

Palgrave Advances in John Clare Studies

Edited by Simon Kövesi and Erin Lafford

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Introduction

Simon Kövesi and Erin Lafford

The year 1820 was a remarkable year for John Clare. His life as a poet was launched in January via a puff piece by Octavius Gilchrist, the second essay proper in the first issue of the newly revived *London Magazine*, directed along liberal lines by the experienced editor John Scott. Gilchrist's 'Some Account of John Clare, an Agricultural Labourer and Poet' appears sandwiched between 'Reflections on Italy Seen in 1818 and 1819' and a critical take on Walter Scott's novels.¹ In this same month Clare's first collection—*Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery*—was published, to widespread acclaim. A month after the book appeared, a poem quoted and discussed in John Taylor's introduction—'The Meeting'—was set to an original composition by Haydn Corri, slotted into a decades-old pasticcio comic opera *The Siege of Belgrade* (originally by composer Stephen Sorace and librettist James Cobb) and sung on stage by Madame Vestris at

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the Royal Theatre, Drury Lane, in what was Vestris's first ever performance on the London stage.² Vestris played the heroine: a witty Turkish peasant called Lilla. Clare missed that run of the opera but recollected that he 'felt uncommonly thrilled at the circumstance'.³ He visited London for the first time in March and, across an extended visit, socialised with his publishers' and patrons' circles of writers, lords, and ladies, some of them famous and influential. On the way to London, Clare had travelled by coach, again for the first time.⁴ Probably responding to one of Clare's later visits to London, Thomas Hood observed Clare and Charles Lamb:

25 in wending homewards on the same occasion through the Strand, the
26 Peasant and Elia, *Sylvanus et Urban*, linked comfortably together; there
27 arose the frequent cry of 'Look at Tom and Jerry—there goes Tom and
28 Jerry!' for truly, Clare in his square-cut green coat, and Lamb in his black,
29 were not a little suggestive of Hawthorn and Logic, in the plates to 'Life
30 in London'.⁵

Like the Tom and Jerry of Pierce Egan's smash-hit tour de force *Life in London* (1821), Clare had fun in the capital. He enjoyed the city's unique mix of theatres, bookshops, print-shop windows, boxing bouts, salons, dinner clubs, pubs, the sheer crowds in the streets—and no doubt much else besides. 'I had often read of the worlds seven wonders in my reading Cary at school but I found in London alone thousands', he gasped.⁶ He even sat for William Hilton, who painted his portrait in his prime—a work which remains to this day the best image of Clare. The first book of poetry sold well: reviewed widely, and mostly positively, the volume went to four editions that same year. His work, his life, and his circumstances were scrutinised often. Clare and a lover had fallen pregnant before the close of 1819, and with a bit of arm-twisting from his new patrons (according to Jonathan Bate's authoritative account⁷), the poet married Martha Turner, who gave birth to their first child in June of 1820. Even including such domestic pressures, Clare could be justified in positively anticipating a life of writing success stretching out in front of him. He could look forward to money coming in that would change his and his family's lives, and alter all of his future prospects. He was, arguably, not wrong or naïve to do so: the chances of his ongoing success looked good, considering the circumstances in which he was born and in which he and his family had laboured for so long, and where he now found himself in early 1820. Granted, things did not quite work out the way this early promise suggested; and

yes, Clare was always a poet of loss and regret for times past, though he was from the very start of his writing life. But the loss of hope, increasing alienation, and isolation that tend to predominate in accounts of Clare are not the only notes we can hear in either his work or his life.

Rather than rehearse the usual stories of decline, madness, and neglect, we ought to linger on just how well Clare did in that remarkable first year in the exciting, knockabout world of the mainstream literary scene, which reflected and informed a Britain of 1820 in all its political and social turmoil. It was not an auspicious time. In the same month Clare's book was published, George III died and the country looked to his widely despised successor, the profligate George IV (the notorious 'Queen Caroline affair'—over his treatment of his long-estranged wife—was to divide the country viciously that same year⁸); the government was preparing militarily for insurrection in many towns and cities (especially in Glasgow and London), partly in response to the Peterloo massacre in Manchester in September 1819; while at the same time rebellion was building in Ireland; in January the country was in the grip of a catastrophically cold winter (in some cases, it was a winter that was fatal for the poor and infirm).⁹ For Clare, by happy contrast, as the reviews and readers' letters started coming in, things seemed to improve happily indeed.

A lot of wise and talented people had faith in Clare. They backed and supported him as much as they could, and he enjoyed it. A little later in the 1820s, Clare reflected that his poems 'have gained me many pleasures and friends that have smoothed the rugged road of my early life and made my present lot sit more easily on the lap of life and I am proud of the notice they have gained me'.¹⁰ All writers write to be read, to be noticed, and to be responded to. Clare was keen for an audience, and keen for appreciation, here described as being paid welcome 'notice' that he did not shy away from, even as he went on to find some discomfort in the 'exposure' (as Adam Phillips has it) that comes with being a published poet.¹¹

If the terrain of Clare's early personal life could be described as 'rugged', the road from that set of circumstances to publication was always likely to be a rocky one. Given where and how he lived, it is remarkable his work made it anywhere at all. That local booksellers, with aspirations to publishing prowess, took an early interest in his work, and were prepared to invest time and money in it—to take a real risk on Clare in business terms and in a public fashion too—all stands as a testament to the evident quality of his early writing. This level of attention also suggests the nascent

92 poet had a keen ability to forge networks to his own advantage, and for
93 what we might anachronistically call his ‘career’. For all Clare’s seeming
94 modesty—fragility, even, as some have had it—the poet clearly had enough
95 private confidence in the merit of his work to show it to influential people.
96 ‘Luck’ has little to do with his trajectory, though to read his own accounts,
97 and those of many of his biographers and myth-makers, his modesty was
98 such that one might think his poetry was dragged out of him. He is fre-
99 quently presented as the most private and cautious of ‘humble’ poets, as
100 someone who was hesitant to the point of debilitation, meaning that any
101 publication at all was miraculous. It can be tempting to read Clare’s as a
102 poetic career produced miraculously as if by a virgin birth, not made of the
103 energy and wit of plans and designs. However, stories of miracle and luck
104 deny the presence of ordinary human work and considerable personal
105 effort. Clare’s prose stories of his own isolated, solitary musings which
106 mark him out for the villagers, from an early age, as a strange lad, have to
107 be balanced with the enriching fact—evidenced throughout his corre-
108 spondences most particularly—of his affable sociability (as well as what
109 John Goodridge claims for Clare’s deep sense of ‘community’¹²), and of
110 his ability to court and maintain relationships that would do him and his
111 aspirations some good. For all his awkwardness, Clare’s was a sociability
112 that operated in a wide variety of circumstances and social settings, and
113 this speaks to a remarkable set of adaptive social skills. With a class system
114 as rigidly policed as that of Clare’s time, one to which all genuflected,
115 conversing with someone of a much higher social and economic standing
116 was not at all easy.

117 What stories of Clare’s shyness, modesty, and humility often elide is the
118 evidence that he was always immensely clubbable and performative: just as
119 labour in unenclosed fields was work carried out in tandem with village
120 peers (sometimes, especially before enclosure, with the whole village,
121 including people of all social classes in the same seasonal task), so too was
122 playing fiddle and singing songs in pubs in Helpston, or in the wider
123 country with the gipsies he purposefully sought out. Musical fun was not
124 a solo affair for Clare, though of course song could provide a sense of reas-
125 suring company when work proved solitary, as it does for young Hodge of
126 ‘Rural Morning’ in *The Village Minstrel*:

127 Young Hodge the horse-boy, with a soodly gait,
128 Slow climbs the stile, or opes the creaky gate,
129 With willow switch and halter by his side

Prepar'd for Dobbin, whom he means to ride; The 130
 only tune he knows still whistling o'er, And 131
 humming scraps his father sung before, As 132
 "Wantley Dragon," and the "Magic Rose," The 133
 whole of music that his village knows, Which 134
 wild remembrance, in each little town, 135
 From mouth to mouth through ages handles down.¹³ 136

Song acts as a familial bond, as a kind of guarantor of community, as a 137
 comforting social glue, as a canon of memory, and as cultural history. Work, 138
 poetry, reading, and the study of nature sometimes took Clare off alone, but 139
 his learning and his culture were always sociably founded. By his own account 140
 Clare's father was a singer; Clare understood song, intimate listeners, and— 141
 we can assume—the rough justice of vocally critical audiences too.¹⁴ He had a 142
 formative, early grasp of the potency of performance, and of the sociability of 143
 story and song. As Ronald Blythe insightfully suggests, a 'village was, still is in 144
 some ways, the least private place on earth'.¹⁵ Community and human 145
 contact—when not wanted—can be oppressive, of course. Privacy costs 146
 money, and was a rare enough commodity in Clare's life, especially as his 147
 desires became more studious. But for critics to ignore the huge cultural 148
 resources that the young poet could draw on in the rush to describe what his 149
 education 'lacked' in comparison to other Romantic-period poets is to ignore 150
 the rich store of life experiences and oral culture he had to hand. When the 151
 young Clare turned all of his oral and musical energy and understanding 152
 towards textual life, he wrote with a determination to be read and sounded 153
 out, as much as a fiddle player plays to be heard. It is no surprise that sound is 154
 everything in Clare's work, to which some of our essays in this collection certainly 155
 attest. It was surely with a sense of purposeful confidence—layered over with 156
 the necessary presentational patina of an apologia of diplomatically cap- 157
 doffing class consciousness—that Clare was able to tap into the rich cul- 158
 tural and entrepreneurial life that was so active, and so vital, in small towns across 159
 Britain in the early nineteenth century. His confidence in these varied and 160
 widening social circumstances takes literary shape in the sheer range of 161
 topics, poetic forms and modes with which he happily experimented in the 162
 1810s, and which were to shape the diverse range of work in *Poems* 163
Descriptive of 1820. 164

Read the Clare of the 1810s and very early 1820s—and of 1820 in 165
 particular—and you encounter someone of buoyant confidence engaged 166

167
 166
 165

168 in a wide variety of correspondences, with all manner of interested parties.
169 There are occasional rages at being double-crossed and swindled too,
170 along with collapses of confidence and activity. But Clare's sociable and
171 business-like engagements with—what was across 1820 at least—an ever-
172 increasing number of well-connected people (and excited corresponding
173 readers), are never only humble or passive. The fair at Market Deeping was
174 where he met J. B. Henson in 1814, the first bookseller to take Clare on;
175 in 1818 Henson advertised a subscription towards a prospective publica-
176 tion, seemingly at Clare's own expense.¹⁶ The bigger and more wealthy
177 wool town of Stamford was another hub of bookish connections for Clare;
178 not coincidentally, it was the town where he bought his first book of
179 poems (James Thomson's *The Seasons*), with his own hard-won money.
180 Stamford was the home of Edward Drury, who was to be the bridge to
181 publication with his cousin John Taylor. Taylor's London-based firm,
182 which he ran with James Hessey, was to go on to publish Clare's first three
183 collections across the 1820s. That Clare swiftly got caught up with inter-
184 ested parties, and then used other (more useful, more powerful, better
185 connected) types to unlock agreements with the earlier ones—all on this
186 rocky road to print—is something that can be read in support of versions
187 of Clare's naivety and social and commercial awkwardness. These moments
188 can also be read as evidence of the way Clare was pushed and pulled
189 around. Nevertheless, the early, blunt severances, first from Henson, then
190 from Drury, can also reveal a pretty determined aspect to Clare's agency as
191 he quickly pushes through from conversations in local bookshops to a life
192 in print: from the provinces to the capital, from the margins to the centre.
193 Clare can even seem ruthless in the pursuit of his ambitions to get pub-
194 lished. His is an agency we can see working busily, even while people like Henson and Drury
both assert their claims, through investment, to Clare's
196 work. By way of example, here is a letter from Drury to Clare, quoted in
197 full (and for which biographer Jonathan Bate offers a rich context¹⁷).
198 Drury wants Clare to break ties with Henson, and come under his wing.
199 His missive is a pitch for business:

200 Dec. 24, 1818

201 Dear Sir,

202 Your epistle (and the favors enclosed) found me in full occupation
203 with the bustle of market-day. And I have scarcely time to prepare an answer
204 by the time your messenger said he would call. However, I cannot allow an
205 opportunity to slip of encouraging you to place full and undivided confi-

dence in Mr. Richard Newcomb, junior, who has both the power and the will of
doing every service that can be wished.

There can be no reason why you should not come over to Stamford on
Sunday—every thing shall be so arranged to suit your wishes; and if you will signify
to Mr. Henson that you have determined to relinquish the plan of publishing
your poems in the form announced we can, if you could, decide on the most
proper steps to be taken; I shall have no objection to purchase the MSS of your
writing, on speculation. Or w^d conclude such an agreement with you, (in which
any money sh^d not be requisite) or sh^d. leave you perfectly independent of my
proceedings.

I have too much love for Poësy not to take Pleasure in helping the
trembling and diffident efforts of a second Burns, or Bloomfield; and
therefore,

remain,

Your Assured Friend,

E. B. Drury

***Come on Sunday at All Events.

A Note to Mr. Henson, as follows w^d. fully effect your purpose— “Sir,
By the Bearer pray return the MSS of Poetry, &c., you have in
possession, and I beg to signify that I do not intend to present my writings to the
public, for the present.”

I am etc”

(P.S. The above is only a suggestion E.D.)¹⁸

To an extent, Clare is being played here: having visited him once, Drury is now
trying to prise the poet away from Henson—even going so far as to offer a
way of doing so that Clare could copy out verbatim—while also proffering a
link to the son of the owner of the *Stamford News*, who has ‘the power and
the will’ Drury thinks Clare needs to get on. Drury seems to be saying ‘Instead of
Henson, come with me to the big time, and money and power will be yours’. The
final sweetener in the double suggestiveness of alliterated labouring-class
poets (‘Burns, or Bloomfield’) that Clare should be looking to follow is possibly
there because Drury wants to end with the poet knowing this is all for a higher
purpose—not for money and power—even though the letter has been precisely
about that. Drury is sell- ing, and selling hard: money, connection, power,
print, and a place amongst a labouring-class tradition of recent stars are
glittery carrots

243 dangled in front of the next 'peasant poet'. The level of control Drury is
244 grasping for, and which he would continue to claim even as Clare moved
245 on to the relationship with Taylor and Hessey (a relationship Drury acci-
246 dentally proffered for Clare of course), would see the poet's patience
247 quickly wear thin. As Clare wrote as early as December 1819 to his local
248 helpmeet the Reverend Isaiah Knowles Holland of Market Deeping, on
249 the issue of having a copy of his first collection of poems presented to local
250 landowner Lord Milton: 'I am affraid Drury will Interest himself in the
251 matter [.] A Shabby Booksellers Word will be no advantage to me as self
252 Interest is the Cause'.¹⁹ The range of relationships far beyond his social
253 class or his known locality that Clare is relying upon, leveraging, and
254 sometimes rubbishing—even here in this momentary snippet of canny
255 assessment and snippy disparagement—is astounding. In critiquing
256 Drury's 'self-interest' Clare is asserting his own, exactly a year after his
257 relationship with Drury began, and the month before his book was
258 launched through Drury's cousin.

259 Clare was no holy fool, and while constantly patronised, he was not
260 easily pushed around or duped. While critics have long condemned Drury
261 for his slippery machinations,²⁰ still some degree of congratulation should
262 surely be directed at Clare: for not doing exactly as prescribed in this letter
263 (though Henson was dropped, he was still writing to Clare in March 1830
264 pleading poverty and suggesting they work together on his next book); for
265 using Drury's familial connections to his advantage; for using Drury as a
266 stepping stone to the truly influential, metropolitan platform that, firstly,
267 Stamford writer Octavius Gilchrist offered, and, secondly, the London-
268 based Taylor and Hessey allowed; and for then severing ties with Drury
269 altogether—much to the businessman's chagrin. Messy though this rela-
270 tionship became, Clare reveals a remarkable resilience, adaptability, and
271 insight: to read self-interest in people he encountered and to be wary of it,
272 but also to use albeit exploitatively inclined people for his own, sometimes
273 successful, ends. It is worth reaffirming that beyond the business end of
274 poetic endeavour, intelligent, well-read, and highly capable people wanted
275 Clare's company before he was a success. In January 1820, laid up in bed
276 with a swollen foot, having read his own review of Clare's forthcoming
277 collection, Gilchrist wrote to Clare in terms so warm it is hard to imagine
278 a friendlier way to close a brief letter:

279 Believe me, I shall always be glad to hear of any good fortune that betides
280 you, and I shall be always more willing than able to promote it [...] As a

general remark for your use, our dinner hour is always (company excepted) two o 281
clock, and you will always find a knife and fork at your service. Ever faithfully, 282
Yours Oct. Gilchrist 283
Jan. 14, 1820²¹ 284

Gilchrist's next extant letter, written a week a later, is full of praise for the 285
qualities of Clare's first volume, published just before on 16 January 1820. The 286
poems, Gilchrist protests jokily: 287

[...] have disappointed me,—they have disappointed me greatly, for they are still 288
better than I looked to find them. Tenderness and feeling and a mind awake to 289
the beauties of nature I expected to find,—but there is occasionally a grasp of 290
thought and strength of expression,—as in "What is Life?"— which I was not 291
quite prepared for [...].²² 292

In the past 200 years since his first book of 1820, critical attention to Clare's 293
work has ebbed and flowed, and if his posthumous reputation has occasionally 294
hit rocky patches, it has never been blocked altogether. Clare has never been 295
entirely forgotten (though that's a myth still told, and retold).²³In the last 30 296
years, as a result in part of the incrementally expanding availability of reliable 297
scholarly texts, critical work on Clare has grown exponentially. We reach the 298
point now that the voices collected in this volume make entries into a voluble, 299
voluminous set of existing and varied conversations. Clare's work and life 300
continue to be a rare and robust stimulus to an array of critical approaches and 301
agendas. The wide variety of topics in his work and contexts that spark interest 302
means that trying to cover the wealth of critical praxis Clare has inspired in one 303
volume poses a challenge. If not quite comprehensive, this collection offers a 304
series of distinct routes into Clare's life and writing that we the editors feel 305
best represent some of the most persistent and emergent critical avenues still to 306
be explored, that all in their own way speak to Clare as the canny, artful poet 307
of sociability and performance discussed in this introduction. We hope these 308
chapters will be informative for readers new to Clare, while also being a 309
collection of rigorous new areas of engagement for more experi- 310
enced ones. 311

Setting the scene for this collection are three chapters on contexts of 312
poetic production and dissemination. David Stewart offers a corrective to the 313
deeply engrained story that Clare's time was up before he got going, 314
315
316

317 because poetry was on the wane. Stewart's research into the widely ignored
318 years between the heights of canonical Romanticism and the powerhouse
319 fiction of the Victorian period proper suggests a different story. Here,
320 Clare is found to be an adaptable writer, one aware of shifts in tastes and
321 trends, alert to the emerging power of annuals, and experimentally adept
322 at responding to new styles of verse. As we have pointed out above, Clare
323 grew into rhyme, story, and performance through song, the fiddle, and
324 the sociability of the pub and the gipsy campfire, yet his engagement with
325 song culture, and assessments of how song culture responded and adapted
326 his work, remain a quiet corner of Clare studies (with the only substantive
327 exception being George Deacon's foundational study of 1983²⁴). Musical
328 scholar Kirsteen McCue has found a treasure trove of settings of Clare's
329 work, heretofore unknown to scholarship, and her chapter reappraises
330 Clare as collector and lyricist, affirming, as she puts it, 'his position amidst
331 a sparkling firmament of famous songwriting contemporaries, including
332 Robert Burns, James Hogg and Thomas Moore'. Following a parallel tra-
333 jectory, Stephanie Kuduk Weiner looks in detail at Clare's song collecting
334 and his song writing, and considers how his understanding of music
335 informed his verse, exploring the ways in which he experimented playfully
336 across text and sound in his own compositions: she examines him, then, as
337 a 'multi-media' artist.

338 Offering a wide variety of close readings of poetry across his oeuvre,
339 Sara Lodge, Andrew Hodgson, and Sarah Houghton-Walker examine the
340 formal aspects and innovations of Clare's poetry. Lodge reads Clare's
341 landscapes into his literary experimentations, and finds him as embedded
342 in responses to literary traditions as he is engaged with digging into real
343 topographies. Hodgson pursues the metrical patterns of Clare's pulsing
344 line across various verse forms, and finds that a 'sensitive rhythmic artistry
345 underpins Clare's affecting and sophisticated control of timing and tone',
346 as he puts it. Focusing on the 1827 poem *The Shepherd's Calendar*,
347 Houghton-Walker looks at Clare's use of repetition—locating 'irregularity
348 as an aspect of natural regularity'—and reminds us that Clare's poetry
349 presents listening as being core to communal connection and social
350 meaning.

351 In the current critical climate, the predominant reason readers discover
352 Clare, the agenda teachers pursue in presenting his work in classrooms,
353 and the motive for journalists and scientists quoting from his work, is our
354 wide gamut of environmental and ecological concerns. It is important to
355 remember that our climate-conscious contexts are not identical to Clare's.

Damaged or not, the promise of nature's permanence and an evergreen return at spring was more of a certainty for the culture of Clare's time, in ways that cannot be offered to our own. Indeed, does the word 'nature' indicate the same kinds of processes, beings, and even feelings that it could in Clare's time? Yet, for all that distance, there remains a huge amount to be learned, explored, and enjoyed in pursuing Clare's sheer attentiveness, his innovative 'botanising' expertise, and his passion for and understanding of the natural world, his own environment, and his explorations of what human environmental damage can effect. He seems to advocate and model a conscious, aware commitment to being in a place that is as rare as it is inspiring. This collection therefore contains three chapters that offer fresh perspectives on Clare's proto-ecological concerns. Often Clare is regarded as the poet of the microcosm: one who focuses on the grain of sand rather than the heaven beyond; an eye to the moss on a branch, rather than the whole forest. Yet in directing attention to the movements of animals in Clare's verse, James Castell charts much wider skies than critics usually pursue, and finds that the poet is 'fascinated by the dynamics of both physical and poetic space' in ways that might usefully 'nuance existing coordinates of ecocriticism'. Katey Castellano puts 'work' to work, in garnering a new understanding of how Clare presents the work of animals, particularly in the case of industrious birds, whose endeavours never cease to amaze the poet. Birds' work, in Castellano's close reading of the poetry, multiply extends the commons, meaning birds forge a kind of rebellion against private property with their own, built determinations of territories. Scott Hess theorises multiple subjectivities in Clare's understanding of the natural symbolic order: the poet's rendering, Hess argues, of encounters with natural bodies is always tending to the multiple, the de-centred, and the collaborative, and his proto-ecological consciousness is always aware of and in touch with an array of species, not just the human.

Innovative representations of the material world of nature are not Clare's only concern. He is a poet who is acutely aware of his own mind and body, as much as he is attentive to the subjectivity of an animal, or the mood of a cloud. In Michael Nicholson's chapter, we find that in times of national difficulty (the contexts of his first two collections of 1820 and 1821), Clare represents a complex human and natural world of stress and 'strain', and builds a community of 'distress' by way of shelter from the storm. Offering a corrective to frequent characterisations of Clare as a 'hypochondriac', and assessing the class dynamics and prejudices in the widespread use of the term in Clare's day, Erin Lafford finds that the

395 poet's heightened bodily awareness can serve as much more than a mere
396 marker of affectation or private obsessiveness: hypochondria can offer a
397 new lens through which to read Clare's poetic subjectivity and experi-
398 ments in relation to physical and mental suffering, and can frame his par-
399 ticipation in a wider Romantic culture of imaginary illness. James
400 Whitehead closes our collection with a similarly corrective account of
401 readings of Clare's later asylum verse that have tended to cloak his work in
402 the misery of institutionalisation: Whitehead considers the sociable aspects
403 of the early Victorian asylum, the regimes that encouraged poetic compo-
404 sition, and reads symptomatic examples of Clare's work in that refreshed
405 context of production. Two hundred years after his first book was pub-
406 lished, and in celebration of his significance today, this collection of criti-
407 cal, archival, and theoretical essays offers a fresh and stimulating set of
408 inroads to help readers of all kinds and with all sorts of interests to pursue
409 and examine Clare's unique work, his unique contexts, and his remarkable
410 life. He is a poet who remains the most uncommon of commoners.

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Notes

- 412 1. *London Magazine* (January 1820), 1: 1–22. Gilchrist's essay on Clare,
413 7–11. Appears in *Critical Heritage*, 35–42.
- 414 2. For the libretto of this opera see James Cobb, *The Siege of Belgrade: A*
415 *Comic Opera in Three Acts* (Dublin: printed and sold by the booksellers
416 [1791?]), and for the original music, see *The Siege of Belgrade: an Opera in*
417 *Three Acts, As Performed at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane, the Music*
418 *Principally Composed by Stephen Sorace* (London: J. Dale, [1791?]). For a
419 reproduction of the playbill for the 19 February 1820 performance featur-
420 ing Clare's poem 'The Meeting' being sung by Madame Vestris during her
421 first ever performance on the London stage, see Augustus Harris, *A*
422 *Collection of Playbills from Drury Lane Theatre 1819–1820* (London: s. n.,
423 1819–1820), available at British Library online: Digital Store Playbills 16,
424 playbill 14 of 230, <http://explore.bl.uk/>.
- 425 3. *By Himself*, 136.
- 426 4. For a richly detailed account of Clare's first visit to London, see Bate,
427 *Biography*, 165–72.
- 428 5. Thomas Hood, 'Literary Reminiscences, No. IV', in *Hood's Own: or,*
429 *Laughter from Year to Year* (London: A. H. Baily and Co., 1839),
430 555–68 (555).
- 431 6. *By Himself*, 136.
- 432 7. Bate, *Biography*, 170–2.

8. For Clare's responses to this national controversy, see Sam Ward, "'This is radical slang": John Clare, Admiral Lord Radstock and the Queen Caroline Affair', in *New Essays on John Clare: Poetry, Culture and Community*, ed. Simon Kövesi and Scott McEathron (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 189–208. 433
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9. These contexts are examined in detail in Malcom Chase, *1820: Disorder and stability in the United Kingdom* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013). For a focused literary-critical account of the radical causes, conspiracies, and controversies of the time, see John Gardner, *Poetry and Popular Protest; Peterloo, Cato Street and the Queen Caroline Controversy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). 438
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10. *By Himself*, 163. 443
11. Adam Phillips, 'The exposure of John Clare', in *John Clare in Context*, 178–88. 444
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12. John Goodridge, *John Clare and Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). 446
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13. 'Rural Morning', *VM*, 2: 67. 448
14. See *By Himself*, 2. 449
15. Ronald Blythe, 'Clare in Hiding', in *Talking About John Clare* (Nottingham: Trent Books, 1999), 39. 450
451
16. A list of notes penned by Taylor and Hessey in early 1820 shows them trying methodically to unpick the history of Clare's dealings and agreements with Henson and Drury; it also reveals how Taylor and Hessey dealt with the tangled legacy of these relationships in their own work towards getting Clare in print. This is offered as Appendix 1 of Mark Storey's *Letters*. Item 2 in the list reads: 'Clare paid Henson [£] 1/5/0 for the Prospectuses, & was even compelled to discharge the Reckoning at the Public House which Henson had incurred by coming over to Helpstone for the Money'. *Letters*, 685. 452
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17. Bate, *Biography*, 117–18. 459
18. British Library, Egerton MSS 2245, fol. 10r.–11v. 460
19. Clare to Isaiah Knowles Holland, December 1819, *Letters*, 19–20 (20). 461
20. See, for example, the stimulating opening chapter of Roger Sales, *John Clare: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 1–27. 462
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21. Gilchrist to Clare, 14 January 1820. British Library, Egerton MSS 2245, fol. 19r. 464
22. Gilchrist to Clare, 21 January 1820. British Library, Egerton MSS 2245, fol. 27r–28v (27v). 465
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23. Accounts of Clare's critical reception can be found in the editors' introductions to existing essay collections such as Hugh Haughton, Adam Phillips and Geoffrey Summerfield, eds., *John Clare in Context*, 1–27; John Goodridge, ed., *The Independent Spirit: John Clare and the Self-Taught* 467
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- 475 *Tradition* (Helpston: The John Clare Society and The Margaret Grainger
 476 Memorial Trust, 1994), 13–24; Simon Kövesi and Scott McEathron, eds.,
 477 *New Essays on John Clare: Poetry, Culture and Community* (Cambridge:
 478 Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1–13. See also the introduction to
 479 *Clare: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Mark Storey (London: Routledge &
 480 Kegan Paul, 1973), 1–26. This exemplary collection is essential to under-
 481 standing the history of Clare’s critical reception.
- 482 24. George Deacon, *John Clare and the Folk Tradition* (London: Sinclair
 483 Browne, 1983; repr., London: Francis Boutle, 2002).

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