

Clare in Fashion

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Fashion is a fine dog but a very false one it barks at shadows
& lets monsters of every description pass by to its ladys library
without a growl so if I can manage one of these successful abortions
I must as that success is a much better payment then after praise
(John Clare to Eliza Emmerson, 1 August 1829)¹

In July 1820, just six months after the publication of his *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery*, John Clare wrote in exasperation to James Hessey: 'I think to please all & offend all we shoud put out 215 pages of blank leaves & call it "Clare in Fashion"'.² Clare's suggestion that his next book should have literally nothing in it was prompted by his discovery that two poems, 'Dolly's Mistake' and 'My Mary', had been excluded from the third edition of *Poems Descriptive*, as a direct consequence of intervention by conservative, and perhaps more importantly, influential, sections of his readership.³

In his letter to Hessey, Clare rails against what he regards as the 'false delicasy' of such readers, asking 'what in the name of delicasy doth poor Dolly say to incur such malice as to have her artless lamentations shut out?'⁴ Hessey responded immediately, countering his objections by stressing the need for an author to conform to accepted standards of decency, and by highlighting the effect which continually flouting them might have on sales. 'Whether it be false or true delicacy which raises the objection to these pieces', Hessey advised, 'it is perhaps hardly worth while to enquire'. He continued:

If we are satisfied that in the Society which we frequent certain subjects must not even be alluded to, we must either conform to the rules of that Society or quit it. An author in like manner is expected to concede something to the tone of moral feeling of the Age in which he lives, and if he expects or wishes his works to be popular, to afford amusement or convey instruction, he must avoid such subjects as are sure to excite a Prejudice against him & to prevent his works from being generally read.⁵

Effectively, Hessey suggests that Clare does not understand the literary marketplace, and that by objecting to the cancellations he exposes himself as being in some measure out of step with the expectations of his audience and of polite society in general.

As Tim Chilcott points out, despite the somewhat conservative strain of Hessey's argument, he does 'define acutely' the problem which he and John Taylor faced, namely, that their publishing house could not be a success if it alienated all of its potential customers.⁶ In spite of this, I believe that it would be wrong to read Clare's frustration simply as evidence of naivety. Instead, it reflects a more pressing anxiety about his position as an author and, in particular, his own status as a peasant poet: an object of fashionable and commercial attention.⁷

Philip Martin has suggested that the 'indelicacies' in many of Clare's early poems, might fruitfully be understood as integral parts of a particular 'class heritage' in Clare's writing, the preservation of which was central to his sense of authority and to his self-fashioning as an author.⁸ Such a view is supported by Clare's commitment to the restoration of these poems at a later date,⁹ and his assertion that "'Dollys mistake" and "my Mary" is by the multitude reckoned the two best in the book'. In addition to this, Clare likens the removal of the poems to the gold being 'lickd off the gingerbread'.¹⁰ This expression, which alludes to the practice of gilding gingerbread with Dutch gold or gold leaf, further suggests that the sale value of his book would be adversely affected by the alterations.

The claim that the excised poems enjoyed a popular appeal may well represent an exaggeration on Clare's part, yet it also serves to underline the fact that he was conscious of the marketplace. Writing to Hessey, Clare seeks to oppose the positive opinion of the wider public to the egregious hypocrisy of his objectors, whom he dismisses as being no more than 'primpt up misses'. Given that the loudest of the dissenting voices belonged in fact to Lord Radstock, there is a certain irony—intentional or otherwise—in Clare's comparison of the Admiral to a primly dressed boarding school miss. The comparison seems to unman Radstock, and perhaps suggests that his evangelism and membership of the Society for the Suppression of Vice are ultimately akin to the delicacy of those women who 'blush to read what they go nightly to balls for & love to practice'.¹¹

A somewhat similar rhetorical strategy can be detected in Clare's correspondence with Taylor regarding 'The Lodge House'. This poem, which was based on a story Clare had heard his mother recite, retained many traces of its origin in the oral tradition.¹² This fact,

together with its subject matter, meant that it was unlikely to be immediately esteemed by Taylor.¹³ Clare seems to have recognised that this was the case since he takes time to emphasise the positive response the poem has met with when writing to his publisher. Although he initially informed Taylor that a tale with the title 'Lodgehouse' was ready for his 'Inspection' in January 1820, it still had not been sent by mid-March, for it is mentioned again in a letter Clare writes following his return from London. In it, he asks Taylor to excuse his 'hasty scrawl', explaining that he has much correspondence to catch up with. He also states that he has enclosed one new poem, 'Solitude', and tells Taylor that he will send 'The Lodge House' 'next time' he writes, adding that it has been seen by Lord Milton who has praised 'many parts of it'.¹⁴ It is not entirely clear why Clare does not send the poem on this occasion, but it corresponds with a growing sensitivity to criticism, resulting perhaps from the publication of his poems and the knowledge that he was being pressurised to change his writing to conform to genteel taste. Taylor had recently written, for instance, proposing changes to 'My Mary' and warning that 'Lord Radstock wishes that this Poem & Dolly's Mistake sho^d both be omitted next Time'.¹⁵

When Clare does send 'The Lodge House', then, it is hardly surprising to find that his tone is defensive, particularly given that 'Solitude' had been criticised by Keats on the grounds that, in Taylor's report, 'the Description too much prevailed over the Sentiment'.¹⁶ Perhaps piqued by Keats's remarks, and by Taylor's desire to cut a 'Couplet here & there', Clare retorts that 'my lodge house I think will be above your thumbs & Keats too'. It has, he boasts, already 'undergone the Criticism of my father & mother & several rustic Neighbours of the town & all approve it'. He then remarks that such views have a particular value, assuring Taylor: 'you will agree they beat your polite Critics in that low nature which you never prove but by reading & which them & I have daily witnessed in its most subtle branches'.¹⁷ Clare is suggesting that Taylor is ill placed to judge a poem such as 'The Lodge House', since his experience of the world it depicts comes solely from reading books and not from reality. There is an interesting parallel between this argument and the descriptions Clare gives of testing his first verse on his parents. Their comments, he claims, proved 'very useful' to him in learning to write poetry, for they taught him how to distinguish 'Affectation and conseit from nature' and 'obscurity from common sense'. 'I thought,' he writes, 'if they could not understand me my taste should be wrong founded and not agreeable to nature'.¹⁸

The suggestion that poetry should conform to nature is a familiar one in Clare's writing. Conversely, consumerism, and in particular the sort of rampant consumerism often associated with fashion, is something contrary to the natural order. This is a traditional opposition, of course, but it is important precisely because it underpins so much of Clare's thinking about the relationship between poetry and the marketplace.¹⁹ As he puts it in a draft letter, possibly intended for Taylor: 'however the vagaries of false taste & idle fashions may predominate tis but for a season—nature will be herself again & nature will out live them all'.²⁰

It is instructive to consider Clare's comments on fashion within the context of the growth of the commercial sector during this period, and to look in greater detail at specific examples of his attempt to negotiate the literary marketplace. If we do so, we find that not only are his views echoed by others, but that his understanding of his position in the marketplace is a nuanced one. It is William Hazlitt, writing in the September 1818 edition of the *Edinburgh Magazine*, who perhaps best sums up the prevailing view of fashion, which he defines as 'an odd jumble of contradictions, of sympathies and antipathies':

It is the perpetual setting up and disowning of a certain standard of taste, elegance, and refinement, which has no other foundation or authority than that it is the prevailing distinction of the moment, which was yesterday ridiculous from its being new, and to-morrow will be odious from its being common. It is one of the most slight and insignificant of all things.²¹

Hazlitt's prejudice against fashion is important not simply as a reflection of some general 'spirit of the age', but because it represents the attitude taken by the *London Magazine* circle, a group whose opinions had a significant influence on Clare. Clare's comical suggestion that a blank book could be acclaimed as the height of fashion is very much in the spirit of Hazlitt's article which argues that fashion 'must be the meretricious, the showy, the outwardly fine, and intrinsically worthless'.²²

A striking example of Clare's distrust of fashion can be seen in his rejection of the observation that was sent to him that 'Poets should conform their thoughts or style to the taste of the country', ('by which,' Clare adds, 'he means Fashion'). In Clare's opinion, this 'is humbug & shows that he has no foundation of judgment for a critic that might be relied on'.²³ There is an interesting similarity between

the observation and the point outlined by Hessey in his reply to Clare's letter protesting about the third edition. Both men appear more willing than Clare to look at literature as an item which primarily needs to appeal to the market. This does not mean that Clare has no interest in commercial success, but that his immediate priorities differ. His response to the observation should not be regarded as simply overstrung. Rather, it is indicative of a concern about the fact that 'John Clare', as a literary phenomenon, exists outside his control, as something which can be both constructed and fought over by others.

Clare's notes for his projected 'Essay on Criticism & Fashion' help convey his understanding of the relation between these two terms. 'None need be surprised,' he writes,

to see these two false prophets in partnership or conjunction for an Essay as they may be called brothers for the one attests what it pleases & the other takes it for granted it is grown a sort of book milliner who cuts a book to any pattern of abuse or praise & Fashion readily wears the opinion²⁴

As an example of this process, Clare contrasts the success of 'the vulgar tasteless jargon' of William Combe's *Dr Syntax* with Wordsworth's poems, which 'scarcely found admirers enough to ensure a second edition'. Clare draws a comparison between the cutting out and manufacture of clothing, and the production of a commercially successful piece of literature. Since paper for books was still made from rags and linen in the early nineteenth-century, a close connection then existed between books and clothes, and both might with some justification be labelled offshoots of the 'cloth trade'. As Lee Erickson makes clear, 'the expansion of readership and of book production during the period depended upon the industrialisation of textile manufacturing in the late eighteenth century'. The ever-greater consumption of clothing, led, he maintains, to a massive increase in the amount of rags available for paper-production.²⁵

Gilles Lipovetsky observes that whilst fashion has by no means been confined to the domain of dress, until well into the nineteenth-century 'the fashion process was most obviously embodied by clothing'. 'Dress', he suggests, 'was the theatre of the most accelerated, capricious, and spectacular formal innovations'.²⁶ This explains why Clare often plays on the connections between literary fashion and dress. In his essay 'On Popularity in Authorship', for

instance, he compares the unfashionability of 'Spencers' (a coat without tails) with the ignorance of the public regarding Edmund Spenser.²⁷ Clare was not alone in drawing attention to these connections. In an exploration of contemporary receptions of Keats and Shelley, Drew Milne has identified a persistent use of clothing metaphors to discuss prosodic tone.²⁸

The use of clothing imagery was also encouraged by the democratisation of male dress which occurred during the opening decades of the century, and which saw distinctions between men of different rank grow less marked. Whereas in the eighteenth-century, the rich had sought to show their superiority through extravagance, in the nineteenth it was increasingly shown through the 'cut' of their clothes. Even so, for those on the margins of polite society, such as Clare or Robert Bloomfield, these distinctions remained painfully plain to see. Commenting on Richard Westall's painting 'Peasant Boy', for instance, Bloomfield remarked: 'I like his attitude; but his clothing, from the waist downward, is in the Bond-street cut. Such breeches and stockings were never on a peasant boy, unless they came to him at second-hand from the squire'.²⁹ A similar sense of incongruity can be felt in Clare's account of a visit to Burghley, in which he describes how, 'I felt fearful that my shoes would be in a dirty condition for so fine a place':

after awhile his Lordship sent for me and went upstairs and thro the winding passages after the footman as fast as I could hobble almost fit to quarrel with my hard naild shoes at the noise they made on the marble and boarded floors and cursing them to myself as I set my feet down in the lightest steps I was able to utter³⁰

Roger Sales has recently noted that Edward Drury sometimes acted as a 'fashion consultant' for Clare, sending him one of his own shirts for another visit to a great house and suggesting that it should be co-ordinated with a 'clean waistcoat' and a 'nice silk handkerchief'.³¹

In stark contrast to the sober style of dress favoured by men, women's fashion changed on at least a yearly basis.³² In doing so, the division between the sexes was strengthened, and 'fashion established femininity as a radically unstable category, a kaleidoscope of shifting images'.³³ In charting the development of female dress during the period, Ann Bermingham has demonstrated how fashion helped justify the exclusion of women from the political process. Additionally, she discusses the way in which the idea of picturesque beauty aestheticized and objectified women and

impotent feminised Others—such as the poor, the old, and the dilapidated—through a process of detached viewing.³⁴

These issues are important here, for two main reasons. Firstly, because they can be used to shed light on the way in which self-taught writers of both sexes came to be commodified and defined by fashion. The same ideology which led to the objectification of femininity, may also be seen behind the depiction of labouring-class poets as artless and uneducated juveniles. Secondly, the association of fashion with supposedly female qualities is one which Clare often resorts to in his remarks on fashion. To Clare, as to many in the period, fashion seemed to effeminise men and turn women into frivolous and rapacious consumers. This fear can be seen particularly clearly in Clare's attacks on fashion in 'The Parish', and also in his letter to Hessey regarding the third edition. Here, he describes the removal of his poems as a form of castration, complaining that 'I have lost my tail—by it'.³⁵ It is also likely that this is a pun on 'tale', meaning I have lost my story.

Writing to Hessey, Clare confesses that 'the judgment of T is a button hole lower in my opinion—it is good—but too subject to be tainted by medlars'.³⁶ The idea that a 'Taylor' should be brought a button-hole lower (at a time when 'tailor' might still be spelt 'taylor'), may suggest Clare's concern that he is being 'tailored' or 'fashioned' to fit a specific market.³⁷ Mark Storey has pointed out that it is usual for Clare to confront his anger in draft form and in so doing to moderate the tone of the finished letter.³⁸ In this case, however, the anger keeps slipping through. To take someone a button-hole lower means to take the conceit out of him, which seems to be Clare's meaning here. Interestingly, Clare had likened the role of the critic to that of the tailor in a letter written to Hessey earlier that month. In it he expresses his admiration for Keats, who, he suggests, 'la[u]nches himself on the sea without compass—& mounts pegassus without saddle or bridle as usual'. Clare states that 'if those cursd critics could be shovd out of the fashion wi their rule & compass', then Keats might meet with more success. The critic, he argues, must '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'.³⁹ The *OED* states that where 'tailor' is used in proverbial or allusive phrases—as is perhaps the case in both these instances—it generally implies disparagement or ridicule. Grosse's *Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* has under 'Taylor' the 'ancient and

common saying' that 'nine taylors make a man', which may originate 'from the effeminacy of their employment'.⁴⁰ Some traces of this meaning might be detected in Clare's characterisation of Taylor as a man whose judgement is too easily influenced by others, a theme he returns to later in the same letter: 'I have felt long enough for poor T. I assure you I know his taste & I know his embarements I often picture him in the midst of a circle of "blue stockings" offering this & that opinion for emprovement or omision'.⁴¹ Here, Taylor is portrayed as an active collaborator with the 'blue stockings', willingly participating with them in the censorship of 'unsuitable' material, and even selecting lines likely to cause offence. (The bluestocking was a stock female hate figure for male writers during the period and Byron, Keats and Hazlitt all express their dislike.)⁴²

Taylor's editing of Clare has been eloquently defended in recent years by Zachary Leader, who reminds us that he neither 'approved or initiated' the censorship of Clare's writing.⁴³ This is true, but it risks neglecting Clare's sense that Taylor did not always have his best interests at heart. Additionally, after the initial protests about 'indelicate' and politically sensitive material, his publishers would inevitably have been reluctant to include further poems which might offend. Taylor's presentation of Clare as a peasant poet (with the emphasis placed squarely on the first term) answered market demands for such figures. But Clare was not content to remain a peasant poet nor to follow the career path expected of him by the reading public. Taylor's introduction to *Poems Descriptive*, together with Octavius Gilchrist's account of Clare in the *London Magazine*, helped condition the terms of Clare's reception and to create a taste for his poetry. As Pierre Bourdieu points out, however, tastes are 'the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference'. 'It is no accident', he contends, 'that when they have to be justified they are asserted purely negatively by the refusal of other tastes'.⁴⁴

Clare's concept of taste was different. In 'On Taste', a poem written during the early months of 1820, and which contains a variation on the theme of blank leaves, Clare asserts, as Janet Todd has suggested, that true taste is founded on appreciation rather than discrimination.⁴⁵

POMP.



QUEEN.

Ask for WARREN'S BLACKING, made at
30, STRAND—all others are inferior.

Tho' my dignity's great, and I shine on a throne,
Yet, to-night, I'll relax for a whim of my own:
They tell me that pomp is a *comfortless* thing,
Save sweetened by joys only friendship can bring,
So no longer around me shall grandeur appear,
And your Queen will preside over mirth and good cheer;
But no courtier, remember, my presence endures,
Save at 30, the STRAND, WARREN'S Jet he procures.



MOTHER GOOSE.

*Ask for WARREN's BLACKING, made at
30, STRAND—all others are inferior.*

From Mother Goose a lesson take,
Nor think the warning vain,
Ne'er thro' thy life's endeavours Le
Too eager after gain.
WARREN has found a golden egg,
And won't his friends forget,
Then call at 30, in the STRAND,
And try his brilliant Jet.

In his title poem to the *Village Minstrel*, Clare refers to the 'thread bare ballad' (*Early Poems*, II, p. 147, l. 560), an image which, as George Deacon observes, 'does not suggest decrepitude', but rather that the song 'is unadorned and unencumbered' and that any 'unnecessary frills' have been worn away as the song has passed from mouth to mouth. 'The song is in essence time worn rather than worn out.'⁴⁶

In these pieces, as in much of his prose written during this period, the attempt to define a style and to find a voice which would be genuinely popular and not merely fashionable, are common threads. These examples (and one could obviously cite many others) demonstrate how pervasive the themes of fashion, taste and fame are in Clare's writing. Mark Storey has suggested that the 'tyranny of fashion is such a recurrent theme in Clare's writings that it cannot lightly be dismissed; he chews at it in his poems and his letters.'⁴⁷

The letter and poem which Clare sent to Taylor, or more precisely to 'The Editor of The London Magazine', under the assumed name of Stephen Timms, provide a clear example of the complexity of Clare's relationship with fashion.⁴⁸ At first glance, the poem, 'Some account of my Kin, my Tallents & myself', might appear to be a sober reflection on the rise from obscurity. Although the poem does contain autobiographical elements, it is primarily intended as a satirical farce. The poem begins:

Ryhme is a gift as our folks here suppose
Nor wealth nor learning ever makes a poet
Tis natures blessing so the story goes
& my condition goes the way to show it

Presented out of context, these lines might be read as a straightforward piece of autobiography; as a rehearsal of the idea of original or natural genius. Yet 'my condition' also proves to be that of the poem, that is, a fabrication. John Goodridge has suggested that in this performance Clare presents 'a parodic version of himself as yokel' in order to 'express his discomfort with the literary clothes he has been made to wear'. As Goodridge makes clear, the poem combines an attempt to ape a style of writing common to those associated with the *London Magazine* with a more serious proposition, specifically, 'that *peasant poet* was a grotesque form of motley which Clare could not be expected to dress in forever'.⁴⁹

In his recent monograph on *Literary Magazines and British Romanticism*, Mark Parker warns that we risk losing sight of what he terms a 'mode of emergence' in reading contributions outside the 'orbit' of the periodical in which they appeared. Each magazine, he

suggests, laboured to develop a specialised frame of reference in which certain names or topics could trigger the reader's recollection of earlier material.⁵⁰ Although it was never to be published in the *London Magazine*, this argument might be applied to Clare's 'Some Account', which responds quite closely in parts to recent writing in the *London*. Whilst I do not propose to attempt anything like a full-scale reconstruction of this context here, I would like to draw attention to the way in which it is exploited by Clare in order to allow him to hint that he is being strait-jacketed by his presentation as an unlettered prodigy.

The title of the poem seems intentionally to echo that of Octavius Gilchrist's 'Some Account of John Clare, an Agricultural Labourer and Poet' which had appeared in the inaugural edition of the *London Magazine*. As in Gilchrist's account, Clare begins by outlining the poet's humble background, the deficiencies of his education and the merits of his verse. In each case, however, the humour inherent in Clare's account of 'Timms' punctures the presumptions surrounding the idea of original genius. The choice of 'Stephen Timms' may also be significant. In selecting a suitable name for his rustic correspondent, Clare is likely to have had in mind John Hamilton Reynolds's play 'King Tims the First'. This had just appeared in *The Fancy*, published by Taylor and Hessey as *A Selection of the Poetical Remains of the Late Peter Corcoran*, and sent to Clare by Taylor without revealing the identity of the author. In this sense, Clare seems to be turning the tables on Taylor, presenting him with a similar sort of literary 'guess who'.⁵¹ Yet it is also conceivable, given his punning reference to *Blackwood's* in the poem, that Clare means to allude to another 'Tims'. In *Blackwood's Magazine*, 'Tims' was initially used as an idiosyncratic nickname for the author P.G. Patmore (father of the Victorian poet Coventry Patmore), but it soon came to have 'more subtle connotations of effete and intellectual writing'.⁵²

If these are the connotations which Clare intends to suggest by introducing a character named 'Timms' then it is possible that he does so to make an implicit criticism about the type of writing promoted by the *London Magazine* and about the image of himself presented in its pages. In an earlier letter, Clare observes that Reynolds would 'soon be on the top list of living poets', if he 'would write more from his feelings than fancy, that is less of "King tim's &c &c & more of Shrewsberrys'.⁵³ This criticism has parallels of course with Clare's view of Keats, who in common with many 'inhabitants of great citys', 'often described nature as she appeared to his fancies &

not as he would have described her had he witnessed the things he describes'.⁵⁴

A further signal of Clare's discomfort with the way in which he was being marketed is indicated by his reference in the 'Timms' letter to widely promoted commodities, such as 'Packwood's celebrated razor strops' and Turner's shoe blacking.⁵⁵ Between 1780 and 1820 the advertising industry in England began to assume its modern shape, and by 1820 advertisements, rather than subscription sales, provided the chief source of revenue for daily papers.⁵⁶ The period saw a relentless attempt to imprint brand names on the public memory, and entrepreneurs used every method at their disposal to get their products noticed. In the 1820s poetry was the most commonly used medium because of its wide public appeal. I would argue that the slipshod character of Clare's verse in 'Some account of my Kin' can be directly linked to the unsubtle styles of poetry found in such adverts (see illustrations). Clare writes 'bad' verse to suggest that poets have been commodified in the same way as shoe blacking:

Things may (as gran observes of Turners Blacking)
Be very good & very worthy praise
But theres such puffing & swindling quacking
That merits next to nothing now adays

In a poem that is apparently so concerned with distinguishing between appearance and reality, nothing is as it seems.

Profoundly unoriginal then, letter and poem provide an ironic commentary on the making and marketing of that fashionable commodity, the peasant poet. Blatantly fabricated—Clare signs the letter in his own name—and unashamedly slapdash, this writing finally resists approbation. Responding to Clare's letter, Hessey wrote of 'Timms': 'we do not think it one of your happiest efforts—The best thing you can do is to write in your own natural Style, in which no one can excel you'.⁵⁷ Hessey is clearly not amused. Peasant poets were expected to stick to particular styles and subjects, to a set of conventions which they were neither expected nor, except in rare instances, permitted to deviate from. As John Lucas suggests, the label 'peasant poet' was 'at once an appeal to fashion and a promise of sweet song untainted by hard thought'.⁵⁸ The pressure to conform to this model was immense and came from many directions. Clare's most important predecessor in the self-taught tradition, Robert Bloomfield, gives a clear sense of the sort of scrutiny to which new work would be subjected, when he wittily describes some of the species of critics he faces, including

pedants, who dive and peep as a crow would after a grub; labouring poets, who insist that nothing good was ever produced without labouring at it, writing and rewriting, and writing over and over again; grammarians, who judge more of points and constructions than of sense and spirit and animation; with a dozen other queer fellows and characters.⁵⁹

The argument that Clare adapted his writing to conform to popular or fashionable notions of poetry, then, may strike those familiar with his general opinion of trade as unusual, for as we have seen, his views on this subject are frequently scathing. As he bluntly declared in a letter to Hesse, 'I mind no fashions.'⁶⁰ However, as Richard Cronin has astutely observed, although Clare might repeatedly express his contempt for the notion that the value of poetry could be determined by market forces, in practice he could not afford to ignore the status of poetry as a market commodity.⁶¹ Bridget Keegan has also demonstrated that in his early poems Clare was 'entirely self-aware in his self-fashioning as a boy genius' and that he 'explicitly capitalized upon the audience' for such figures.⁶²

Clare was by no means a dedicated follower of fashion. But he was mindful of the fact that changes in public taste might affect the market for his poems. Of *The Shepherd's Calendar* he remarked: 'I am sure its dress is sufficient to win even the hearts of the Muses tho they scouted the rest but ryhmes is gone or going out of fashion for a season'.⁶³ Somewhat ironically, the decline in the fashion for poetry has been linked to the rise of the annuals whose success, Peter Manning has suggested, was due in part to the inclusion of plates showing fashionable women 'whose dress and attitude held up to the audience the model of taste'.⁶⁴ As the fashion for poetry faded, Clare attempted to prolong his career as a writer by contributing to the annuals and by heeding his friends' advice 'to attempt something in prose as verse will not sell'.⁶⁵ Ultimately, however, the 'tide of fashion', which he bemoans in his elegy 'To the Memory of Bloomfield', proved 'too strong' and market success passed him by. Clare's first volumes sold well, but in the years which followed peasant poetry became increasingly old fashioned, and something of his predicament is suggested by a phrase used by Hazlitt: 'The fashion of an hour old mocks the wearer'.⁶⁶ Despite this ephemerality, the histories of fashion and consumption provide important contexts for studying authors from the self-taught tradition. They emphasise diverse receptions, and draw our attention away from a narrow conception of the artist as lone producer, and

towards wider cultural perspectives which have been less clearly articulated.⁶⁷

NOTES

1. *Letters*, p. 463.
2. *Letters*, p. 84.
3. For contemporary criticisms of these poems see the notice which appeared in the *Eclectic Review* in April 1820 and Eliza Emmerson's letter to Clare of November that year, both reprinted in *Critical Heritage*.
4. *Letters*, p. 83.
5. James Hessey to John Clare, 11 July 1820, quoted in Tim Chilcott, *A Publisher and His Circle: The Life and Work of John Taylor, Keats's Publisher* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 111-12.
6. Chilcott, *A Publisher and His Circle*, p. 112.
7. Clare's early supporters seem to have been in little doubt about the potential commercial value of his writing. In Edward Drury's words: 'My view of these poems is to consider them as wares that I have bought which will find a market in the great city. I want a broker or a partner to whom I can consign or share the articles I receive from the manufacturer', quoted in Edward Storey, *A Right to Song: The Life of John Clare* (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 128.
8. Philip W. Martin, 'Authorial Identity and the Critical Act: John Clare and Lord Byron', *Questioning Romanticism*, ed. by John Beer (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 83.
9. See his letter to Taylor of 18 January 1821 regarding the fourth edition of his poems (*Letters*, pp. 140-2).
10. *Letters*, pp. 84, 83. Clare also uses this phrase in his 'Don Juan A Poem'. See Tim Chilcott, *John Clare: The Living Year, 1841* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 1999), p. 51.
11. *Letters*, p. 83. On Radstock's involvement with the Society for the Suppression of Vice see Roger Sales, *John Clare: A Literary Life* (Houndsmills: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 51-5. Interestingly, Sales suggests that some of the Society's members 'became obsessed by the devious ways in which lewd books and prints were apparently smuggled into girls' boarding schools', p. 54.
12. Clare informed Octavius Gilchrist in December 1819, that he was 'now Ryhming some of my Mother's "old Stories" as she calls 'em they are Local Legends Perhaps only known in these Places As my enquiry as never gained any hints of 'em elsewhere "The Lodge House" is one & nearly finished' (*Letters*, p. 24). For a discussion of this poem in relation to Clare's other narrative tales see *Cottage Tales*, pp. xxxiii-xxxv.
13. Some of Taylor's objections to the poem do appear to have been based on factors other than its subject matter, although Eric Robinson suspects these were not the chief reason the poem was rejected. See the extract from Taylor's letter to Clare of 18 April 1820, quoted in *Cottage Tales*, p. xviii.
14. *Letters*, pp. 26, 36.
15. Quoted in *Critical Heritage*, p. 60.
16. Quoted in *Letters*, p. 38n.
17. *Letters*, pp. 38-9. Bob Heyes discusses the circulation of Clare's manuscripts

- amongst his friends and neighbours in his essay 'Writing Clare's Poems: "The Myth of Solitary Genius"', *John Clare: New Approaches*, ed. by John Goodridge and Simon Kövesi (Helpston: The John Clare Society, 2000), pp. 33-45.
18. *By Himself*, p. 14.
 19. The roots of this opposition are outlined by James Raven in his *Judging New Wealth: Popular Publishing and Responses to Commerce* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 160-1, and by Diana Donald in her introduction to *Followers of Fashion: Graphic Satires from the Georgian Period* (London: Hayward Gallery, 2002), p. 10.
 20. *Letters*, p. 539.
 21. William Hazlitt 'On Fashion', *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. by P.P. Howe (London: Dent, 1930-4), XVII, pp. 51, 52.
 22. Hazlitt, 'On Fashion', p. 53.
 23. Quoted in *Letters*, p. 207n.
 24. *Prose*, p. 217.
 25. Lee Erickson, *The Economy of Literary Form: English Literature and the Industrialization of Publishing, 1800-1850* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 6.
 26. Gilles Lipovetsky, *The Empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 15, 16.
 27. *Prose*, pp. 207-8. The version of this essay published in *The European Magazine* has been transcribed and annotated by John Birtwhistle. This is available online at <<http://human.ntu.ac.uk/clare/birtwhistle.htm>>.
 28. Drew Milne, 'Flaming Robes: Keats, Shelley and the Metrical Clothes of Class Struggle', *Textual Practice* 15.1 (Spring 2001), pp. 101-22.
 29. *The Remains of Robert Bloomfield* (London, 1824), II, p. 113. On Westall see Christiana Payne, *Toil and Plenty: Images of the Agricultural Landscape in England, 1780-1890* (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 1993), p. 51.
 30. *By Himself*, p. 119.
 31. Sales, *John Clare*, p. 3.
 32. For concise overviews of male and female fashions during the period, see Joan Nunn, *Fashion in Costume 1200-2000*, 2nd edn. (London: Herbert Press, 2000), pp. 104-31 and Herbert Norris and Oswald Curtis, *Nineteenth-Century Costume and Fashion*. (1933; Mineola, New York: Dover, 1998), chs. 1-2.
 33. Ann Bermingham, 'The Picturesque and ready-to-wear femininity', *The Politics of the Picturesque: Literature, Landscape and Aesthetic since 1770*, ed. by Stephen Copley and Peter Garside (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 91.
 34. Bermingham, 'The Picturesque', p. 93.
 35. *Letters*, p. 84.
 36. *Letters*, p. 83.
 37. Simon Kövesi has detected a possible pun on 'Taylor' in Clare's 'Don Juan a Poem': see his 'Masculinity, Misogyny and the Marketplace: Clare's "Don Juan A Poem"', *John Clare: New Approaches*, p. 199. He suggests that this poem 'parodies a poet explicitly seeking to foster interest from a buying public', becoming 'a parody of poetry which is "made" or determined by market forces' (p. 197).
 38. Mark Storey, "'Creeping into Print": Editing the Letters of John Clare', in *The Theory and Practice of Text Editing: Essays in Honour of James T. Boulton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 77.

39. *Letters*, p. 80.
40. *Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, 1811 edn. (London: Bibliophile Books, 1984). Byron uses a variation on this phrase in his attack on the tailor-poet Nathaniel Bloomfield (brother of Robert) in his notes to *Hints from Horace*. Bloomfield's 'Essay on War', he suggests, 'is produced by the ninth part of a "poet"'. George Gordon, Lord Byron, *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. by Jerome J. McGann (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), I, p. 442.
41. *Letters*, p. 84.
42. On the various meanings of 'bluestocking' see Sylvia Harecstark Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 290-303.
43. Zachary Leader, *Revision and Romantic Authorship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 236.
44. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. by Richard Nice (Routledge, 1984), p. 56.
45. *Early Poems*, II, pp. 375-6; Janet Todd, *In Adam's Garden: A Study of John Clare's Pre-Asylum Poetry* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1973), p. 29. In his letter of 2 April 1820, Clare informs Taylor that in the 'last fortnight' he has written 'a good many Sonnets 2 of which to "Taste" & "Poetry" I like best' (*Letters*, p. 43).
46. Deacon, p. 54.
47. Mark Storey, 'Clare and the Critics', Haughton, p. 31.
48. For the text of this letter see *Letters*, pp. 196-8.
49. John Goodridge, 'Identity, Authenticity, Class: John Clare and the Mask of Chatterton', *Angelaki* 1.2 (1993), 141-2.
50. Mark Parker, *Literary Magazines and British Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 4.
51. Clare acknowledged the book on 10 June 1820 (*Letters*, p. 75). Storey suggests that the 'Letter from Mr Humphrey Nixon' which Clare refers to in the 'Timms' letter was in all probability penned by Reynolds, which further implies that he was the source of the name.
52. Parker, *Literary Magazines*, p. 4. On Patmore and the London Magazine see Josephine Bauer, *The London Magazine 1820-1829* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1953). According to John Strachan, Patmore was firmly established as *Blackwood's 'Tims'* by the summer of 1820. See his edition of *Parodies of the Romantic Age* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), V, p. x.
53. *Letters*, p. 181. Elsewhere, Clare admits to Taylor that he does not 'understand' Reynolds's 'King Tims' (*Letters*, p. 76).
54. *Letters*, p. 519. In his comments on Reynolds, Clare may mean 'fancy' to allude to Reynolds's fondness for boxing, which was colloquially known as the fancy and is a theme of Reynolds's book. Given the context of Clare's remark, however, I think it almost certain that he intends principally to refer to poetic fancy.
55. 'Packwood's celebrated razor strops' were advertised in the *Stamford Mercury* in 1817, whilst there are numerous advertisements for Turner's shoe blacking in papers that Clare might have encountered, such as the *Stamford Mercury*, Drakard's *Stamford News*, and the *Boston Gazette*. See the notes to this poem in *Early Poems*, II, p. 795. Further references to these advertisements may be found in *Prose*, p. 207, *Letters*, pp. 391, 550, and *By Himself*, p. 158. On Packwood see Neil McKendrick, 'George Packwood and the Commercialization

- of Shaving: The Art of Eighteenth-Century Advertising or "The Way to Get Money and be Happy"', in Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb, *The Commercialisation of Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Europa Publications, 1982), pp. 146-94.
56. See Marcus Wood, *Radical Satire and Print Culture 1790-1822* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 155, 187.
 57. Quoted in *Letters*, p. 196n.
 58. John Lucas, 'Clare's Politics', Haughton, p. 148.
 59. Letter to George Bloomfield, 30 November 1801, *Selections from the Correspondence of Robert Bloomfield*, ed. by W.H. Hart (1870; Walton-on-Thames: Robert F. Ashby, 1968), p. 18.
 60. *Letters*, p. 82.
 61. Richard Cronin, 'In Place and Out of Place: Clare in *The Midsummer Cushion*', *John Clare: New Approaches*, p. 141.
 62. Bridget Keegan, 'Boys, Marvellous Boys: John Clare's 'Natural Genius'', *John Clare: New Approaches*, pp. 66, 69-70.
 63. *Letters*, p. 400. Two months prior to this, Clare had written to Taylor asking for money and admitting, 'I feel very dissappointed at the bad sale of the new Poems but I cannot help it if the public will not read ryhmes' (*Letters*, p. 394).
 64. Peter J. Manning, 'Wordsworth in the *Keepsake, 1829*' in *Literature in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-Century British Publishing and Reading Practices*, ed by John O. Jordan and Robert L. Patten (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 57. Despite this, Stephen Colclough has demonstrated that in some cases the annuals provided new avenues of expression for Clare (unpublished conference paper, delivered at 'Crossing Borders: John Clare, James Hogg and their Worlds', St. Catherine's College, Oxford University, 6 July 2001).
 65. *Letters*, p. 463. For details of this project see P.M.S. Dawson, 'Clare's 'Letter to Allan Cunningham'', *JCSJ* 20 (2001), 21-37.
 66. Hazlitt, 'On Fashion', p. 52.
 67. See Ann Bermingham's introduction to *The Consumption of Culture 1600-1800: Image, Object, Text*, ed. by Ann Bermingham and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1995).