

Hic Inde Clare:
Integrity, Exocognition, & John Clare's
'Proposals for Building a Cottage'

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This article argues that the structure of Clare's 'Proposals for Building a Cottage', determined by Clare's complex relationship to 'culture', coaxes distinct reading experiences that call attention to distinct brain activities and thus invites a neuroscientific approach to reading Clare's opus as well as poetry in general.

In the early 1500s, 'culture' indicated soil cultivation, becoming the human attribute of refinement around the time John Clare wrote, in the early 1800s. During the first half of the eighteenth century, we see the mixing of the two senses of 'culture's' close relative 'cultivate' via metaphor in tracts like J. W. Orderson's *Creoleana*, dealing with *noblesse oblige* in West Indian Creole culture: 'But our youth's mind was not so great a blank as it seemed to be—it was a soil pure and fertile, but barren for want of cultivation'.¹ Here is 'culture' in its transitional phase. Clare's rough agrarian beauty as well embodies the etymological transition from 'culture', husbandry of the earth, to 'culture', husbandry of manners. We see these two senses anxiously abut each other in '[After reading in a letter] Proposals for Building a Cottage'—the poem this paper will focus on. In proceeding to focus on a single poem rather than trying to plait a variety of Clare's poetic sound-bites, this essay enacts Nietzsche's philology, an interpretive strategy that,

in an age of "work": that is to say, of haste, of unseemly and immoderate hurry-skurry which is intent upon "getting things done" at once, even every book, whether old or new, will not "get things done" so hurriedly: it teaches how to read *well*: i.e. slowly, profoundly, attentively, prudently, with inner thoughts, with the mental doors ajar, with delicate fingers and eyes...²

This essay not only tends slowly to Clare's language in 'Proposals', but also considers Nietzsche's idea of slow reading as an embodied

experience ('fingers and eyes') and extends this idea to the plastic brain itself, the 'mental doors', as it were, showing how absorbed aesthetic experience can reshape the brain in ways useful to decision-making skills and sustainability. 'Proposals' teaches us important things about what I choose to call 'exocognitive' aesthetic experiences and 'interity'—my terms, both—and a way of being in the world that these concepts foster.

On the neural level, exocognitive processes are brought about by aesthetic experience and are grounded primarily in the same area of the brain—the prefrontal cortex—that shows pronounced activity during meditation³ and likely shows pronounced activity during, for instance, Timothy Morton's 'rhapsody'⁴ and Robert Mitchell's revision of 'suspended animation'.⁵ I don't mean to argue that exocognition is isolated in the prefrontal cortex; I'm using exocognition mainly as a placeholder term for what I believe future fMRI technology⁶ will show as what happens in the brain when the subject is absorbed in aesthetic experience. For now, let's assume this absorption—a presentness, an attentiveness that shrinks temporal awareness to the exclusion of past and future—is very similar to meditation that, again, has been shown to grow the prefrontal cortex. Generally speaking, the prefrontal cortex facilitates decision-making, particularly as relates to the subject's social being,⁷ and sounds like it bears an essential relationship to Gerald Edelman-*via*-Karl Kroeber's description of consciousness as 'regulating the salience of various elements of the vast stimulus complex that is the unstable environment it is perpetually encountering'.⁸ In essence, the prefrontal cortex negotiates the subject's way of being in the world, between what the subject wants and which of the subject's possible courses of action might exist harmoniously in his environment—a balance between desire and empathy—and may well prove to be an important seat of consciousness itself. With a well-developed prefrontal cortex a subject might imagine and enact effective cultural practices, among peers and strangers, self and other, at home and in the wild, to the extent that such distinctions—peer / stranger,⁹ self / other, domestic / wild—might even dissolve (the rhizome¹⁰ shares a similar goal) and thus create a model of what I choose to call 'interity'. Interity replaces Kroeber's discussion of a way of being in the world as 'Keats's word, interassimilatively, as mutually interactive **participants** in an ever-self-transforming **set of interlocking systems**' [my boldface], where Kroeber's bulky

diction of part-, -form-, set, -lock-, system- seems to create and enforce structural distinctions rather than dissolve delineations and borders toward a sustainable harmony.¹¹

Alas, interity is not rhizomic, but rather is the brain growing toward empathy by physically growing the prefrontal cortex with absorbed aesthetic experience, that is, sustained and repeated exocognitive processes. While I understand that cultural studies doesn't need any more binaries, 'Proposals' is fascinating in the way it toggles between this and that, between contrasting meanings of 'culture', between present and future, spectator and participant, urban and rural, culture and nature, between the way it both absorbs and distances its audience, and is thus especially useful to define exocognition and endocognition, the latter of which may for now simply be regarded as 'not exocognitive'—more about these terms will be revealed. Here is the unedited poem as appears in the Peterborough Collection at the Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery:

Beside a runnel build my shed
 Wi' stubbles coverd oer
 Let broad oaks oer its chimley spread
 & grass plats grace the door

The door may open wi a string
 So that it closes tight
 & locks too woud be wanted things
 To keep out thieves at night

A little garden not too fine
 Inclosed wi painted pails
 & wood bines round the cot to twine
 Pind to the wall wi nails

Let hazels grow & spindling sedge
 Bent bowering over head
 Dig old mans beard from woodland hedge
 To twine a summer shade

Beside the threshold sods provide
 & build a summer seat
 Plant sweet briar bushes by its side
 & flowers that smelleth sweet

I love the sparrows ways to watch
Upon the cotters sheds
So here & there pull out the thatch
As they may hid[e] their heads

& as the sweeping swallows stop
Their flights along the green
Leave holes within the chimney top
To paste their nest between

Stick shelves & cupboards round the hut
In all the holes & nooks
Nor in the corner fail to put
A cupboard for the books

Along the floor some sand Ill sift
To make it fit to live in
& then Ill thank ye for the gift
As somthing worth the giving¹²

Immediately we are in scene: A Fairfield Porter-esque¹³ gestural realism points to the specifics of place, 'Beside a runnel,' and in continuing simply with 'build my shed', rather than 'I build my shed', the grammatical subject is elided. The simple present tense 'build' performs the action at once as both the speaker's imagined blueprint and, without relying on future tense, the actual, present construction of the 'shed'. We are eased by the apparent confluence of content and form: the runnel tells us we're likely to be in a rustic environment, and when the first line resolves with four beats, we are aware of an evenly rustic ballad meter emerging. But the more ambitious 'Cottage' of the title has curiously become a humble 'shed' after only the first line. From what follows—'To make it fit to live in'—we know the speaker intends the shed to be a personal dwelling, rather than a functional out-building, such as a goat-shed or cow-shed as in the sense the *Oxford English Dictionary* offers: '1799: J. Robertson, *Gen. View Agric. Perth* 223: "The milch cows are generally fed in the house or in a shade"¹⁴. The demotion of 'Cottage' to 'shed' is at odds with the term 'shed' itself; where we would fully expect Clare to write in dialect with 'shade', a spelling then beginning to fall from the lexicon, he uses the more culturally progressive 'shed'.¹⁵ Furthermore, in the example given, 'shade' appears in a late eighteenth-century agricultural publication in the rustic context of cows being milked and fed, a form whose

associations would be more appealing to Clare than the 'shed' that might appear in, say, a legal instrument. The form, then, disagrees with the content—interrupting the confluence we at first felt—and reveals a further tension between culture and culture with which the whole poem is fraught.

We ourselves must eschew the myth that Clare 'eschewed literary models and used a language that was purely local'.¹⁶ Yet are we to read this as subversive mimicry where Clare the rustic homesteader mimics the colonizing discourse, his 'shed' a mockingly monolithic counterpoint to the monumentality of enclosure's improvements? We know, for instance, that around the same time Clare mockingly displaces such subversion onto 'My Mary' in the poem of that name: 'And mimicking the Gentry's way / Who strives to speak as fine as they? / And minds but every word they say'.¹⁷ We also know that elsewhere in the eponymous poem 'The Village Minstrel', Clare laments that 'Inclosure came & every path was stopt / Each tyrant fixt his sign were pads was found', so he was well conscious of the colonizing, tyrannical discourse of the enclosure movement while composing 'Proposals'.¹⁸

Or is the discrepancy in Clare's favouring the cultured over the rustic, that is, favouring the use of 'shed' over 'shade', an anxious gesture, a manifestation of what Geoffrey Summerfield calls Clare's 'no man's land, where he was neither spectator nor participant, exiled by his dreams of metropolitan literary recognition, and yet tugged back in to local dailiness by his need to earn a shilling and by his dependence on the more primal, oral, local roots of the village and its landscape'?¹⁹ In this sense, the unedited 'shed' not 'shade' forsakes Clare's 'oral, local roots' in favour of a more 'metropolitan' discourse. Here we see evidence of a spontaneous self-editing in the act of composition, where the course of the poet's verbal instincts has been subjugated to a less organic path of diction. *The Village Minstrel and Other Poems*, in which 'Proposals' originally appears, is the second of Clare's books to be published by Taylor and Hessey in 1820 and 1821, and was ripe to bear the anxious marks of a neophyte's welcome to the machinery of the big-city literary scene following his first trip in 1820 to London, where manners were cultivated more than crops. Significantly, as well, the poem frames itself as a response, 'After reading in a letter', and the title with its emphasis on 'reading' and 'letter' then appears to be a reaction to the printed word and the publishing culture whose very currency had become *belles lettres*, letters.

While considering publication of *The Village Minstrel*, even Taylor was content to leave unedited 'Real English Country Words [which] are different in my mind and should be judged differently from those which are only peculiar to a district' such as Northamptonshire, the marks of whose diction Clare's verse often bears.²⁰ So, we could view Clare's poetic choice of the 'Real English Country Word' 'shed' as self-imposed, rather than as a choice made out of fear or apprehension that Taylor would not accept it. Even if we buy Jonathan Bate's argument about the playfully and respectfully collaborative editorial relationship between Taylor and Clare,²¹ we might still suspect along with Raymond Williams that '[w]hat was imposed on the labourer-poets was a definition of learning and cultivation, and more critically a definition of poetry'²² that might cause Clare to make unnaturally elevated word choices, of which 'shed' is an excellent example. Rather than make the case either way, Williams's observation helps reveal a complexity of instinct and apprehension, of self-possession and insecurity, of interity and ego, with which 'shed' is fraught.

Beyond the curious diction in the poem's opening line, we have the 'paratactic rhapsody' Timothy Morton reads in Edward Thomas's 'Adelstrop',²³ rendered in a string of imperatives that continues the agent's present absence from the first line: 'Beside a runnel build my shed... Let hazels grow... Dig old mans beard... Plant sweet briar... Leave holes... Stick shelves'. The litany arises from the page without an intervening subject, propelled by trochaic substitution, and, as Heidegger would have it, 'points to the relation of word and thing in this manner, that the word itself is the relation, by holding everything forth into being, and there upholding it', that is, the immediacy and vacated grammatical subject position allow us—force us into?—'an experience with language...which we reach along the way in order to attain it, itself pertains to us, meets and makes its appeal to us, in that it transforms us into itself'.²⁴ The immediacy summons the scene into being and implicates the reader in the construction of that scene—Clare's stylistic architecture creates being via aesthetic absorption. Still, much depends on the title. Taylor and Hessey seem to have taken liberty to frame the poem as the poet's response to his own reading about proposed cottage design. In this context, the poem is not a proposal in its own right, but a response to proposals read: 'After reading in a Letter proposals for building a Cottage'. The poet's response, then, could

be a physical one, that of building a shed that the poem documents, or the imaginative response of building a poem from language that in turn brings the shed/scene into being—Clare is not, as Ashbery says, 'already there, talking to you before you've arrived on the scene'; he is instead 'being' itself, hewing the broad oaks and you hear his hasp rake along the grain and you feel the handle fiddle in your own hands.²⁵

If, however, the poem's title tells us that what follows is the truncated 'proposals for building a cottage', then we become aware of a distinction between exocognitive and endocognitive brain processes, because we expect that what follows exists inside the speaker's, or poem's, consciousness only; we assume a distanced role in the imaginative construction of the shed because it's only *proposals* to build. This is the difference between what we envision when a friend calls up with proposals to go to the beach and cook out, and when a friend shows up in a car with towels and a grill, ready to go; or if what we envision is exactly the same (unlikely because the quality of expectation varies)), then the emotions associated with the visions (or imaginings) are of a different texture, the latter more immediate, more urgent, and most assuredly involving different parts of the brain. Furthermore, because the poem is framed as 'proposals,' we expect to hear not about a *thing*, but a *thing desired for*. The impossible tension of the first line and the entire poem lies in the fact that we get the subjunctive mood, the imperative tense, and the present indicative conflated in each verb, an ever-precarious merger of desire, demand, and nowness—the subject and future tense with its implied subjunctive are, again, both elided for poetic concision. What Clare's audience gets, however, is expansion through concision, and we as readers experience a tension in that we have to keep reminding ourselves this is only '*Proposals for Building a Cottage*,' that is, we read the poem endocognitively as mere proposals, but our exocognition sneaks in as we imaginatively construct the shed along with the poem, at times rhapsodically forgetting that it all amounts to merely proposals to build.

The endocognitive is the interruptive part of meditation that anticipates the future or frets on the past. Mired in proposals or regrets, endocognition excludes the immediate present and its aesthetic analogue, immediacy. The interrupted absorption provides no or relatively less exercise for the prefrontal cortex. Endocognition is, ironically, the 'so much depends / upon' of

'The Red Wheelbarrow',²⁶ the *idea* in *No ideas but in things*, the rhetorical gesture that ruins the otherwise haiku-like immediacy of, simply,

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens

Nothing depends upon the barrow if 'so much depends / upon' it, but if left as above, unencumbered with ideology, all thing and no idea, then everything depends upon the barrow: the image is immediate, and it engages our exocognition because the image is not abstracted by proposals to describe a red wheelbarrow, or the rhetorical weight of so much depending on the thing itself. In the case that we encounter the poem as 'After reading in a letter proposals for building a cottage', our arrival at the future tense in the final stanza, as quoted above, is traumatic:

Along the floor some sands Ill sift
To make it fit to live in
And then Ill thank ye for the gift
As something worth the giving

The trauma lies in the fact that we realize we've been fooled into taking part in the immediate, imaginative building of the shed; we had engaged our exocognition, but the image is destroyed when we're suddenly yoked to the more rhetorical endocognition. We got all dressed and ready to go the beach on the spur of the moment and our friend never showed up, or she showed up and left before we could get in the car, or we got in the car and she ended up taking us to Wal-Mart to browse the outdoors department. Until this time, we were so excited we could actually sniff the fishy sand and taste the salty air, we heard the sparrows sweep and smelled the musty hazels. The experience was likely to have been so jarring for the poem's later editors that they might have called the poem merely 'proposals' precisely because of the future tense at the end.

Clare, then, is making us experience the whole of his *opus* and biography in one poem: here is this existence where form and content are at once both married perfectly and at odds—the 'actual peasant'²⁷ actually writing peasant-like, and not—and here is a feasible existence being realized right in front of you, and in life's last stanza; here is that existence being struck from the world, relegated to the unfeasible endocognitive—an asylum. The grateful ending—'And then Ill thank ye for the gift'—on first read a sublimely humble gesture, actually assumes searing irony, augmented by once again the future tense, which implies, in fact, 'thanking you for this gift exists only in an impossible future—there is a garden of forking paths, sure, but it may as well have but a single tine in the realm of possibility. Moreover, here Clare seems to enact Timothy Morton's 'dark ecology': that antidote to ecomimesis, or earnest nature writing blind to ideology (and, quite literally, dirt) inherent in its purportedly pristine object, 'Nature'. Dark ecology's ecocritical perch, however, is 'saturated with unrequited longing', as is Clare's melancholic 'I', 'a politicized version of deconstructive hesitation or aporia' in Morton's terms.²⁸ Clare's 'I' in 'Proposals' positions itself ecologically, both inside and outside of nature, 'at the limits of subjectivity' (about which more later), a song of both innocence and experience, assuming the critical perch which is absent, according to Morton at least, in contemporary green criticism.²⁹ Indeed, Morton may have done better to exemplify 'Proposals' than the canonical 'I Am' he uses.

Returning to the poem, until the jarring last stanza arrives, 'After reading in a letter' engages our exocognition so intently we might miss Clare himself practicing the ethics of enclosure. In 'John Clare: Searching for Blackberries', Eric Robinson traces and reads Clare's blackberrying as a championing of anti-enclosure foraging.³⁰ Such 'foraging' is, then, a euphemism for 'thieving' in the post-enclosure pastoral frame, and Clare was well aware that 'others believed me crazed and some put more criminal interpretation to my rambles and said I was night walking associate with the gypsies, robbing the woods of the hares and pheasants, because I was often in their company'.³¹ Clare also knew that gypsies were commonly thought thieves, whose 'name has grown into an ill omen and when any one for the tribe are guilty of a petty theft the odium is thrown upon the whole tribe',³² though Jonathan Bate claims that 'It would not have been beyond the bounds of possibility for Clare to have gone off and joined them'.³³ We are surprised,

however, when one of the considerations in Clare's shed-building is 'locks / To keep out thieves at night'. Granted, the line's galloping trimeter, the tidy containment of the unenjambéd sentiment in the line, 'To keep out thieves at night', and its resolution with the exact rhyme, 'tight' and 'night', all render a somewhat light-hearted sentiment, but the prevailing sense of the poem doesn't present thieves as an innocuous afterthought. We've barely even scratched an outline in the dirt for where the shed will stand in the first stanza when in the second stanza paranoia provokes locks and doors closed tight and spectres of thieves. Perhaps Clare's close association and identification with gypsies places thieves foremost in his consciousness, as the domestic act of home-building spurs a Lacanian fixing of one's gaze on the landscape in search of images from which to build a sense of self (one could, in fact, have a field day reading the entire poem in this regard: self as shed). So, 'To keep out thieves' reads like a mantra of the enclosure movement, an unexpected concern of the pastoral ethic otherwise apparently at work in 'Proposals'.

Following the locks and thieves, the poem's subsequent gesture juxtaposes rustic culture and refined culture with 'A little garden not too fine'. Clare will cultivate a garden not too formal, not too refined, 'not too fine', but one of a shade (not shed) sensibility, closer to his roots, a garden that satisfies our myth of the bucolic Clare... until we find out he intends the not-too-fine garden to be 'Inclosed'. For all the discourse on the tyranny of enclosure, Clare appears to have assimilated its tendencies and attitudes. Through the course of the poem itself, Clare likewise assimilates gentry culture—or learns how to spell—when the localized 'chimley' in the first stanza achieves its more learned disposition, 'chimney', in the antepenultimate stanza.

We would expect such off-kilter, at-odds attitudes to be matched by an equally awkward form, apt 'to articulate complex structures of feeling' such as Mina Gorji reads in Clare's 'To the Snipe'.³⁴ 'In a poem about the desire for ease and security', Gorji continues, 'Clare has made himself and his readers formally insecure by adopting an unfamiliar and uneven quatrain, whose lack of symmetry works against lyric harmony'.³⁵ We could readily read in 'Proposals' a similar, proto-domestic 'desire for ease and security', though when we examine its quatrains, rather than find unfamiliarity, unevenness, and insecurity, we find a nearly metronomic ballad form. If there is insecurity, it comes from the culturally conflicted

content being carried by a predictably metric form. All nine quatrains rhyme *abab*, and all quatrains except two follow a strict 4343 beats-per-line ballad meter. The exceptions, interestingly, in which two quatrains contain a three-beat line with an extra syllable, awkwardly interrupt the harmonious 4343 rhythm to hail the coming of the subjective 'I'. The first instance of broken rhythm—'And flowers that smelleth sweet'—in the twentieth line announces the introduction of the 'I' to the poem, which arrives as the white space in the stanza break reverberates with the foregoing awkwardness. The awkwardness of the line results from what amounts to a choriambic foot stuck in its midst—'FLOWers that SMELL' [my capitals indicating stress]—and the 'I' initiates and plants itself into the resonance of that rhythmic discord. One could argue that Clare intends a classic tonal register here via manipulation of the choriambus's Aeolic, Sapphic nucleus, a quite cultured gesture, but it's much easier to simply call it a rough-hewn line. Clare is, after all, an actual peasant.

The only other rhythmic exception occurs in the last stanza, where the thirty-fourth line extends itself by a relatively less awkward extra unstressed beat—'To make it fit to live in'. It's as if the final iambic foot 'to LIVE' trips over itself, stutters, which makes for an unkempt trimeter. As well, the feminine ending created by the extra unstressed beat suggests that only the presence of a female companion will indeed make the structure 'fit to live... in'. Or perhaps Clare summons Hamlet's 'To be' dilemma—the first four lines of which soliloquy have feminine endings—and with it a more fearful attitude toward the quatrain's sudden supernatural solicitings. In this case, the rhythmic hiccup is bracketed by the 'I', however involved in the contracted 'Ill', which we must now read as an absorption of the subject 'I' into a struggling self-'will' = 'Ill':

Along the floor some sand **Ill** sift
 To make it fit to live **in**
 And then **Ill** thank ye for the gift [my bold emphases]

Fittingly, the *Ill*-ness (or *will*-ness) and discord support my earlier reading of the final stanza as not genuinely grateful, but searingly ironic, and perhaps fearful after all. Another possible reading is that the 'I' absorbed in will otherwise sees itself exclusive of natural rhythms, and therefore only considers itself fit to approach the interity of the gaining natural environment when there is an interruption. Or, *vice-versa*, it is the 'I' absorbed in will that

causes the rhythmic disruption to an otherwise fluent harmony. Quite possibly, the 'I' who is Clare saw himself an interruption, an other, in each environment he entered, his life a progressive self-othering, an attitude with which, once again, this unassuming poem is entirely fraught. The liminal experience here is with none other than subjectivity itself.

Is the 'I', as Raymond Williams says, the 'man driven back from the cold world and in his own natural perception and language seeking to find and recreate man' through his 'lonely creative imagination' rather than his will?³⁶ We encounter a speaker surrounded only by flora and fauna, by nature, which in much nineteenth-century literature was itself a 'cold world', not just indifferent but hostile to man. Still, the speaker doesn't seem 'driven back'... he's just there, motivated more by his reading of proposals than by any spectre of a cold world (though a biographical reading may differ). If the speaker is driven, he is driven perhaps, in Dorothea Olkowski's words, 'back to a time before the man-nature dichotomy, living nature as nothing but a process of production, so that the self and the non-self, outside and inside, no longer have any meaning whatsoever'.³⁷ But because the poem's very form betrays such an idyllic state of interity (which I'll explain), what we get is a tension between will and imagination, a prototype of cultural practice in which the wild and the domestic, the Dionysian and Apollonian, are joined together via an interloper who hasn't quite figured out exactly where he belongs, or to which world, or what the proper application of his will—Clare would have done well in having more frequent exocognitive experiences such as he offers his readers in 'Proposals'.

In what seems to be the Frank Lloyd Wright-esque cultural practice of architectural interity, interweaving the wild and domestic scenes (the sweet briar bushes with summer seats, the sweeping swallows & chimney tops, the wood bins round the cot), the poem's hallmark is division, emphasized by the aforementioned rhythmic discord: while there's no way to divide evenly an odd number of whole quatrains, the only appearance of the naked 'I' creates a split between the first five and last four quatrains, and a dividing line between the flora to which the first 'half' of the poem is dedicated, and the fauna described in the second half. The lonely, arrhythmic 'I' stands out against an immense void of white space (not just the stanza break but the left margin as well) with its emaciated, non-active gesture—'I love'—despite the poem's attempts elsewhere to

incorporate the subject into the wild via elision and contraction. No matter how hard the poem and the scene attempt to hide the cumbersome 'I' and its self-will, there is the awkward 'I', absorbed in its distance from the poem's otherwise integrated architecture.

This surrendering of will and along with it notions of what should constitute the inside/outside, or culture/nature, dichotomy, as Clare's 'After Reading in a Letter Proposals for Building a Cottage' clearly emphasizes, is liable to promote anxiety—ask any gardener who has tried to keep deer out of the planter boxes or squirrels from the bird-feeder.³⁸ What the sustainability movement calls 'cultural practices' are a mode of deciding how we will interact with the environment, and then following through. Because such decisions are mediated through the brain's prefrontal cortex, activities like meditation and exocognitive aesthetic experiences that stimulate and increase the mass of the prefrontal cortex should be sought, with a goal of negotiating and perhaps dissolving the binaries desire/empathy, self-will/nature's-will, inside/outside, nature/culture, perhaps exposing, as Timothy Morton does with 'nature', the hindrances inherent in some of these signifiers. Likely, what triggers exocognition in one reader won't work as well in another reader—but my purpose is not to argue for a specific aesthetic or a specific kind of reader. Furthermore, I no doubt beg the question, 'what's the difference between absorption in poetry and absorption in the symphony, or fishing, or billiards, or TV (probably closer to sleep than meditation), or an elegant mathematical formula?', and my attempt at science will attract the usual neurohumanity naysayers. Regardless, I do believe that as fMRI technology—or some other technology capable of reading brain processes—gains sophistication, we'll be able to determine more accurately what goes on in the brain when one is moved by *Moonlight Sonata*, *Fishermen at Sea*, or *The Second Coming*. What we'll find is that each activity that absorbs us—poetry, fiction, visual art, music—involves uniquely nuanced brain activities, some repeated combination of which will have implications for critical thinking and perhaps even mental health and recovery.

NOTES

- 1 J. W. Orderson, *Creoleana* (Oxford: Macmillan, 2002), p. 37.
- 2 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Dawn* (New York: Macmillan, 1911), pp. 8-9.
- 3 Sara W. Lazar and others, 'Meditation Experience is Associated with Increased Cortical Thickness', *Neuroreport* 16 (17): 1893-7.
- 4 Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 54-63.
- 5 Robert Mitchell, 'Suspended Animation, Slow Time, and the Poetics of Trance', *PMLA*, 126.1 (2011), 107-22.
- 6 Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) observes neural activity as a function of changes in blood flow.
- 7 Earl K. Miller, David J. Freedman, and Jonathan D. Wallis, 'The Prefrontal Cortex: Categories, Concepts and Cognition', *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences*, 357:1424 (2002), 1123-36.
- 8 Karl Kroeber, *Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 146.
- 9 Preclusive would be a distinction between harmful stranger / benevolent stranger.
- 10 The 'rhizome' is Deleuze and Guattari's term to describe a non-dualist, nonhierarchical mode of philosophy and interpretation, like the biological rhizome with multiple points of entry. For fuller discussions of the rhizome and 'de-centred interconnection' in Clare, see Simon Kövesi, 'John Clare & ... & ... & ... Deleuze and Guattari's Rhizome' in *Ecology and the Literature of the British Left: The Red and the Green*, ed. by Valentine Cunningham, H. Gustav Klaus and John Rignall (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 75-88, and Simon Kövesi, 'Beyond the Language Wars: Towards a Green Edition of John Clare', *JCSJ*, 26 (2007), 61-75.
- 11 Kroeber, *Ecological Literary Criticism*, p. 142.
- 12 *Early Poems*, II, pp. 60-1.
- 13 A mid-twentieth-century American painter, Porter forewent abstract expressionism in favor of a representational approach to everyday beauty, especially in the natural landscape.
- 14 On closer examination, it is possible the *OED* mistook the usage of 'shade' for 'shed' when the original intended meaning was 'shaded place'. Compare other contexts in the same document, where pines provide 'a shade'.
- 15 'shed, n.2', *OED*.
- 16 John Barrell quoted in Mina Gorji, *John Clare and the Place of Poetry* (Liverpool University Press, 2008), p. 5.
- 17 *John Clare: Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Merryn and Raymond Williams (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 49.
- 18 *Early Poems*, II, p. 169, ll. 1086-7.
- 19 *John Clare: Selected Poetry*, ed. by Geoffrey Summerfield (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 15.
- 20 *Biography*, p. 220.
- 21 *Biography*, pp. 220-1.
- 22 Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 135.
- 23 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, pp. 58-9. Morton frames the rhapsode as an assembler of the aesthetic, much like Clare in 'Proposals': 'For Heidegger, "man is the shepherd of Being"—he might as well have said that man is the rhapsode of being'. Morton's rhapsode reflects Heideggerian Appropriation, which 'assembles the design of Saying and unfolds it into the structure of manifold Showing...[and] grants to mortals their abode within their nature, so that they may be capable of being those who speak' [Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. by Peter Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 128]. Clare's paratactic rhapsody, then, by 'assembling the design of Saying' and of his abode at once with an absorptive immediacy, carries within it epistemological implications—no less than the aesthetic as seat of being. Certainly this essay argues that the way in which Clare's aesthetic engages (and disengages) the prefrontal cortex (a seat of decision-making) changes readers' ways of being in the world.
- 24 Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, p. 73.
- 25 John Ashbery, *Other Traditions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 16.
- 26 William C. Williams, *Spring and All* (Paris: Contact Pub. Co, 1923), p. 46.
- 27 Timothy Morton's term in *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).
- 28 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 186
- 29 Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 200.
- 30 Eric Robinson, 'John Clare: Searching for Blackberries', *Wordsworth Circle*, 38.4 (2007): 208-211. Robinson's larger point is that this kind of political bent in Clare disappears when he enters Northampton, as he was then 'comfortably housed [...] and well fed', p. 211.
- 31 *By Himself*, p. 78.
- 32 *By Himself*, p. 83.
- 33 *Biography*, p. 97.
- 34 Gorji, *John Clare and the Place of Poetry*, p. 103
- 35 Gorji, *John Clare and the Place of Poetry*, p. 103.
- 36 Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 137.
- 37 Dorothea Olkowski, 'Flows of Desire and the Body-Becoming', in *Becomings: Explorations in Time, Memory, and Futures*, ed. by Elizabeth Grosz (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 100.
- 38 Especially true because we can no longer fathom natural time in a post-industrial frame. We only began to wear watches when owners pushed back the hands of the time clocks to make us work longer hours for the same pay. Significantly, we came to wear them close to our hands as a memorial to the intimate instruments of labour our hands once were—not properly in the hand, but close, our reminder that time had become a shackle. We titivated their shiny metal as further shrine to our dying intimacy with self-sustenance, and to conceal with superficial glitter the drudgery our labour had become.

