of assuredness that it seeks to communicate. The reader is left wondering either if the health Clare professes is less secure than he claims it to be, or if health is a less stable subject position for him in the first place, founded upon indeterminacy rather than clarity and directness.

Perhaps this reading grants too much attention to a small section of prose that Clare admits is not even in his own hand. However, the conclusive argument I wish to offer is that, whilst examining class is able to reveal the tensions in the kind of healthcare that Clare had available to him, and so demonstrates how his exposure to different strains of ideas and medical environments is extraordinary in comparison to his labouring-class peers, it is the form of his writings that better express what health is *like* for Clare. The epigraph from Geoffrey Grigson at the beginning of this conclusion gestures towards health as a form of 'being', a process of continual unfolding that, as this thesis has it, occurs at a textual level across the poet's works. To adopt the poem as a site of play and ambiguity constructed

around experiences or ideas of health is not to abstract it from material reality or need for Clare, but rather to move more deeply into understanding what health, and being healthy, are from a subjective standpoint rather than that of objective taxonomy. Each of my three chapters, taking their cue from the introductory chapter, has worked to show that health is an essential category through which Clare explores the subject's position in the world and in relation to others. Furthermore, they create room for an apprehension of the 'healthy' as a state inclusive of more disruptive or pathological physical and mental experiences, rather than as merely opposed to them. Tom Paulin suggests that 'we wrong Clare's writing if we regard it as the timeless lyric product of purely personal experience'.[9] Regarding health as a 'lyric product', however, gets more to the heart of Clare's grappling with it as an elusive yet palpable subjective state that poetry can disclose.

In *Edge of the Orison* (2005), Iain Sinclair recalls his visit to the central building of High Beach asylum, now renamed the Suntrap Centre, and marvels at how Clare has been re-appropriated into its therapeutic heritage:

> Nature studies (woodcraft for recidivists and malefactors) have replaced the trade in lunatics (returned to their communities). Clare's fascination with creepy-crawlies, fungi, ferns, is now purposed as a therapy for a sick city.[10]

Whilst Sinclair detects a degree of irony in the idea that the place where Clare wrote so much about his suffering has been converted into a centre dedicated to a pursuit for which he is renowned, he pinpoints the resonance that the poet has with contemporary accounts of wellbeing. High Beach and Northampton persist as affective sites in cultural consciousness,

[9] Tom Paulin, 'John Clare in Babylon', *Minotaur: Poetry and the Nation State* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), pp. 47-55 (p. 48).
[10] Iain Sinclair, *Edge of the Orison* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2005), pp. 129-30.

where Clare's presence is still palpable for those who encounter them.[11] In *Nature Cure* (2005), Richard Mabey's memoir of his own struggles with mental illness and subsequent recovery, Clare appears throughout as a poet who provides him with both a sense of comradeship and with a model of being in the world that is potentially reparative:

> I feel a bond with Clare. He is – almost – an honorary East Anglian, and had his own struggle with depression. For a mercifully brief spell, I had the eerie experience of being in the same hospital as he had been in 150 years before. He stayed there, I got out. But he is still a companion, an urgent, troubled part of me, dodging from bush to bush, and I need to follow his trail, too.[12]

What would it mean for contemporary scholarship in the Medical Humanities to follow Clare's trail? The introduction to this thesis traced how Clare does not sit easily in the role of 'poet-physician', a category popular within many studies of Romantic poetry and medical culture. It is striking, therefore, that Clare should re-appear in the twenty-first century as a poet whose works relate pressingly to a need for reparative practices. In doing so, they might have more to say about what it means to be healthy now than those of his Romantic contemporaries. This thesis sought to argue that Clare deserves to be acknowledged for his acute interest in health, and to be taken seriously as a poet whose formal experimentation reveals his nuanced understanding of and innovative approach to health as a subjective experience. Clare's poetic exploration of health makes him an important contributor to Romantic conceptions of the body, mind, and their relationship to the world around them, and a key figure in Medical Humanities scholarship of this period that should no longer be overlooked. He also emerges as a poet who, because of his unique position within Romanticism and nineteenth-century medicine, offers a model of health that speaks to our

[11] See, for example, Alan Moore, *Voice of the Fire* (London: Gollancz, 1996), pp. 223-237; and *By Our Selves*, ed. Andrew Kötting (St Leonards on Sea: Badbloodandsibyl, 2015).
[12] Richard Mabey, *Nature Cure* (London: Vintage Books, 2005), p. 24.

own contemporary fascination with what constitutes both wellbeing and a healthful environment.

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