

The John Clare Society Journal

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Beyond the Language Wars: Towards a Green Edition of John Clare

Simon Kövesi

Get Taylor to Copy it out for me if he pleases with his remarks as soon as leisure permits him as I have no Copy by me his opinion will soon set me at rights I wish I had him near me & I shoud do— (Clare, 1822)

I am obliged to trust to the judgment of others who mangle & spoil them very often & the Ballad that I wrote to the 'Souvenir' is so polished & altered that I did not scarcely know it was my own (Clare, 1825)¹

The two quotations above, from letters by John Clare to his publishers James Hessey and John Taylor respectively, show how difficult it was for Clare to negotiate over his texts as they entered the machinery of print culture. They also show how varied his responses could be to the process of change which took his scripts from manuscript to printed collection. In the first quotation, Clare wants the close, intimate help of Taylor, whose 'opinion' will put Clare's texts at 'rights'—which implies he thought his texts were at 'wrongs' before Taylor's help. In other words, Clare is submitting to the standardising procedures and demands of publication and print culture—and seemingly he is submitting willingly, generously and humbly. At this moment, he trusts his publishers with his texts and is happy for their editing to proceed. Three years later, in the second quotation, Clare shows another side to his trust in Taylor when he condemns the editor of the *Literary Souvenir* for the publication of two poems² in an unauthorised state which reveal them to have been 'polished & altered' on their way through the 'mangle' of despoiling publication. Clare is alienated from his own creation: his lack of authorial control is shown in his own creature being now barely recognisable to him. This comment was made in a letter which worries at the increasing estrangement and neglect Clare felt from Taylor, due to the delayed process of getting *The Shepherd's Calendar* into print, which was beginning to get troublesome

indeed.³ Their relationship was about to hit its stormiest patch.

My point here lies in the differing contexts of the two quotations: different publishing processes; different editors: one known and authorised; one latent and unauthorised; different recipients of his comments, and wholly different responses from Clare to a similar issue. Unsurprisingly, contrasting contexts produce contrasting responses from Clare over editing and the standardisation procedures that every single one of his published texts experienced. Clare had a highly varied attitude to linguistic standardisation over the course of his long writing life. This essay will argue that it is unfortunate for readers today that modern editions of Clare's texts do not represent the instability and variation of Clare's responses to linguistic standardisation: indeed, as I hope to show, they do everything they can to suppress it. The editing of Clare is constructed by two mutually-exclusive views of what Clare's attitude to language was. Clare editors' clashes over the poet's attitude to language follow the same entrenched contours as the debate over 'standard' language in the 1980s and 1990s, which were conflictual but more explicitly political. This wider debate remains a politicised fight about linguistic and national histories, education, ideologies, class, and about the history of the English language and its historians. The debate is well-rehearsed, but perhaps we should remind ourselves of its polarities.

From the blue corner emerges the argument that the nation needs a standard and widely-understood language for its smooth running, its economy, cohesion and social unity, and that the version of the English language which in the nineteenth century became the standard way of writing and speaking was the best choice, the most sophisticated, complex, accurate and respected. In the red corner is a belief that the language enforced by the education system inherently carries the values of the class that legitimises it, and the class which speaks the language of choice. In the case of English, that is the language of exclusive, expensive, southern public schools. The red corner would argue that any repression of local accent and dialect is tantamount to political oppression. In the blue corner standard language is the bearer of morality, rationality, nationality; in the red corner standard language is the arbiter of state oppression, a marker of compromise and a tool of propaganda and distortion. In the blue corner, standard language is a natural right and a social necessity which grants access to power, levels out society and includes everyone. In the red corner standard language has been naturalised through an artificial process of codification and enforced by 'language missionaries' in the classroom and re-writers of linguistic history in

the universities. It suppresses local vernacular variation, subsumes all regions and de-legitimises linguistic difference—it renders one variant ‘better’ than all others and so excludes those who do not adhere to its rules. The blue corner would argue that nationally-accepted ‘rules’ of language are exactly what the country needs for the sane running of its affairs. The red corner would argue that all variations of language should be valued, so that all cultures and classes are permitted their own distinct voices.

The pair of colours I’ve used to describe this fight are of course political. In the early Thatcherite 1980s, language became a battleground as conservative thinkers sought to rescue the classroom from what they saw as linguistic social liberalism gone mad, in the 1960s and 70s. Marxist linguists and cultural theorists stood their ground, reassessing the history of language study and investigating the naturalisation of standard English, to reveal the ideological artifice behind its dominance. This was and is, war, over that most important cultural everyman’s land: language.⁴

The wars between left and right in the 1980s and 1990s take exactly the same shape, and include many of the same issues, as the impassioned debate which continues between editors over the presentation, editing and repackaging of John Clare’s texts. I will not look here at the ‘evidence’ in Clare’s own words in support of either case, nor at the consequent editorial practices, because both have been analysed in detail recently in two substantial review essays by R. K. R. Thornton.⁵ Instead this essay will focus on the ways editors of Clare describe their methods in support of their resultant texts.

Since the 1960s, Clare has been published most prominently by the Oxford University Press editing team of Paul Dawson, David Powell and Eric Robinson, and in 2003 they published their ninth and final volume of the complete poetry, bringing to an end a major feat of scholarship. This team has also edited paperback editions of his poetry and prose for Carcanet. The editorial methodology of this Oxford team requires some discussion. From the outset they believed that Clare was a radical about language. Here they introduce the last volume of the Oxford edition:

What we decided *not* to do, was to publish corrected versions of Clare. We came to the conclusion that Taylor’s and Hessey’s corrections took far more away from Clare’s poetry than they contributed to its clarification. We do not accept the argument that, because Clare had sometimes passed proof for Taylor and Hessey, we should accept the corrected readings. We believe that Clare’s genius is rooted

in his language—in his vocabulary, his spelling, his syntax, his idiom, his tone and his use of dialect; even when this results in crude names for flowers or other natural phenomena. We believe that to change Clare's language is to alter his social and economic status and to destroy his local culture. [...] In reading modernized editions of Clare, we are more often struck by the distortions of Clare's meanings that occur in them, than by the improvements made in the readings.⁶

This is more than a platform for an editorial methodology: it is a manifesto, with all the rhetorical repetition of a political constitution. Their Clare is against standard grammar and punctuation and resists the standardisation of language. Their Clare is never happy with editorial intervention, advice or correction, even when he said he was. For the purposes of this essay they are squarely in the red corner. Their claimed intention is to transcribe Clare's manuscripts exactly as the poet wrote them. And this means they ignore the authority of texts published in Clare's lifetime, even those which he oversaw and approved. The editors of the Oxford complete poetry were joined in this 'textual primitivism', by Anne Tibble and Kelsey Thornton in *The Midsummer Cushion* (1979), Margaret Grainger in *Natural History Prose Writings* (1983) and Mark Storey in *Letters* (1985). Because of the sheer range and weight of editions following this method, it has become the orthodoxy.

If the Oxford team and their followers are in the red corner, defending Clare's right to linguistic idiosyncrasy, then Jonathan Bate's recent paperback selection (Faber and Faber, 2004) and his Clare biography (Picador, 2003) are in the blue corner, likewise claiming to do right by Clare, likewise claiming the moral high ground. Bate's Clare is authorially a different creature entirely, and needs a different programme of editorial intervention. In the biography, if the poet becomes political at all, Bate claims that he does so '[a]lmost without realising it'.⁷ In this subtle way, while providing the fullest account yet of Clare's life as a writer, Bate denies him active political control. In his edition, Bate makes a case for his regularising of Clare's texts. Bate adds his name to a long list of dissenters from the Oxford editors' orthodoxy—a list which includes critical work by Zachary Leader, Tim Chilcott, Roger Sales and Hugh Haughton, and editorial work by Geoffrey Summerfield in the Penguin selection, Kelsey Thornton in his Everyman edition, myself in two prefatory selections, and many editors who worked on Clare manuscripts before the Oxford team's radical change of

direction in the 1960s. These scholars would claim that it is harmless for Clare's texts to be regularised and standardised to a degree. For all his anger about grammar being 'like Tyranny in government',⁸ Clare actually often appreciated 'help' from his editors to make his verse more accessible. Why then should modern editors not continue to do so? For this group, editorial interference is not necessarily a negative, invasive or destructive act. Here is an extract from the latest in this line, Jonathan Bate:

Clare indicated in a note to his publishers that he expected his editors to normalize his spelling ('I'm' for 'Im', 'used' for 'usd', etc.) and to introduce punctuation for the sake of clarity, but he did not want them to over-regularize his grammar or remove the regional dialect words that were so essential to his voice... [The] nine volumes of the Oxford University Press [published] between 1984 and 2003, [were] based rigorously on the original unpunctuated and erratically spelt manuscripts.

But, as I show in my biography of Clare, the poet positively wanted his friends and publishers to assist him in the preparation of his work for the press. The final wording of many lines was reached via a process of dialogue that is frequently recoverable from surviving correspondence... Clare was glad to be given advice, but did not always take it. Sometimes he acknowledged that his work was improved by his editors, whilst sometimes he stood by his own first thoughts.

As Clare used his critical self-judgement, so the modern editor should use critical judgement and analytical bibliography to decide on the status of the variations between manuscripts and printed texts—to distinguish between errors based on misreading of Clare's hand or misinterpretation of his sense, alterations that go against his spirit, and improvements of which he approved or is likely to have approved.⁹

Bate's Clare spells 'erratically' and was 'glad to be given advice' by his friends, and so Bate puts himself in that same position, as a friend, advisor (and patron?). Bate then adopts something more appropriate to an authorial position: 'As Clare used his critical self-judgement, so the modern editor should use critical judgement and analytical bibliography to decide...'. Here Bate claims to be doing more than merely interpreting the text: the position he asserts for his editing has untroubled similitude, through that simple bridging word 'so', to Clare's own critical-creative position in relation to his text.

Indeed in the authoritative sounding 'critical bibliography' Bate might even be laying claim to Clare's writerly authority with the added benefit of serious, professionalised scholarly technique. Deftly, Bate acquires for himself an even *better* position than Clare could have had. If that were not enough to make us rely on the text he constructs, he then claims that any changes he makes will be unlikely to 'go against [Clare's] spirit'. Thus an editorial methodology is elevated to the plane of easy communication with a long-dead poet, or at least evokes an 'essence of Clareness', known only to Bate. As Clare's biographer it is perhaps inevitable that in his supporting edition, Bate reconstructs Clare's 'spirit' as a guide for his editing. The editor continues:

This anthology is accordingly the first substantial selection from Clare's entire oeuvre to be prepared according to the principles that the poet himself wished to be applied to his work: the errors and unapproved alterations of earlier editors are removed, but light punctuation is provided and spelling is regularized without diluting the dialect voice.¹⁰

A 'principle' is an origin, a source; a source of action; a beginning, commencement; fountainhead; a fundamental source from which something proceeds; a primary element, force, or law which produces or determines particular results. It is a fundamental truth (all *OED*). If Bate is right, if Clare's principles can be located in a clear and unquestionable fashion, and if, as he says in his biography, reading Clare's rejection of punctuation as a 'political gesture' is a 'mistaken modern assumption',¹¹ then clearly the Oxford editors are wrong in point of fact and principle. In a sense, Bate returns us to an earlier principle of editing and publishing practice. He is as much a 'fundamentalist' as the Oxford team. We might even say that Bate's return to the manuscripts to edit them with his 'new-found' fundamental principle, is also a species of 'textual primitivism'. Bate, though, still includes what he calls "'raw" or "unedited"' texts when the problems of regularising—and the resulting distance between 'raw' and 'cooked' texts—seem too great. Perhaps he is not quite as certain about Clare's linguistic 'principles' as his argument would suggest.¹²

The Oxford editors' claimed intention is to transcribe Clare's manuscripts exactly as the poet wrote them. But this cannot be true. In editorial terms, the action of 'transcription' carries with it a transformative, a transitional and a translatory effect. Transcription involves activity, not passivity. Also, manuscripts do not look or read like books, and in material terms they do not smell or feel like

books. Equally, handwritten words do not look or read like printed text. Transcription implies substantial transforming activity on the editors' and subsequently on the printers' parts. The transition from handwritten text to printed regular type is a complex process of profound change, and there always remains an unbridgeable distance between manuscript and printed text, not only in what the two look like, but in what the reading process will involve. The Oxford complete edition only provides room for one manuscript-based transcription per poem, where the manuscripts may contain many. 'Transcription' therefore demands value judgements in each choice of textual variant, or more politely put, requires the enactment of editorial 'discernment'. Take for example, the following, from the introduction to a *Middle Poems* volume (my italicised emphases):

In most cases MS A54 supplies the copy-text. The exceptions to this are where the MS A54 text *seems* to represent a self-censoring of earlier versions, where we have *preferred* the earlier text; or where the transcription into Pforzheimer Library, Misc. MS 196, allowed him the opportunity substantially to revise a poem, where we have *preferred* the later text.¹³

The evidence of editorial selection lies in the words 'seems' and 'preferred'. Inevitably, the editors' choices govern our reading, by selecting only what they think is 'best'—or what they think Clare would have thought 'best'. While this team of editors might not insert punctuation, regularise Clare's spelling or indent his rhymed lines, and so claim to follow his own handwritten words to the letter, they do decide which version of the poem to include. and when there is more than one version of a poem in manuscript the choice of copy-text may be as invasive and reconstructing as any editorial intervention. Unless Clare were to get a truly complete edition, with all textual variants transcribed in full (not just footnoted as in the Oxford edition), such choices must be the necessary responsibility in the editing of his work. But they permanently limit the way readers access the work. This opens to question the self-presentation of these editors as simply transcribing from manuscripts. As would be true for any editor, the Oxford team become creative re-writers of Clare's textual life.

As some critics have pointed out,¹⁴ the Oxford team will silently re-order a poem or a piece of prose, if they think they can make more sense of it than is apparent from Clare's original manuscript ordering. They admit, too, that they do not always follow extant manuscripts.

Where the poems were copied out by an amanuensis, the team corrects, sometimes silently, led by their own beliefs about Clare's original intentions. For example, many of the poems Clare wrote in the asylum only survive in Knight's transcriptions. But instead of exactly transcribing Knight's version, the Oxford team create a new text. They argue as follows:

Like other editors Knight sometimes misreads a word and where our own familiarity with Clare's practice has enabled us to suggest alternative readings, we have placed these in the main text if we think they make better sense than Knight's.¹⁵

Their resulting texts are therefore sometimes new formations which do not directly follow the manuscript source. Their editorial principle here seems more complex than plain, faithful transcription. It is in fact as modulated and nuanced as that of Jonathan Bate. The clearest indication that their version of Clare's politicisation of language is more resolute and absolute than Clare's own, arises in the *Early Poems* volumes. Here, they disagree with Clare's own punctuation of some of his manuscripts. They speculate that his anxiety about presentation was such, that:

...the punctuation became so excessive that it seriously interfered with the reader's enjoyment of the poetry. We have therefore removed the punctuation when it was clearly wrong but have provided the evidence of exactly what we have done. The reader may therefore easily restore Clare's original punctuation if he so wishes in the few poems that we have dealt with in this way.¹⁶

Thus, they create new texts which are not Clare's manuscript originals, but their own re-writings, based on their application of a politicised version of his response to standard language. Here, when Clare is revealing change, development and experiment in his language use—in other words where he is inconsistent in his use of language—the editors attempt to correct it, and act out their own inversion of linguistic standardisation.

It is a simple truism, but one often ignored, that the editor, not the author, is the organising agent in editions of this sort, even where the edition claims to be complete, inclusive and faithful to the original. Clare's Oxford team are fundamentalists, in the sense that they maintain 'a leading or primary principle, rule, law, [...] which serves as the groundwork of a system' and in that they present their

methodology and their text as 'primary, original; from which others are derived' (all *OED*, 'fundamental'). Indeed, when another edition is published, they might try and suggest that it should be derived from their edition, as if the manuscripts were only available through them and their edition. This is an aside, though an especially significant one if (like me) you are threatened with possible legal action by the leader of the Oxford team, Professor Eric Robinson, for publishing Clare's poetry without his 'permission'.¹⁷ Bate's Faber edition is the first from a major British publisher to ignore Robinson's putative copyright ownership, since the latter was first claimed in 1965.¹⁸ It has been followed by two editions which likewise do not refer to the copyright claim: Tim Chilcott's 2006 Carcanet edition of *The Shepherd's Calendar*, and Paul Farley's 2007 Faber selection.¹⁹ It may be thought impolitic or impertinent to mention the copyright when discussing academic editing issues, as I am here. But for anyone editing or quoting Clare, the copyright claim is never far from their, or their publishers', minds. It has had a concrete impact on the way Clare has been edited for the last forty years—an impact still to be fully assessed. Copyright law is itself a construction of the publishing industry—a mechanism which guarantees 'standard' behaviour and requires submission to a putative authority.

One of the great problems the Oxford editors have never fully confronted, and one that Clare himself ran up against, is that print culture is founded on standards, regularity and consistency: standard fonts, sizes of letter and spaces, symbols of punctuation and inflection, indentation, paragraphing, justification, margins, page numbering, and formatting of all kinds. Along with printed textual regularities, most books have the same quality and texture of paper throughout. Pages are all bound together, made tightly the same in shape, size, cut, and of course in the colour, consistency and quantity of the ink on the paper. Proofing, editorial interventions and all the processes that go into the physical making of a book, even down to the presses churning out the final 'copies', all lead to identical versions of the same, regularised product. From the shape of the books to the shape of the letters, printed matter *always* tidies and re-orders the original typed, handwritten, spoken or word-processed language, and this is a core function of printing and publishing. Standardising and regularising is precisely what we expect from the normalising practices of the publishing industry. In publishers' agreed standards, readers find security and reliability, and so to some degree there must be comforting pleasure in our relationship to any book if we can predict its approximate shape and contents, even

when the words inside are as yet unknown to us. Standards let us know what we want to know: that there will be no hurdle between us and direct, straightforward understanding; that we have a ready passage to something reliable. In resisting this hugely pervasive and naturalised industry the Oxford editors are doing something radical indeed. But paradoxically, the hardbound, inaccessibly expensive, scholarly nine-volume edition of the poetry forms a fundamentally conservative organ. The editors never acknowledge the problem that works against the foundation of what they say they are trying to achieve: that their edition is only *partially* resistant to print culture, in not standardising Clare's texts. Their introductions and notes are all sophisticatedly Latinate, the spelling is standard, the dialect, inflections and syntactical structures are standard. Their explanatory notes are founded in the authority of scholarly research, as are their considerable variant notations (which can sometimes dominate the page). The reliability of the edition—the marker, if you like, of its high standards—is bound up with the imprimatur of Oxford University Press. As was inevitable, what might have seemed a radical methodology in the 1960s, has become the established norm, the conservative, safe ground, guarded and defended in law as the morally-correct territory to work within. Paradoxically, the standard edition maintains Clare's non-standard linguistic practice from within an establishment position, framed, managed and explained within a standardised scholarly text. While these editors question standards of language practice on Clare's behalf, they never question the politics of the standard text that they have created, the standard press which published it, the standard language of their own authorising writing, and its possibly problematic relationship to Clare's non-standard language. The result is a paradox: a radical version of Clare's language delivered in and defended by the most conservative, and because of its prohibitive cost, most élite, of fashions.

Possible futures: following the rhizome towards a green edition?

Perhaps it is now time to move beyond the limitations of the entrenched binary opposition of red versus blue in the editing of Clare. Interestingly, though the Oxford editors follow Clare's spelling to the letter, like Bate they regard Clare's spelling as 'erratic'. Erratic is compounded with the suggestion of 'error', so it is a word which suggests that Clare's spelling was unintentionally erroneous, perhaps uncontrolled and random. In some ways this suggests the opposite of

Clare's having linguistic and political control. An early meaning of 'error' was the 'action of roaming or wandering'. 'Erratic' similarly signifies a 'wandering from place to place': to be vagrant, nomadic. An erratic person is someone 'who is eccentric in modes of action' (all *OED*). 'Erratic' is a word which suggests an irregular aimlessness, a destabilising inconsistency. But as I have set out above, inconsistency is fully alien to print culture, which is always structured around the enforcement of consistency, which renders textually-primitivist editions inherently paradoxical, and makes 'polishing' editions likewise problematic.

As an aesthetic mode though, erratic and creative inconsistency could reflect the language of oral culture. Like other labouring-class poets of the Romantic era, such as Robert Burns, James Hogg, Robert Bloomfield and Allan Cunningham, Clare was steeped in oral culture, with its folk tales and songs, story-tellers, fiddle-players and penny ballads. His primary literacy was not in print, but in the spoken word, in voice, in sound and song. Oral culture is the prime source of his 'erratic', wandering, nomadic and sociable aesthetic values. This may seem an odd thing to say of a poet so often rooted by historicising criticism to a sense of place, and to his village of Helpston. I am not referring here to material geography, but instead to an aesthetic model. Clare's ideal aesthetic is rambling and vagrant. Through it he explores his own resistance to humanity's authoritative governing subject position: in other words 'that little personal pronoun "I"', which he condemns as a 'Deity over the rest of the alphabet'.²⁰ Clare replaces the pastoral poet's formula with a delight in disorder. Through his modelling of nature he sometimes attempts to level human social hierarchies. His aesthetic prefigures Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's model of the 'rhizome', which is a model of ideas without a centre, organised regularity or hierarchy. Deleuze and Guattari's 'rhizome' requires a syntactical feature which flowers abundantly in Clare's poetry, often to the annoyance of critics who consider it a weakness: he repeatedly starts lines of verse with 'and'. Deleuze and Guattari state that:

A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb 'to be,' but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, 'and ... and ... and ...'²¹

The following untitled poem is typical of Clare's deployment of 'and' in verse:

The shepherds almost wonder where they dwell
 & the old dog for his night journey stares
 The path leads somewhere but they cannot tell
 & neighbour meets with neighbour unawares
 The maiden passes close beside her cow
 & wonders on & think her far away
 The ploughman goes unseen behind his plough
 & seems to loose his horses half the day
 The lazy mist creeps on in journey slow
 The maidens shout & wonder where they go
 So dull & dark are the november days
 The lazy mist high up the evening curled
 & now the morn quite hides in smokey haze
 The place we occupy seems all the world²²

This is a 'faithful transcription' from manuscript by the Oxford editing team, so it keeps Clare's original ampersands: there are eight of them in the fourteen lines of this sonnet. There are many other non-standard linguistic features here, but the use of the ampersand, more commonly used by Clare than 'and', is fascinating. To abbreviate 'and' to '&' seems to symbolise the present-tense immediacy of Clare's response to indeterminacy in this misty scene, which is muffled by the flocculent wonder and blurred boundaries of levelling nature. With the exception of the closing line, there is no beginning, middle or end to this scene, no up or down, and no natural or social stratification of any kind. There is no plan, no managed pathway. Everything happens at once, and it almost does not matter which item is mentioned first. The natural mist has made everything indistinct. It is a compliment to the unshackled clarity of Clare's art to suggest that the order of appearance of each element in this scene is completely arbitrary. And yet—*yet*—all the elements are intricately, intimately related: they show 'alliance'. Only the sonnet shape gives the scene a form we can discern for certain. But even then, this is a sonnet form that Clare has devised himself, closing with a quatrain instead of the expected couplet. The ampersand, '&', serves to conjoin, while simultaneously the poem describes the disjunctures of human bewilderment and wonder. The ampersands mean that each element tumbles into the next, in no particular order, with no ordering 'I' or eye or centre. Nature and community are gently perplexed and defamiliarised, until the final line, which is almost reassuring, compensating for the abstraction and loss of a firm sense of place the previous lines have enacted.

It may be that Clare will remain impossible to 'edit' in a

satisfactory manner, since his manuscripts deliver a wild unmanageable inconsistency, energised in many ways against the codification, stratification, and careful organisation of any printed edition of his work. This could be a reason that neither the Clare created by the Oxford team, nor that created by Bate, nor that of any other 'polishing' editor, can be fully satisfactory or fully representative of Clare. An edition cannot contain Clare's rhizomatic manuscripts, because a book is too much of an encapsulating, standardising, organising, deadening machine to deliver something which resists easy parcelling: Clare's textual world. A bookish man though Clare was in his life, the legacy of his textual world is built on shifting sands, and is erratic, unstable, inconsistent, fluid and indeterminate, because it is at the same time an oral world. Clare attempts to straddle vernacular, dialect orality *and* written language, speech acts *and* the printed word. But as the poet Tom Leonard points out, words are not spelt when they are spoken.²³ Clare's textual world is partly generated by this fault line between sound and print, but it is also always ecological, seeking and describing connections between humanity and nature, between the individual and the social.

Perhaps, then, we could begin to develop a more tentative, inclusive editing style out of the urgent ecological politics of the present day. With their emphasis on interconnection and co-dependency, ecological politics are directly related to Clare's poetic vision. Instead of forcing Clare's texts into 'red' or 'blue' positions on the language-war spectrum, we might therefore consider the colour green.²⁴ In what ways might Clare's ecology inform a contemporary editorial methodology that, instead of morally opposing 'raw' against 'cooked' texts, could seek interconnections between different branches of his textual legacy? This legacy includes all manner of textual variant, all of which interrelate. They can function independently, but are most richly encountered in a bountiful, interconnected, branching multiplicity. Tim Chilcott's accessible edition of *The Shepherd's Calendar*, which places a transcription of Clare's 'raw' manuscript opposite the 'cooked' 1827 published version, takes us part of the way there. It de-centres meaning, and foregrounds—indeed requires—readerly choice, deferring much of the editorial determinism of previous editions. But this edition is limited to two versions of Clare's text, and so embodies the very binary opposition this essay has been describing—page against *opposing* page, verso *versus* recto, left *versus* right. 'Eco-editing' would free itself of the limitations of the book, not only because of

the trees that books cost, but also because the book is binary and limits us to a two-dimensional reading space. It would be naïve to think that online textual resources are carbon-free, of course, but it is to new technologies we should turn, if we wish to fulfil, and fill out, Clare's potential textual resonance.

An online edition of Clare with an ecologically-informed methodology could be customisable by the reader, accessible at different levels for different contexts and needs, viewable through resizeable manuscript facsimiles. It could deliver primitivist transcriptions, facsimiles of the collections published in Clare's lifetime, and 'modernised' or 'polished' texts too. Readers could choose a point on the spectrum of editing variants for the level of standardising they would like the text to have. They could determine how linguistic standardisation and typesetting conventions are applied to the text. Such a resource could include active links to notes, essays, illustrations, and an endless, growing interconnectivity with other online resources. Some texts could even be 'edited' orally or visually, transformed into performances, sung and played on the fiddle. In summary, such a multi-centred, free resource could include not just the singular, exclusive oppositions of 'red' and 'blue' readings, but a whole spectrum of textual differentiation, pluralism and complexity, which could be changed and added to as long as the rhizome that is the internet is alive. A resource like this would be modelled upon the endless 'and ... and ... and ...' of Clare's ecological interconnectivity. The editor would become a facilitator, opening up textual possibilities so that the choice of which version of Clare is accessed would be placed entirely within the control of the reader. As readers of Clare we would free his texts, and ourselves, of pre-emptive editorial value judgements, while methodologically enacting our concerns about this green planet and Clare's multicoloured world.

NOTES

For permission to republish this essay, I would like to thank the editors of *The Drouth*, in which a version of this essay first appeared. *The Drouth*, 19 (Spring 2006), 35–41.

1. First quotation: letter to James Augustus Hessey, 2 April 1822, *Letters*, p. 235. Second quotation: letter to John Taylor, 19 December 1825, *Letters*, p. 351.
2. The editor was Alaric Watts. For more details, see *Letters*, p. 350, n. 2.
3. For the latest discussion, see Tim Chilcott's very useful 'Introduction' to *The Shepherd's Calendar* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2006), pp. i–xxxi.
4. For the red corner's argument see Tony Crowley, *The Politics of Discourse: The Standard Language Question in British Cultural Debates* (Basingstoke:

- Macmillan, 1989); for the blue corner's response see *John Honey, Language is Power: The Story of Standard English and its Enemies* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997).
5. The essays by R. K. R. Thornton weigh up, among other pertinent things, the 'evidence' for either case in Clare's own words: 'What John Clare Do We Read?', *PN Review*, 31, no. 4 (March–April 2005), 54–56; 'The Raw and the Cooked', *JCSJ*, 24 (2005), 78–86.
 6. *Middle Period*, V, pp. xii–xiii.
 7. Jonathan Bate, *John Clare: A Biography* (London: Picador, 2003), p. 351.
 8. In a letter of 21 February 1822 to Taylor, Clare famously wrote: 'I may alter but I cannot mend grammar in learning is like Tyranny in government—confound the bitch Ill never be her slave & have a vast good mind not to alter the verse in question—by g—d Ive tryd an hour & cannot do a syllable so do your best or let it pass', *Letters*, p. 231. Though furious and politicized over standard language practice here, he still asks for editorial assistance, meaning that this quotation could back up either side of the debate.
 9. *John Clare: Selected Poems*, ed. Jonathan Bate (London: Faber and Faber, 2004), pp. xxxi–xxxii.
 10. *Selected Poems*, ed. Bate, p. xxxii.
 11. Jonathan Bate, *John Clare: A Biography*, p. 566.
 12. *Selected Poems*, ed. Bate, p. xxxiii.
 13. *Middle Period*, IV, p. ix.
 14. See for example: Valerie Pedlar, "'Written by Himself"—Edited by Others: The Autobiographical Writings of John Clare', *John Clare: New Approaches*, eds. John Goodridge and Simon Kövesi (Helpston: John Clare Society, 2000), pp. 17–31; John Goodridge, Review of John Clare, *Middle Period V, Romanticism* 9, no. 2 (2003), 215–19.
 15. *Later Poems*, I, p. xii.
 16. *Early Poems*, I, p. xxiii.
 17. For a bibliography of articles, letters and reports about this dispute, see the 'Copyright' section of my Clare website www.johnclare.info.
 18. There is an exception in the shape of Merryn and Raymond Williams's *Selected Poetry and Prose* (London: Methuen, 1986), but this never made it to a second edition because it was deemed to have breached Robinson's copyright in his editions.
 19. *John Clare: Poet to Poet*, ed. Paul Farley (Faber and Faber, 2007).
 20. Letter to Eliza Louisa Emmerson, March–April 1830, *Letters*, p. 504.
 21. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 2004; original publication: *Mille Plateaux*, 1980), p. 27.
 22. *Middle Period*, V, p. 268.
 23. 'Least, they never say it the way it's spelt. Coz it izny spelt, when they say it, is it?', Tom Leonard, 'Honest', *Three Glasgow Writers: A collection of writing by Alex. Hamilton, James Kelman, Tom Leonard* (Glasgow: Molendinar Press, 1976), p. 47.
 24. For an accessible table of the political philosophies informing a variety of environmentalisms, see David Pepper, *Eco-Socialism: from Deep Ecology to Social Justice* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 47. See also, Greg Garrard, *Eco-criticism* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 16–32.

Abbreviations

BY HIMSELF *John Clare By Himself*, ed. Eric Robinson and David Powell (Ashington and Manchester: Mid-NAG and Carcanet, 1996)

COTTAGE TALES *John Clare, Cottage Tales*, ed. Eric Robinson, David Powell and P.M.S. Dawson (Ashington and Manchester: Mid-NAG and Carcanet, 1993)

CRITICAL HERITAGE *Clare: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Mark Storey (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973)

DEACON George Deacon, *John Clare and the Folk Tradition* (London: Sinclair Browne, 1983)

EARLY POEMS (I-II) *The Early Poems of John Clare*, ed. Eric Robinson, David Powell and Margaret Grainger (two volumes, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989)

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

JCSJ *The John Clare Society Journal* (1982-)

LATER POEMS *The Later Poems of John Clare*, ed. Eric Robinson, David Powell and Margaret Grainger (two volumes, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984)

LETTERS *The Letters of John Clare*, ed. Mark Storey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985)

MIDDLE PERIOD (I-II) *John Clare, Poems of the Middle Period 1822-1837*, ed. Eric Robinson, David Powell and P.M.S. Dawson (two volumes, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); (III-IV) (1998): (V) (2003)

MIDSUMMER CUSHION *John Clare, The Midsummer Cushion*, ed. Kelsey Thornton and Anne Tibble (Ashington and Manchester: Mid-NAG and Carcanet, revised edition, 1990)

NATURAL HISTORY *The Natural History Prose Writings of John Clare*, ed. Margaret Grainger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983)

NORTHBOROUGH SONNETS *John Clare, Northborough Sonnets*, ed. Eric Robinson, David Powell and P.M.S. Dawson (Ashington and Manchester: Mid-NAG and Carcanet, 1995)

OXFORD AUTHORS *The Oxford Authors: John Clare*, ed. Eric Robinson and David Powell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984)

PROSE *The Prose of John Clare*, ed. J.W. and Anne Tibble (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951, reprinted 1970)

SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR *John Clare, The Shepherd's Calendar*, ed. Eric Robinson, Geoffrey Summerfield and David Powell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, revised edition, 1993)

SUMMERFIELD *John Clare, Selected Poetry*, ed. Geoffrey Summerfield (London: Penguin, 1990)