

JOHN CLARE AND THE POETIC PROCESS

by

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ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to interpret and correlate Clare's several statements in prose and verse about his art. It is also an attempt to discover the impact of the resulting theory on the individual poems, and on the body of his work as a whole.

The theory itself is examined in detail, and reveals Clare's view that the poet's mind is uniquely endowed with functioning powers which he calls taste and genius. They combine to enable the poet "to look on nature with a poetic eye," and thereby alter his initial perception. This alteration produces metaphors which, when recorded in words, become poetry. But it is also governed in better poets by an artistic integrity which confines the poet to recording only those metaphors which have a basis in his natural environment. In this way the mind intensifies the beauty of nature, but remains directly based on nature for its images.

In practice Clare often used the mental experience of this process of metaphorization to provide structure for his individual poems. The best of these poems describe the progress of the mind from its initial response to an object in nature, to a state of mental excitement during which the object is transformed into a metaphor, and finally to an impulse toward recording these images. In these works, too, the metaphors used are those which arise from the poetic process described

in the poem. Unlike his early work, in which he imposed conventional metaphors on his perceptions, his mature works gain an added element of unity from his creation of metaphors out of material provided by the experience itself.

On a larger scale he utilizes certain major metaphors to provide a scheme to which the individual poems can be related. Thus the poems in praise of childhood and those of disillusionment at his waning appreciation of nature can be related to each other by the encompassing pattern of the Eden--wasteland metaphor. Similarly, many of the songs, as well as "The Nightmare" and "Child Harold," are interrelated by their participating in the major metaphor of Mary Joyce.

Thus Clare is seen speculating theoretically about the nature of art, experimenting with poetic form, and developing consistent major metaphors which give his work a distinct unity.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS OF CLARE'S WORKS

- LP The Later Poems of John Clare, ed. Eric Robinson and
 Geoffrey Summerfield. Manchester: Manchester U.P.,
 1964.
- Letters The Letters of John Clare, ed. J. W. and Anne Tibble.
 London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951.
- PM Poems of John Clare's Madness, ed. Geoffrey Grigson.
 London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949.
- Prose The Prose of John Clare, ed. J. W. and Anne Tibble.
 London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951.
- SP Selected Poems and Prose, ed. E. Robinson and
 G. Summerfield. London: Oxford U.P., 1967.
- SC The Shepherd's Calendar, ed. E. Robinson and
 G. Summerfield. London: Oxford U.P., 1964.
- Sketches Sketches in the Life of John Clare, Written by
 Himself, ed. Edmund Blunden. London: Cobden-
 Sanderson, 1931.
- TP The Poems of John Clare, ed. J. W. Tibble. London:
 Dent, 1935.

INTRODUCTION

Clare's poetry has been ignored for a century and a half by all but a small circle of critics and a somewhat larger group of biographers. Except for a few anthologized pieces his poems are almost inaccessible, and those that are accessible have received little critical attention. There are several reasons for this indifference to what must be a very high ranking minor poet, not the least of which are the unfortunate details of his career which saw his later works reach the public in a time of decided indifference to poetry, and which saw him confined to an asylum at the time his most mature works should have been published. But these reasons do not explain the fate which Clare has suffered since the post^humous publication, most of it since 1920, of the majority of his mature works. For this lack of recognition there are at least two other reasons.

The first of these is a reluctance to accept as a thinker one who was originally labelled a "peasant poet." The most common charge against Clare, dating back to the contemporary reviews of his first volume, is that his description is vivid and accurate but his poems lack the element of thought which characterized the nature poetry of his contemporaries.¹

¹Some modern critics with this view are: Sir Edmund Gosse, Silhouettes (London: Heinemann, 1925), p. 108; H. J. C. Grierson, Lyrical Poetry from Blake to Hardy (London: Hogarth, 1928), p. 9; John Middleton Murry, Unprofessional Essays (London: Jonathan Cape, 1956), p. 77; Rayner Unwin, The Rural Muse (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1954), p. 122.

And worse than the charge itself is his silent dismissal by critics who demonstrate their agreement with it by ignoring his works. He deserves notice, however, because he was not simply a passionate lover of nature; he knew that

Pleasures are of two kinds--one arises from cultivation of the mind & is enjoyed only by the few--& this is the most lasting & least liable to change--the more common pleasures are found by the many like beautiful weeds in a wilderness they are of natural growth & though very beautiful to the eye are only annuals--these may be called the pleasures of the passions & belong only to the different stages of our existence. (Prose, 227)

To him, "mind alone is the sun of earth--it lives on when the clouds & paraphernalia of pretensions are forgotten" (Prose, 225); and perhaps the best description of his own mind is given in his autobiography:

As to my learning I am not wonderfully deep in science nor so wonderfully ignorant as many have fancied I puzzled over everything in my hours of leisure with a restless curiosity that was ever on the enquiry & never satisfied when I got set fast in one thing I did not tire but tried at another tho with the same success in the end yet it never sickend me I still pursued knowledge in a new path & tho I never came off victorious I was never conquered.

(Prose, 53)

This persistence is demonstrated by the penetrating insights in many of his poems and by the restless mental activity evident in his prose writings. It is also evident in the theory of poetry which he formulated in both. For he thought often and deeply about the phenomenon of poetic composition which excited him early and sustained him throughout life.

A second reason for this neglect, however, is to be found in the poetry itself. Much of what was available to critics before 1920 was juvenilia or at best very early poetry of his mature period, and these works are an insufficient sampling of his ability. But the mature work which has been available in this century causes a different problem. On the surface it gives the appearance of extreme simplicity. It appears, if not read with the care all poetry demands, merely descriptive or at best void of any significance beyond the beauty found in nature. But this simplicity is deceptive, and the description contains much more than a catalogue of beautiful scenes. Underlying the best of his work are thoughts which are original, if unsophisticated in the vocabulary of their expression, and often profound in their understanding of human nature.

This is easily detected in a poem typical of Clare's mature accomplishment, "The Flood" (SP, 144-5). It appears on the surface to present a colorful, but rather inconsequential, description of a flooding stream in three fourteen-line stanzas, which the Tibbles (TP II, 140-1) have published as three separate sonnets. Taken as a single poem, however, and examined more closely, it reveals a well-wrought work of art which gradually unfolds a statement of the poet's view of his personal predicament.

The first seven lines of the poem establish not only the physical position and state of mind of the poet, but also our sense of some as yet unexplained significance to both.

ON Lolham Brigs in wild and lonely mood
 Ive seen the winter floods their gambols play
 Through each old arch that trembled while I stood
 Bent oer its wall to watch the dashing spray
 As their old stations would be washed away
 Crash came the ice against the jambs and then
 A shudder jarred the arches.

The language with which he describes the bridge establishes
 an aura of strength in which the poet himself exults:

--yet once more
 It breasted raving waves and stood agen
 To wait the shock as stubborn as before.

The bridge affords protection for the poet from the destructive-
 ness of the stream, but at the same time allows him to feel its
 action--it trembles, but remains unmoved. There follows a
 description of the stream's destructive power in relation to
 the surrounding land, of its attempted destruction of the
 bridge, and of the controlling force of the bridge's "engulphing
 arches":

--White foam brown crested with the russet soil
 As washed from new ploughd lands would dart beneath
 Then round and round a thousand eddies boil
 On tother side--then pause as if for breath
 One minute--and ingulphed--like life in death

Whose wrecky stains dart on the floods away
 More swift then shadows in a stormy day
 Straws trail and turn and steady--all in vain
 The feather dances flutters and again
 Darts through the deepest dangers still afloat
 Seeming as faireys whisked it from the view
 And danced it oer the waves as pleasures boat
 Light hearted as a merry thought in may.

From his vantage point on the bridge he then describes the
 appearance of the flood with its debris of bushes and rails,
 and in so doing begins to expose the metaphor which has been
 working, though submerged, since the beginning of the poem:

Trays--uptorn bushes--fence demolished rails
 Loaded with weeds in sluggish motions stray
 Like water monsters lost each winds and trails
 Till near the arches--then as in affright
 It plunges--reels--and shudders out of sight.

The description of this monster's movements recalls the use of "gambols" in the opening lines and of the subsequent words commonly associated with monsters. For example, the waves are "raving" one minute and pausing for breath the next, and are compared to "life in death" at one point. The action of the stream in uprooting trees and weeds is also suggestive of the activities of monsters. But at this stage of the poem the connection between the monster and the flood is extremely tenuous, because it is only the debris which has been referred to as a monster. Clare makes the relationship complete in line twenty-nine, however, when he describes the waves' motion:

Waves trough--rebound--and fury boil again
 Like plunging monsters rising underneath
 Who at the top curl up a shaggy main
 A moment catching at a surer breath
 Then plunging headlong down and down--and on
 Each following boil the shadow of the last
 And other monsters rise when those are gone
 Crest their fringed waves--plunge onward and are past.

It is important to notice here how the poet carefully invites us to notice that he has been using the submerged metaphor since early in the poem. He does this by repeating, in his description of the monster, images he has previously used to describe the waves. For example, the crested wave of line thirty-six refers back to the "brown crested" foam of line ten, and "monsters pause for breath" in line thirty-two recalls the identical situation in line thirteen. Thus the atmosphere has been

prepared through an accumulation of such images which prepares the reader for the eventual disclosure of the metaphor.

From this metaphor the poet returns to his own situation and its relationship to the metaphor:

--The chill air comes around me ocean blea [cold]
 From bank to bank the waterstrife is spread
 Strange birds like snow spots oer the huzzing sea [tumultuous]
 Hang where the wild duck hurried past and fled.

He describes the desolation of his environment, here, in terms reminiscent of his opening description of a "wild and lonely" mood, a portrayal which, by the ambivalence of its syntactical position, applies to both the poet and the flood. This dual application is evident in the final couplet which discusses the universal implications of the central metaphor:

On roars the flood--all restless to be free
 Like trouble wandering to eternity.

Thus the initial experience has developed in the poet's mind to a conclusion in which the entire experience becomes symbolic of a larger truth. On the level of reality he sees a turbulent flood, filled with uprooted trees, battering the bridge upon which he stands, and he feels the shock of this activity. On the level of metaphor he sees a series of monsters confined by the arches of the bridge--and their very shape suggests a type of clamp which holds them to the earth--restless and fighting to be free. And on the universal level he pictures the restless, wandering and disruptive forces in the world struggling to an impasse with the stubborn, restricting and stabilizing structures. The poet surveys this "waterstrife" from the bridge which

protects him from the destructive forces, but allows him the sensitivity to feel their vibrations without being destroyed. He identifies with the restless element in mood and through his fascination with its activity, but remains confident in his resistance to it.

Thus what appears to be a simple description is, in reality, a complex and subtle exploration of two of the contraries of existence, an exploration which employs description, metaphorization and universalization. This poem is not an exceptional one in Clare's canon, nor does it contain all of Clare's essential qualities, but it does serve as an example of what he was doing with metaphor and language. It is an example of what distinguishes Clare from the ordinary descriptive poets with whom he is often associated in the minds of modern readers.

Clare is an intelligent and, in his mature works, technically accomplished poet who applied his vigorous mind to several themes, but most consistently to an analysis of his own craft. He wrestled with questions of perception, creativity and expression; and such questions, with the answers which Clare works out, provide the basis for this thesis.

CHAPTER I
THE POETIC PROCESS

I found the poems in the fields,
And only wrote them down. (PM, 57)

Although Clare is most often labelled a descriptive poet, he had, as this passage suggests, a unique view of what such description involved. For although he believed his art consisted primarily of recording what he saw or felt in the presence of nature, he was continuously aware of the differences between what he perceived and what was perceptible to non-poets. Thus he terms what he sees "poems," or what might be defined roughly as a collection of natural images which give to the mind an aesthetically pleasing picture, song, or often in Clare's case, fragrance. This view reduces the poet to a scribe or recorder of perceptions, rather than a creator who invents novel images and arranges them into works of art. Hence he criticizes Keats for being unfaithful in his recording of nature:

...his descriptions of scenery are often very fine but as it is the case with other inhabitants of great cities he often described nature as she appeared to his fancies & not as he would have described her had he witnessed the things he describes...what appears as beauties in the eyes of a pent-up citizen are looked upon as conceits by those who live in the country. (Prose, 223)

Rather than a creator of images ^{the poet} should be one who seeks them in the fields and transcribes them. However, this transcription involves more than simply holding the mirror up to

nature (TP I, xi). M. H. Abrams¹ has pointed out the dangers of taking the mirror analogue too literally and Clare's view of imitation provides ample proof of the validity of Abram's statement. For while Clare's theory is, in one sense, imitative, it also takes into account the special qualities of the poet's mind which alter the perception of objects. He believed that "to look on nature with a poetic eye magnifys the pleasure, she herself being the very essence and soul of Poesy" (letter to Taylor and Hessey, 1822). Through an excitement of the mind and through the specially sensitive quality of mind which Clare believed to be the unique possession of the poet, the surface of the mirror was altered in such a way as to magnify the image perceived. This alteration revealed to Clare's mind not a flower, but a pearl (TP II, 436); not a bird, but a hermit (SP, 69); not a snowdrop, but a "lovely woman" (TP I, 129); in short not an object, but a metaphor.

The process by which the poet found and recorded metaphors, or "poems," of nature is described in passages dispersed throughout his work; hence this chapter will be a collation of his various statements concerning this process. We must first, however, distinguish between two types of poetic experience which Clare seems to have engaged in. The first type, and the type with which we will be primarily concerned, is that of the immediate experience in which his reactions to nature were written down largely on the spur of the moment and at the actual

¹M. H. Abrams, The Mirror and The Lamp (New York: W. W. Norton, 1958), p. 35.

scene of the inspiration. The second type is the reflective experience in which he drew on memory for his images, either because of their destruction in time or his isolation from them in the asylum, and composed his poems from this memory of the image.

In either case he was faithful to his belief in the desirability of images directly drawn from nature and seldom drew from any other source. These images represent the initial stage of the poetic process because images were to Clare the substance of poetry:

True poesy is not in words,
But images that thoughts express.
(TP II, 49)

The art is in that quality of the image that transcends mere verbal description and can be conveyed only in thoughts which require more than the individual word for their expression. That there must be communication of these thoughts, however, is attested to by the fact Clare felt compelled to write poetry. But his is poetry which focuses on the image rather than the word, the picture rather than the syntactical formality of the discourse:

Clare was not, we feel, interested in words as words; nor did he pay much attention to their formal grouping into sentences. The unit for him was the short phrase or clause--the verbal expression of the image upon which his attention was focused.

(TP I, p. viii)

Natural images alone were reliable material for poetry because, although

Art may ply fantastic anatomy...nature is always herself in her wildest moods of extravagance--Arts

penalty is a beautiful vagary a vision a romance--
 & like the moral pictures of nature in books we
 look about us & cannot find anything like them
 elsewhere. (Prose, 211)

Faithfulness to the natural image was the gauge of the true
 poet:

A pleasing image to its page conferred
 In living character and breathing word
 Becomes a landscape heard and felt and seen
 Sunshine and shade one harmonizing green
 Where meads and brooks and forrests basking lie
 Lasting as truth and the eternal sky
 Thus truth to nature as the true sublime
 Stands a mount atlas overpeering time. (SP, 114)

Although he is obviously using Pope's phrase here he is equally
 obviously adapting it to his own meaning. He reiterates this
 concept of artistic integrity in "Child Harold": "Real poets
 must be truly honest men/tied to no mongrel laws on flatterys
 page" (LP, 35). In his prose he adds that they must not be
 influenced by a desire to anticipate public response, but
 must be faithful to their own feeling for their subject:

While some affectations are striving for a life-
 time to hit all tastes, by only writing as they
 fancy all feel, and by not trusting to their own
 feelings, miss the mark by a wide throw, an
 unconscious poet of little name writes a trifle
 as he feels, without thinking of others, or
 fancying that he feels it, and becomes a common
 name. Unaffected simplicity is the everyday
 picture of nature.... (Prose, 257)

This kind of artistic integrity is necessary for the recording
 of the images which are presented to the poet's mind, and Clare
 testified late in life to his own adherence to the code: "My
 Songs Where The Language Of Truth...I Told her in love that all
 nature was true" (LP, 74).

Truth to the image did not mean photographic reproduction, however, because the poet's mind was specially formed to perceive objects in an aesthetic way. Clare felt the poet had a mental quality not common to the average man which enabled him to respond to natural objects with an unusual intensity:

In every trifle something lives to please
 Or to instruct us. Every weed and flower
 Heirs beauty as a birthright, by degrees
 Of more or less, though taste alone hath power
 To see and value what the herd pass by.
 (TP II, 143)

As this passage suggests, taste is the capacity to perceive the beauty inherent in natural objects. He saw this capacity as that unique aspect of his mind which enabled him "to look on nature with a poetic feeling," and he describes it in detail in one of his sonnets:

-----Taste is from heaven,
 An inspiration nature can't bestow;
 Though nature's beauties, where a taste is given,
 Warm the ideas of the soul to flow
 With that intense, enthusiastic glow
 That throbs the bosom, when the curious eye
 Glances on beauteous things that give delight,
 Objects of earth, or air, or sea, or sky,
 That bring the very senses in the sight
 To relish what we see; but all is night
 To the gross clown--nature's unfolded book,
 As on she blunders, never strikes his eye;
 Pages of landscape, tree, and flower, and brook,
 Like bare blank leaves, he turns unheeded by.
 (TP I, 279)

Thus he sees taste as an inspiration, a potential capacity to react to beauty intensely, which is an innate quality of the poet's mind independent of nature. That it is a latent quality is evident from its inability to produce enthusiasm independently

of nature's beauties, although it enables these objects themselves to "warm the ideas of the soul to flow/with that intense, enthusiastic glow/that throbs the bosom." It is a quiescent quality which becomes active only when inspired, or triggered, by natural objects. Since it only reacts to some objects, those which possess distinctive qualities which identify them as one of nature's "beauties," it is a selective agent. Indeed, "it modifys expression & selects images--it arranges & orders matters of thought" (Prose, 228). Once it has selected these images, taste "endears"² them to the mind so that the senses "relish what [they] see" (TP I, 279). By this method taste "hath power/to see and value what the herd pass by" (TP II, 143). Clare is aware of the overpowering influence of this part of his mind even though he does not always identify it in his descriptions of its function:

I could not walk the fields like common men
And have no fancys nourish--nor could I
Pass the wild rose bush oer the foxes den
And not admire its grandeur silently. (LP, 146)

He describes this same reaction in "Shadows of Taste" and identifies the mental quality which enables even botanists to respond aesthetically:

But he the man of science and of taste
Sees wealth far richer in the worthless waste
Where bits of lichen and a sprig of moss
Will all raptures of his mind engross
And bright winged insects on the flowers of may
Shine pearls too wealthy to be cast away. (SP, 115)

²This is the term used in "Dawnings of Genius" to describe taste's role in perception (TP I, 69).

And just as he considered artistic integrity an attribute of an abstract concept of truth or honesty,³ so he considered taste an attribute of an ideal wisdom. Thus the moorehen's wisdom in choosing the safest, most ideal spot for its nest is based on "the taste/they have to choose such homes upon the waste/rich architects" (SP, 80), a taste which picks "picturesque" settings rather than simply functional ones. So also in "Shadows of Taste" after reiterating that all natural creatures share in varying degrees this quality of mind, Clare relates it to wisdom:

Such are the various moods that taste displays
Surrounding wisdom in concentrating rays
Where threads of light from one bright focus run
As days proud halo circles round the sun. (SP, 116)

Since he has defined taste earlier in the poem as "the instinctive mood" with which creatures "choose for joy," or select that element in nature which will give them an emotional excitement, this passage sets up a heirarchy based on the proximity of the individual's taste (mood) to the central, but undefined, concept of wisdom. The poet's place in this heirarchy becomes clear from another passage in the same poem:

And man that noble insect restless man
Whose thoughts scale heaven in its mighty span
Pours forth his living soul in many a shade
And taste runs riot in her every grade
While the low herd mere savages subdued
With nought of feeling or of taste imbued
Pass over sweetest scenes a careless eye
As blank as midnight in its deepest dye. (SP, 113)

³See LP, 35, LP, 74 and the following couplet from "Shadows of Taste":

Thus truth to nature as the true sublime
Stands a mount atlas overpeering time. (SP, 114)

The poet, he who "pours forth his living soul," is obviously closest to the focal point of wisdom.

Another mental peculiarity of the poet which effects the perception of natural images is "genius." Clare defines it as "a pleasing rapture of the mind,/a kindling warmth to learning unconfin'd" (TP I, 69). Whereas taste is a latent desire for the appreciation of beauty which selects images for the poet's consideration, genius is the faculty which acts upon the perceived images in a state of what Clare called rapture. It is the capacity for mental excitement ("rapture of the mind") which results from the activation of the latent quality of taste. Taste is necessary for the initial perception, genius for the ensuing mental reaction to that perception. In "Dawnings of Genius" Clare gives an example of this reaction in one of his typical rustic characters:

Genius! a pleasing rapture of the mind,
A kindling warmth to learning unconfin'd,
Glow in each breast, flutters in every vein,
From art's refinement to th' uncultur'd swain.
Hence is that warmth the lowly shepherd proves,
Pacing his native fields and willow groves;
Hence is that joy, when every scene unfolds
Which taste endears and latest memory holds;
Hence is that sympathy his heart attends,
When bush and tree companions seem and friends;
Hence is that fondness from his soul sincere,
That makes his native place so doubly dear.

In those low paths which poverty surrounds,
The rough rude ploughman, off his fallow-grounds
(That necessary tool of wealth and pride)
While moid and sweating by some pasture's side,
Will often stoop inquisitive to trace
The opening beauties of a daisy's face
Oft will he witness, with admiring eyes,
The brooks sweet dimples o'er the pebbles rise;
And often, bent as o'er some magic spell,
He'll pause, and pick his shaped stone and shell:
Raptures the while his inward powers inflame,
And joys delight him which he cannot name.

(TP I, 69)

Once his attention has been attracted to details of his surroundings by the selective influence of taste, genius awakens and produces an excitement of the mind which, if he were a practising poet, would eventually result in poetry. Genius is also responsible for intensifying this initial experience; for "increasing beauties, fresh'ning on his sight" which "unfold new charms, and witness more delight" (TP I, 70--italics mine). Genius manifests itself in transitory glimpses of insight: "the bursts of thought with which his soul's perplex'd, are bred one moment, and are gone the next." And it leads to a frustrating realization of the inadequacy of language to express the intensity of the experience:

Ideas picture pleasing views to mind,
For which his language can no utterance find...
He feels enraptur'd though he knows not why,
And hums and mutters o'er his joys in vain,
And dwells on something which he can't explain.
(TP I, 70)

What remains of this intense experience are occasional recurring glimpses of memory which are related to the original as sparks are to a dying coal. He uses that metaphor to describe the remnant of the rapturous moment resulting from the activity of genius:

So have I mark'd the dying ember's light,
When on the hearth it fainted from my sight,
With glimmering glow oft redden up again,
And sparks crack brightening into life, in vain;
Still lingering out its kindling hope to rise,
Till faint, and fainting, the last twinkle dies.
(TP I, 70)

Genius, then, is another attribute of the poetic mind which, independently of education or intellectual refinement, enables

the poet to respond to the aesthetic aspects of nature. It produces "that joy, when every scene unfolds,/which taste endears and latest memory holds" (TP I, 69).

These two elements of the mind are responsible for the alteration of the mirror's image. One is by definition selective, therefore altering through exclusion of unwanted details; the other is non-rational, therefore altering by the subjectivity of its response. And both must be taken into account when discussing Clare's view of artistic integrity which we could now paraphrase, "Given that the poet's mind is composed of genius and taste, which are not common to the vulgar mind and therefore transcend ordinary powers of perception, the poet must reproduce as closely as possible the images he sees in nature." Although such a paraphrase is limiting to Clare's total view of the artistic process it may clarify some of the statements which he uses to describe the actual process.

11

The prerequisite for initiating this process, Clare felt, was an environment of isolation and silence which he combined in the term "solitude." The reverence he held for this condition is indicated by his statement that "solitude and God are one to me" (TP II, 308), and the effect it had on his mind is acknowledged in the following lines to a snipe:

Thy solitudes
The unbounded heaven esteems,
And here my heart warms into higher moods
And dignifying dreams. (TP I, 379)

In another poem he identifies it as the source of rapture:

A mind o'erflowing with excess
Of joys that spring from solitude,
That sees all nature's spring to bless
The heart away from noises rude. (TP II, 260)

Solitude provided the necessary isolation from distracting influences of civilization, but more important it provided an atmosphere of absolute silence in which a reciprocal communication with nature was possible. For Clare as for Keats, "heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter" ("Ode on A Grecian Urn"), and he maintained the belief that although "the many look for sound--'tis silence speaks" (TP II, 40). Thus his desire for solitude was based on the prospect of silent communication: "for Nature's voice is never loud; I seek for quiet joys" (PM, 57).

As he indicated in the passage to the snipe, Clare also found in solitude a propensity for awakening poetic activity, or for warming the heart into higher moods. This was an impulsive awakening, beyond the poet's powers to arrest, as he indicates elsewhere:

I fain had slept, but flies would buzz around;
I fain had looked calmly on the scene,
But the sweet snug retreat my search had found
Waken'd the muse to sing the woody screen. (TP I, 276)

This awakening is the first mental stage of the poetic process and is described in several poems. For example, it is expressed through a metaphor of ignition in "The Village Minstrel":

Nature look'd on him with a 'witching eye,
Her pleasing scenes were his delightful book,
Where he...with wild enthusiasm us'd to look...
And fir'd with what he saw, humm'd o'er his simple lay.
(TP I, 141)

More often it takes the form of a gradual process of "warming":

And what wild eye with nature's beauties charm'd,
That hangs enraptur'd o'er each witching spell,
Can see thee, Winter, then, and not be warm'd
To breathe thy praise, and say, 'I love thee well!'
(TP I, 237)

Thus the initial stage is an awakening awareness to the beauty of the surrounding scene and, as each of these examples suggest, it expresses itself in art. This phenomenon is further illustrated, metaphorically, in "The Happy Bird" where the bird feels himself "swayed by the impulse of the gadding wind" to "swell out in rapture's gushing symphonies" (TP II, 246). The impulse of poetic utterance is inspired in her, as it always was in Clare, by the influence of natural forces.

The statement that this stage in the process is a kind of inspiration is only partially true if inspiration means a mysterious and unconscious fit of creativity. What is remarkable about Clare's description of these experiences is his sense of a predominantly gradual awakening of mental activity, of "warming" to higher moods or of being "charmed" into a spell. And even when they involve an ostensibly instantaneous awakening they are preceded by a period of meditation. What is also important is that although Clare admits to his inability to describe the ultimate emotion of what he calls rapture, he is able and willing to describe the progress of these experiences and to indicate that he was conscious of the source and method of this inspiration. Such an awareness reduces to an oversimplification Martin's claim

that "there was at this time [c.1820] an impression on Clare's mind that his verses were the product of intuition; and that the songs came floating from his lips and pen as music from the throat of birds."⁴ Clare was at least aware that this "inspiration" was an activity of special qualities inherent in the poet's mind, since he was capable of describing them in action at approximately the time Martin is referring to--"On Taste" and "The Dawnings of Genius" were written before 1820. Furthermore, this view of the poetic process remained more or less constant throughout Clare's life. It is true he became more conscious of the need for revision and technical craftsmanship in later life but it is not true, as Martin charges, that this "destroyed his former notion that his verses came flowing by a sort of inspiration."⁵ Granted that this is an inaccurate description of Clare's earlier views, it is even more incorrect in its statement that his earlier views were abandoned by 1835. About this same time he was reiterating, in "On Visiting a Favorite Place" (c.1832-5), his earlier views:

With verses dancing on my tongue,
 The rapture of a heart at ease,
 A fondness and a taste for song,
 And love for places such as these,
 A mind o'erflowing with excess
 Of joys that spring from solitude,
 That sees all nature's spring to bless
 The heart away from noises rude;
 So did its sunshine warm my brow,
 And sure it gleams as lovely now. (TP II, 260)

⁴Frederick W. Martin, The Life of John Clare, Introd. and notes E. Robinson and G. Summerfield (London: Frank Cass, 1964), p. 134.

⁵Ibid., p. 200.

In essence this is identical to the experiences described in his early work.

The second stage in the poetic process, the movement of selected images to the mind, is the stage about which Clare is least specific. He says of it in "Sunset Visions," "something cometh to the gazing mind" (TP II, 304), indicating that it is an automatic movement from the landscape to the mind. Furthermore, when we remember "true poesy is not in words/but images that thoughts express," Clare's statement that "an image to the mind is brought" (TP II, 49) becomes increasingly significant. The movement is from external to internal, from concrete object to abstract thought, and he gives an example of this movement in the same poem; after illustrating the process in the second half of the third stanza he calls it

A language that is ever green,
That feelings unto all impart,
As hawthorn blossoms, soon as seen,
Give May to every heart. (TP II, 49)

The movement from image (blossoms) to thought (concept of beauty associated with May) is what provides the mind with material that will eventually result in song. In "Dawnings of Genius" he reverses the syntax of these other statements to say of the same process, "ideas picture pleasing views to mind" (TP I, 70). The pleasing views are conceptualized into ideas by means of mind's selecting or "picturing"--framing the views into abstract concepts or ideas. Thus, almost literally, "the wild flower 'neath the shepherd's feet/looks up and gives him joy" (TP II, 49). The image does not give itself back to the poet; it gives an "idea" of joy.

This process of perception can operate only on a special state of mind, however. For

An image to the mind is brought,
Where happiness enjoys
An easy thoughtlessness of thought
And meets excess of joys. (TP II, 49)

Thus the image is brought to that kind of mind which is in a state of happiness based on an unselfconscious, or unself-analyzing, intellectual activity. "Thoughtlessness of thought" implies that there must be thoughts, but that they must not be thoughts of thoughts. In short, the mental activity must be directed out toward the external object rather than back into its own locus of mentation. This is the reason Clare stressed the unconscious aspects of the honest poet in his essay on "Popularity in Authorship" (Quoted p. 11 of this chapter) and it is also what he means in "Child Harold" when he writes:

And he who studies natures volume through
And reads it with a pure unselfish mind
Will find Gods power all round in every view
As one bright vision of the almighty mind. (LP, 36)

The "pure" mind is one which is preoccupied with external nature; "unselfish" because not concerned with analyzing its own thoughts. Such an unselfconscious state of mind, therefore, makes possible the operation of the "inward powers" of genius when provided with images by the selective element of taste.

The natural propensity of the mind in this state is to attempt to preserve the image presented to it. Thus when viewing a landscape, in his sonnet "Written in Autumn," Clare attempts to freeze the scene even though its appeal to the poet lies in its transitoriness. This seeming paradox is expressed in his

desire for autumn to "lastingly decline" (TP I, 129). Elsewhere he describes this attempt more fully:

I gazed upon them with a wishing eye,
 And longed but vainly for the painter's power
 To give existence to the mingling dye
 And snatch a beauty from an evening hour.
(TP I, 74)

Again the significant characteristic of the scene is its transitoriness, and again the poet wishes to make it static by giving it "existence" and by snatching its beauty out of the progression of change in which it is involved. In Clare's realization of the futility of such an attempt, combined with his desire to continue it, lies the poignancy of this poetic experience:

But soft and soft it [a cloud] lost itself in night,
 And changed and changed in many a lumined track;
 I felt concerned to see it leave the sight
 And hide its lovely face in blanking black.
(TP I, 74)

In this case the poem itself is an attempt to describe the gradual change and eventual disappearance of the cloud and becomes therefore more effective than even the painter at capturing the essential transitory quality of the scene. The wistful mood and simple personification combine with the repetition of "soft" and "changed" to convey an impression of the progress of the sunset, an impression made possible only by the time span required to read the poem. But in spite of this advantage of the poet's, Clare continued to feel, in the midst of the poetic experience, the desire to capture the momentary beauty which he could feel passing by.

This desire manifested itself in a concept of poetic form which Clare not only formulated, but also attempted to exemplify in his own experimentation. After completing "The Shepherd's Calendar," itself a series of static pictures of rural life, he wrote to his publisher, John Taylor, "I intend to try the Drama in pastoral & tragic pictures & I have made it up in my mind to write one hundred Sonnets as a set of pictures on the scenes of objects that appear in the different seasons" (Letters, 156). The former attempt was abortive, but the latter resulted in numerous sonnets of which Edmund Blunden wrote, "His finest works in his contemporary volumes of verse... is contained in sonnets and other brief pieces conveying... momentary impressions of nature with startling power."⁶ Ian Jack has noticed the same tendency in Clare: "as we turn over his hundreds of sonnets we become aware that he was experimenting endlessly to find a verbal equivalent for the small woodcut so brilliantly practised by Bewick."⁷ Whether Clare was conscious of such a specific attempt or not, he did feel in the poetic process a natural tendency of mind to capture a momentary image, and this tendency was revealed in the form his poetry took, not only in the sonnets and short lyrics, but also in the succession of individual scenes which constituted many of his longer poems. Indeed it became part of his method of perception:

And then I walk and swing my stick for joy
And catch at little pictures passing bye

⁶ Edmund Blunden, "John Clare," Athenaeum, March 5, 1920, p. 298.

⁷ Ian Jack, English Literature 1815-32 (London: Oxford U.P., 1963), p. 137.

A gate whose posts are two old dotterel trees
 A close with molehills sprinkled oer its leas
 A little footbrig with its crossing rail
 A wood gap stopt with ivy wreathing pale...(SP, 81)

This perception reveals Clare's method of concentrating on small scenes or brief static moments of perception for the material of his poetry. Taken one step further it returns to his belief in the image as the primary component of not only nature, but also perceived and expressed nature, which is poetry.

This significance of the image is emphasized by the specific manner in which taste and genius alter the reflection in the mind's mirror. Clare does not see the natural object simply as a material image, but as a metaphor, and in this sense the poet's mind is unique. This metaphorization is explained in his major statement on the poetic process, "Pastoral Poesy," in which, after discussing the image transferred to the mind, he gives the following example:

The storm, from which the shepherd turns
 To pull his beaver down,
 While he upon the heath sojourns,
 Which autumn pleaches brown,

Is music, ay, and more indeed
 To those of musing mind
 Who through the yellow woods proceed
 And listen to the wind.

The poet in his fitful glee
 And fancy's many moods
 Meets it as some strange melody,
 A poem of the woods,

And now the harp that flings around
 The music of the wind;
 The poet often hears the sound
 When beauty fills the mind.

So would I my own mind employ,
 And my own heart impress,
 That poesy's self's a dwelling joy
 Of humble quietness. (TP II, 50)

Whereas the shepherd, self-conscious and therefore aware only of the threatening aspect of the storm (i.e., his mind is inward oriented), sees it simply as an element to seek shelter from, the poet, being in a state of "easy thoughtlessness of thought" and listening to the wind (i.e., is outward oriented) sees it as a "poem of the woods"--the kind of poem Clare claims to have found in the fields and written down. Since he sees the storm through the faculties of taste and genius he does not see merely a physical spectacle of accumulating dark clouds and increasing wind velocity, but rather a metaphor focusing on the imaginary harp and its resultant music. He progresses from a passive state, "in his fitful glee/and fancy's many moods," which makes it possible for him to appreciate the "strange melody" and "music of the wind," to a desire for mental activity. From passive appreciation to his version of "make me thy lyre" Clare moves, from a physical to an imaginative position, and concludes by embodying this shift in the all-inclusive metaphor of the woods as a harp played by the winds. But what is most important here is his mode of perception, for although he describes what he sees, he is conscious that he sees in a unique way--he sees metaphors where the shepherd sees only physical phenomena.

This awareness of the metaphorizing power of the poet's mind is repeatedly stressed in his poetry, especially in those

poems dealing with some aspect of the poetic process. For instance, in "Poesy" his state of mind makes natural objects appear as companions which "tell their tales of joy and grief,/ and think and feel with me" (TP I, 447). And when speaking of poetry in "The Moorehen's Nest" he reiterates this concept of transformation and adds the suggestion that metaphoric images and the "pictures" which he sees in nature are related modes of perception:

I pick up flowers and pebbles and by thee
As gems and jewels they appear to me
I pick out pictures round the fields that lie
In my minds heart like things that cannot die
Like picking hopes and making friends with all.

He also explains, here, the transitoriness of these glimpses of metaphor:

Yet glass will often bear a harder fall
As bursting bottles loose the precious wine
Hopes casket breaks and I the gems resign.
(SP, 79)

Thus the poet sees gems and jewels rather than flowers and pebbles, in much the same way as he sees "patriarchs" which "wear an ancient passion" (SP, 92-3) where the ordinary mind would only see weeds.

Clare never does make it clear, at least in his published works, at what point in the poetic process the object⁸ becomes a metaphor, but his statement that it occurs to one in "fitful glee" and "fancy's many moods" would suggest the transformation occurs in conjunction with the mental excitement of

⁸See also "Wood Pictures in Spring," TP II, 121.

genius, a suggestion which is supported by his claim that "Taste is a uniformity of excellence--it modifies expression & selects images--it arranges & orders matters of thought--but genius creates them" (Prose, 228--italics mine). In "The Moorehen's Nest" Clare records the progress of this excitement as "loading the heart with joys it cannot bear/that warms and chills and burns and bursts at last" (SP, 79) and in "Expression" he calls it the "muses fire," describing its method as

Stealing the music of some angel's song
 To tell of all he sees and all admires,
 Which fancy's colours paint so sweet, so strong!
(TP I, 275)

The language of these excerpts is more fanciful than descriptive, but it does convey the intensity of feeling which is associated in his mind with the climax of the poetic experience.

The eventual result of this mental activity is what Clare calls the "throbbing utterance of the soul" (TP I, 275), the work of art. The excited state of mind produces a desire to describe the quality of the landscape which has precipitated the poetic experience: "I/feel a new being.../and shape my idle fancies' into rhymes/of nature's ecstasy in bursting flowers" (TP II, 121). With characteristic humility Clare credits nature with the real creative power because, while he admits to some powers for himself, he sees the poet as a recorder of the ecstasy which the bursting flower reveals. This apparently naive comment is actually another statement of the concept of the poet as transcriber, although in this case he does not include reference to the poet's special mode of perception. Thus the ostensibly creative power of nature is transferred to,

or at least shared by the poet, to produce the work of art. And speaking in terms of the graphic arts, Clare gives his appraisal of the ideal product of this process:

real excellence must be its own creation
it must be the overflowings of its own mind &
must make its admirers willing converts from its
own powerful conceptions & not yield to win
them by giving way to their opinions of
excellence which turns out in time to be
nothing more than mere importers of fashions
mysterys of pretensions. (Prose, 213)

This plea for artistic integrity reveals that the artist's creativity is not that of a craftsman creating novel "objets d' art," but is an overflowing of his mind; and when we remember that Clare regarded natural objects as the only fit material for mental speculation it becomes clear that what flows from the mind will be natural images, altered by taste and genius to appear, in poetry at least, in the form of metaphors.

When discussing this expression, or the actual recording of these images, we must bear in mind Clare's belief that thoughts, not words, are the proper medium for expression. Thus the image is not merely concrete, and therefore definable by a single word, but involves an abstract element as well which must be expressed in a combination of words which add up to a whole greater than the sum of its parts. For example, the effect of Clare's portrayal of the badger is not contained in any special qualities of language, nor in associations inherent in the word badger, but in the thoughts which result from the accumulative description of his appearance and actions:

He falls as dead and kicked by boys and men
 Then starts and grins and drives the crowd agen
 Till kicked and torn and beaten out he lies
 And leaves his hold and cackles groans and dies.
 (SP, 86)

But Clare was also aware of the inadequacy of language to convey the full impact of these thoughts which constitute poetry:

Language has not the power to speak what love indites,
 The Soul lies buried in the ink that writes. (PM, 216)

Even "paint itself with living nature fails...and mind alone feels, fancies and portrays" (TP II, 121). Thus true poetry is a mental phenomenon conveyed by thoughts rather than words. And these thoughts are most effectively communicated through a faithful portrayal of natural images:

A pleasing image to its page conferred
 In living character and breathing word
 Becomes a landscape heard and felt and seen.
 (SP, 114)

The successful use of an image elevates the communication from verbal to mental; from description, to the experience of hearing, feeling and seeing.

By thus transferring the emphasis from the verbal composition of the work of art to the thought expressed in it Clare has justified his claim to the irrelevance of grammatical rules. He felt "whatever is intelligible to others is grammar & whatever is common sense is not far from correctness" (Prose, 222), and in a more colorful mood he vowed "grammer in learning is like tyranny in government--confound the bitch I'll never be her slave" (Letters, 133). Since the formulation of intricate syntactical structures was not necessary to convey his simple

pictures of nature, Clare felt justified in condemning not only grammar, but elaborate poetic diction as well. Although he did champion the cause of rustic language, notably in his debates with Charles Lamb, he was more concerned with shifting the emphasis from the mode of expression to the object or event being described and the thought which arose from the contemplation of it.

This shift in emphasis also resulted in an attempt to express himself in prose-poetry. The Tibbles have noted this tendency in their second biography of the poet, but fail to explain the reason for his experimentation. That he experimented is clear from the following passage:

The dewdrops on every blade of grass are so much like silver drops that I am obliged to stoop down as I walk to see if they are pearls, and those sprinkled on the ivy-woven beds of primroses underneath the hazel, whitethorns & maples are so like gold beads that I stooped down to feel if they were hard, but they melted from my finger. And where the dew lies on the primrose, the violet & whitethorn leaves they are emerald and beryl, yet nothing more than the dews of the morning on the budding leaves; nay, the road grasses are covered with gold and silver beads, and the further we go the brighter they seem to shine, like solid gold and silver. It is nothing more than the sun's light and shade upon them in the dewy morning; every thorn-point and bramble-spear has its trembling ornament: till the wind gets a little brisker, and then all is shaken off, and all the shining jewelry passes away into a common spring morning full of budding leaves, Primroses, Violets, Vernal Speedwell, Bluebell and Orchis, and commonplace objects.
(Prose, 252)

What makes this passage poetic is not so much the obvious use of metaphor with its contrast between the insubstantial dewdrop and the solid pearls, emeralds and beryls, as it is the thoughts

suggested by the simple scene and incident described. The simple, innocent, and childlike act of testing the hardness of the drops only to have them vanish, the progression from the illusory appearance of the dew in the first sentence to the awareness of the reality of a common spring morning in the last, and the fragility and transitoriness of this natural phenomenon all add up to an impressive pastoral description which would gain nothing from the embellishments of conventional verse. Similarly in "The Nightingale's Nest" his verse is significantly close to prose:

Snug lie her curious eggs in number five
Of deadened green or rather olive brown
And the old prickly thorn bush guards them well
And here well leave them still unknown to wrong
As the old woodlands legacy of song. (SP, 75)

Except for the rhyme in the final couplet, the poetry of these lines lies in the scene described, for if ever verbal embellishment were removed from verse it is done so here. The impact of the verse is produced by the concept of natural protection and the metaphor of the legacy of song, both of which are derived immediately from the physical presence of the bird's nest, rather than from any ornament of language or syntax. Clare's experimentation to find an effective means of expression was motivated by a realization that much of the "poem" he found in nature was lost in the transcription. He felt his "heavy hand [the muse's] song defiles (TP I, 240-1). Thus, while the poet's self-expression in art is the ultimate goal of the poetic process, it involves within it the realization that such expression is incapable of reproducing the intensity of the experience.

But equally important to Clare was what remained of this poetic experience. On at least one occasion he was left with a pleasant emotion: "something cometh to the gazing mind,/and when the colours fade, bright hope remains behind," (TP II, 304), but on another occasion he indicates the eventual fate of such feeling:

Dim burns the soul, and throbs the fluttering heart,
Its painful pleasing feelings to impart;
Till by successless sallies wearied quite,
The memory fails, and fancy takes her flight.
The wick confin'd within its socket dies,
Borne down and smother'd in a thousand sighs.
(TP I, 70)

His letters give evidence to support this statement:

The Muse is a fickle Hussey with me she
sometimes stilts me up to madness & then leaves
me as a beggar by the wayside with no more life
than whats mortal & that nearly extinguishd
by mellancholy forbodings. (Letters, 132)

The poetic process, then, is a transitory experience which leaves behind a residue in the memory which itself gradually disappears. This concept is clearly illustrated by Clare's letter to John Taylor accompanying a sonnet, "To The Memory of John Keats":

I did it as I felt it at the moment your
mellancholy news woud give me pause for
reflection--I wishd I had made an Elegy afterwards
of it as my ideas was crampt they flowd freely & I
coud have gone a great length but words are of
little value--be as it will I can do nothing more
now--the moment is gone I cannot call it back I
wish I could. (Letters, 109)

This passage also suggests that recollection in tranquility was not Clare's method. His other prose writings support this view and show that the actual composition of the

poems took place as much as possible during the rapturous experience itself. Clare indicates this in his autobiography:

Poetry was a troublesomely pleasant companion annoying & cheering me at my toils I could not stop my thoughts & often failed to keep them till night so when I fancied I had hit upon a good image or natural description I used to steal into a corner of the garden & clap it down.
(Prose, 32)

The immediacy of this activity is also stressed in a letter to Taylor:

...recollect the subjects are roughly sketched in the fields at all seasons with a pencil I catch nature in every dress she puts on so when I begin to rhyme & polish up I have little to do in studying discuss how I am like the boy that gets his book alphabet by heart & then can say his lesson with his eyes as well shut as open. (Letters, 50)

So the composition takes place in the fields and all that remains is to add "rhyme and polish up," as he indicates in another autobiographical passage:

I used to drop down behind a hedge bush or dyke & write down my things upon the crown of my hat & when I was more in a kip for thinking than usual I used to stop later at night to make up my lost time in the day thus I went on writing my thoughts down & correcting them at leisure.
(Prose, 32)

As one of Clare's fellow patients records, this method did not change even in his asylum days:

One principal article [which Clare carried with him] was on octavo sheet or two of paper, whereon to write his thoughts, chiefly poems, which he wrote in his leisure moments, for his mind seemed ever on the alert, when seated alone for any length of time.⁹

⁹G. M. Townshend Mayer, "John Clare," TLS, July 1, 1921, p. 421.

The result of the immediacy of this method was an acknowledged influence of the poet's environment and personal mood at the time of composition on the final product of this process. For his poems, like most Romantic poems, were descriptive of actual experiences. His nature poems are almost always situational and even most of the songs, except those collected ballads which he rewrote, betray the actual situation of the poet at the time of composition. His narratives are also frequently descriptive of personal experiences. For example, Clare writes of "Michaelmas Eve," "I was one of the assembly & these three figures gave me the hint for the poem & every incident in it is truth & drawn from the life" (Letters, 75); and of two occasional pieces, "The Spanish Refugee" and "Freedom":

These two trifles are a few minutes ryming
from reading in an old newspaper of the distress
of the Spanish Refugees in London & as I fancy
one reads a little pathetic & tother goes a descent
musical pony canter I feel anxious to have your
opinion of them. (Letters, 197)

These individual experiences had a considerable influence on the final product, even to the extent of deciding the mode of expression: "so my feelings were stirred into praise & my praises were mutterd in prose or rhyme as the mood might suit at the moment then these moods often repeated grew unperceivd into quantity on paper" (Prose, 52). They often influenced the metre of a piece too, as he indicates in his reference to "The Spanish Refugee" and "Freedom," and as he indicates in another letter to Taylor: "I have got in this dancing measure

which runs so easy that I can hardly get out of it several of my summer walks & "Helpstone Heath" which I am now writing are in the same" (Letters, 143). And writing of a short poem, later included in The Village Minstrel he repeats this idea: "I measured this ballad to-day wi the thrumming of my mothers wheel if it be tintured wi the drone of that domestic music you will excuse it after this confession" (Letters, 47). One final example will serve to show the value Clare placed on the inspiration of the moment, another statement which gives the lie to Martin's view that Clare considered himself a craftsman in later life. Writing to Frank Simpson in 1828, he explains his failure to write an epitaph for one of Simpson's friends:

its all no use I can do nothing for
the more I try the worse I am & the reason
why it is is I believe that I never knew
Mr. Friar & therefore I cannot feel the
subject at all so here I give it up with much
reluctance. (Letters, 212)

His failure to compose this epitaph was based on the absence of a severe enough feeling of grief, a feeling which was real to him on Keats' death even though he knew him only indirectly. And we have seen how important the immediate mood was in composing the sonnet on Keats' death.

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The immediate experience, then, was the major impulse to composition which Clare was sensitive to. However, when these experiences came less frequently, as a result either of their chronological distance from the poet or from his physical

removal from nature, he was forced to rely on a second method, based on memory. Whereas in the former method he relied on direct perception in a special ecstatic state of mind, in the latter the perception was indirect, via memory, and the state of mind was less often one of excitement than of melancholy brooding. Consequently most of the poems in the latter class lack the vitality of those in the former and, although several possess individual beauty, collectively they tend to be either derivative or repetitious of each other. Such is the case with many of the songs and ballads of Mary, with the possible exception of those which exploit an immediate situation or scene to portray an attribute of his love for her. It is important to bear in mind that since Clare was given considerable freedom in the asylums, especially High Beech, he often composed in his original manner, although increasing confinement at Northampton made it more and more necessary to revert to memory.

He did not have an unfavorable opinion of the power of memory, however, even though he was often frustrated by its inadequacy to reproduce the original intensity of his past experiences. For example, he testifies to memory's function of retaining images in "The Tell-Tale Flowers." After asking the question, "Wild flowers that dance to every wind--/do they no memory leave behind?", he answers affirmatively:

Ay, flowers! The very name of flowers,
That bloom in wood and glen,
Brings spring to me in winter's hours,
And childhood's dreams agen. (TP II, 433)

He repeats this idea in a metaphoric description of his memory at work, in the same poem: "And from the brook I turned away,/ but heard it many an after day." In "The Flitting" the poet's feeling of alienation arises from the fact that he has no memories associated with his new environment, but the memory of the objects surrounding his former home make the present one more bearable:

But times will change and friends must part
And nature still can make amends
Their [i.e., former objects] memory lingers round the heart
Like life whose essence is its friends. (SP, 182)

The fact that both these passages are found in extremely plaintive poems suggests Clare's belief that ultimately memory is only the shadow of its original. He expands this view in a prose fragment:

The spring of our life--our youth--is the
midsummer of our happiness--our pleasures are then
real & heart stirring--they are but associations
afterwards--where we laughed in childhood at the
reality of the enjoyment felt we only smile in
manhood at the recollections of those enjoyments
they are then but the reflections of past
happiness & have no more to do with happiness in
the reality than the image of a beautiful girl
seen in a looking-glass has in comparison with
the original--our minds only retain the resemblance
the glass is as blank after her departure--we only
feel the joy we possessed. (Prose, 225)

Thus memory is limited in its power, but Clare does suggest that although it is not constant it has a recurring ability to inspire the poet:

After long absence how the mind recalls
Pleasing associations of the past:
Haunts of his youth, thorn hedges and old walls,
And hollow trees that sheltered from the blast,
And all that map of boyhood... (TP II, 395)

The result of this recollection is the poem which describes it. The sight of Glington Spire awakens in the poet memories of his childhood which in turn results in a form of poetic experience described as "waking fond desire," the expression of which is the poem. Similarly, in "Remembrances," the poet's memory leads him to attempt, unsuccessfully, to re-experience his past pleasures, but results in a melancholy poetic admission of the impossibility of such an attempt. This poem is, though, a series of descriptions of former experiences which are provided by memory and which demonstrate, by their poignancy, the possibility of composing poetry from the memory of former situations and scenes.

That Clare employed this method is evident from his prose, in which he continually refers to having composed songs and poems from memory, as well as several of his other poems. In "Ashton Lawn" he describes how his pictorial method of perception in the initial experience serves as a means of preserving the experience for future exploitation:

I HAD a joy, and keep it still alive,
 Of hoarding in the memory's treasured book
 Old favorite spots that with affections thrive,
 And to my inward fancies shine and look
 like well-done pictures in some winning page.
(TP II, 124)

Like the original perception, the memory retains the experience in the form of a "picture," or static moment captured from a passing scene or situation, and makes them available later for reproduction into poems. He reiterates this concept in "The Moorehen's Nest" and adds a description of how these pictures

act on the mind:

And these associations of the past
 Like summer pictures in a winter blast
 Renews my heart to feelings as the rain
 Falls on the earth and bids it thrive again.
 (SP, 80)

The suggestion here is that the memory serves a revitalizing function which renews the mind's "feelings" or responses and bids it "thrive," or react poetically, again. Thus the attempt to freeze the moment of intensity in the initial experience not only finds an outlet in instant poetic utterance, but also results in a mental "picture" retained to initiate a poetic response sometime in the future. Clare's picture metaphor is therefore significantly appropriate in describing a method not only of poetic observation and the consequent form (e.g., the sonnets discussed earlier), but also of mental "photography" and "filing" of the image observed. He does not describe in any detail the mental process which follows the rejuvenation of the picture, but this is presumably because it is the same process of excitement, though on a reduced scale, and composition as that which follows the initial perception of other images.

While this method of indirect experience most closely resembles the direct one, it is not the only mode of composition for which he depended on memory. Most of his songs and ballads were composed from his memory of those he heard as a boy from his father and mother, or from Granny Bains, a village cow-woman. In this manner he composed "Peggy Band" (Prose, 135) and several other ballads, as well as a tale, "The Fate of Amy." That he used the memory of the folk-tales and songs merely as a point of departure for his imagination is revealed by his

statement concerning the tale of Amy:

You will see by this that I have deviated away from the original--I once when a boy had the tale in another manner as near to the truth as possible--under the title of the "Haunted Pond"--it is now lost or I would have sent it--but this cramped the imagination (truth in my opinion in poetry always does)--I therefore wrote it in the manner you see it gave my imagination free scope.
(Letters, 24)

Tales like this and the ballad "Peggy Band" provided his mind with fuel for yet another type of indirect poetic process, but it is significant that he maintains the belief, even in these indirect compositions, that they are shaped by the imagination and are therefore not simply mirror images of the original.

Although Clare was at times capable of composing to order--his letters contain several pleas for subject matter to try his talents--by far the bulk of his poetry, and that the most accomplished of it, was composed during either a direct poetic experience or an indirect simulation of the original. The one exception, of course, is the composition from memory of old songs which involved no original experience as such, but which drew on extraneous material which the poet altered to his purpose. The results of these methods of composition is poetry which is highly metaphoric, since derived from a process of perception which conceived of natural images as metaphors, and highly personal, since based almost exclusively on individual experiences of the poet.

CHAPTER II

THE PROCESS AS STRUCTURE

Clare's method of perception provided him with both content and form for much of his poetry. The content was obviously derived from his experiences in nature, and much of the form, like the sonnets already mentioned, developed from his method of perception. Arising out of the progression of his poetic experience came a form which eventually provided him with the means of coherently structuring what naturally tended to be rambling, discursive and poorly organized poems. And from his observation that the mind created metaphors arose an increasingly mature handling of metaphors and metaphor patterns. The development is generally from loose, rambling poems with conventional and isolated metaphors to more clearly structured works with natural metaphors often arranged into patterns.

To show this growth I have divided Clare's life into periods, somewhat arbitrarily. Since few of his poems are dated with any degree of accuracy, only rough chronology is available and dating of individual poems within a period is almost impossible. Therefore these periods will be treated as units to be compared and contrasted with each other, but not, unfortunately, to demonstrate development within themselves. They will be represented by poems which I consider the best achievements of the period, rather than typical of the bulk of its poetry. I have chosen to divide Clare's life into four

periods: two Helpstone periods, the first from 1809-24 and the second from 1824-32; the Northborough period from 1832-41, including his three years in the asylum at High Beech and his few months of freedom in 1841; and the period from 1842-64 which he spent in the Northamptonshire asylum.

The first of these periods extends from his employment at Francis Gregory's The Bluebell Inn, which he later called "the nursery for that lonely & solitary musing which ended in rhyme" (Prose, 23), to his first major indication of physical and mental illness and his consequent consultation with Dr. Darling in London. This visit provides a convenient dividing point because it was preceded by a period of complete mental exhaustion during which all composition was suspended. This first Helpstone period includes his publication in 1820 of Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery and in 1821 of The Village Minstrel and Other Poems, as well as his three trips to London and his resulting acquaintance with such literary personalities as H. F. Cary, J. H. Reynolds, Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt, S. T. Coleridge and Thomas De Quincey. It was characterized by fits of creativity, notably in the summer of 1820, the spring of 1822 and January to June of 1823, interspersed with fits of extreme depression and almost total abstinence from the muse, especially in 1821 when anxious at the long delay in the publication of The Village Minstrel, and in 1824 when mental exhaustion brought him to despair. It included extreme popularity after the publication of his first volume, and an extreme sense of isolation and loneliness following the

failure of his second book. And it contained a wealth of experimentation with poetic subjects and forms, an experimentation which is evident in his attempts at satire, narratives, songs, sonnets, ballads, dream poems and nature poems.

This period was also marked by considerable experimentation with the use of an immediate experience as a structuring device for his poems. The title of his first poem, "Morning Walk," suggests this method came naturally to him, probably arising from both his personal preference for rambling in nature and his early reading of the recently developing poetry of experience evident in Cowper and Thomson. At any rate his early poetry contains glimpses of what was later to develop into coherent and unified poems centered around a framework of the poet's personal experience.

The experimentation in this period reveals only a very clumsy and often embarrassingly naive use of the experience, however. The experiences used are seldom poetic ones, revelations of the poetic process in action, and seldom become significant as exposures of the poet's mental activity and resultant thoughts. More often they are strictly physical situations from which he views the landscape, or rambling walks which connect several scenes loosely into the scope of one experience. Any meditative passage is usually a short segment sharply distinguished from the action described in the poem, though often related to something perceived during it. That the poems lack unity is attributable to a number of causes, but at least one of the solutions Clare seems to have considered

was the increasing utilization of his own experiences to provide coherence and progression.

Most of the weaknesses of his early work are evident in "Summer Evening" (TP I, 60). Apart from the direct description of experience in the brief final section, there is no impression of a unifying movement of the poet either physically or mentally, and this final segment bears very little relationship to the descriptions of nature given in the two preceding sections. If the two previous sections have been perceived by the poet, the conclusion must involve a change of location--from one which has not even been established. Furthermore, although there is a suggestion of unity in the time sequences of the perceptions, the poem lacks the focus usually provided by the physical situation of the poet. It shifts from one scene to another in the description with no sense of being seen through the single window of his mind. We see outdoor scenes ostensibly related to his position by his distinguishing between "far and near," but we also see Dobson preparing for bed inside his cottage. Nor is his description of the external scene limited to a reasonable selection of what one person is likely to see from a given position. It is crammed full with at least twenty-three varieties of birds and animals as well as ten human beings, and it cries out for selectivity or artistic economy. Ironically, when the poet does enter the poem his presence is an unwelcomed intrusion. His indignant outburst against mischievous boys and his burdensome moralizing on Providence, although they do arise out of the events described,

do not give the impression of being the end result of the poet's immediate experience, as the sentiment in "The Flood" does. They appear instead as abruptly inserted made-to-order platitudes. This inability to fuse the objectivity of the observer and the subjectivity of the commentator is particularly evident in these early poems, and is overcome in the later works by the total subjectivity which results from the limited perceptions of a single observer.

In another early poem Clare attempts to link the multiplicity of scenes he wants to describe by more clearly defining the position of his own experience. "Recollections After a Ramble" (TP I, 181-8) is a series of very loosely connected descriptive passages, rich in variety, but linked by their being perceived through the constantly moving focus of the poet's mind. Thus the impression of a cluttered landscape is alleviated by the poet's admission that the scenes are not perceived from a single point and that the movement of the poem is constructed, though loosely, around his physical movements. Depiction of the experience is awkward, however, and is interspersed with, rather than integrated to the rest of the poem. For example, in the latter half of the following stanza where he first describes his own actions they have little or no relation to what he purports to be perceiving in the first half:

While cows restless from the ground
 Plung'd into the stream and drank,
 And the rings went whirling round,
 Till they toucht the flaggy bank,

On the arch's wall I knelt,
 Curious, as I often did,
 To see the words the sculpture spelt,
 But the moss its letters hid.

He is describing alternately his actions and his perceptions and in no way fusing the significance of both, although at some points in the poem he does relate them by observing a causal connection between them:

And as while I clomb the hill,
 Many a distant charm I found,
 Pausing on the lagging mill,
 That scarcely mov'd its sails around,
 Hanging o'er a gate or stile,
 Till my curious eye did tire,
 Leisure was employ'd awhile,
 Counting many a peeping spire.

And at the end of the poem he demonstrates his awareness of the significance of the experience as a means of giving the poem completeness, by summing up the value of this type of experience:

Be the journey e'er so mean,
 Passing by a cot or tree,
 In the route there's something seen
 Which the curious love to see;
 In each ramble, taste's warm souls
 More of wisdom's self can view
 Than blind ignorance beholds
 All life's seven stages through.

The fact remains, however, that the poem lacks a real sense of unity, and the rambling nature of the experience itself is insufficient to provide coherence and progression.

"Recollections After an Evening Walk" (TP I, 75-6), although less satisfactory from a standpoint of metre and rhythm, reveals a more restrictive use of the experience and consequently eliminates the overcrowded scenery and inconsistency which results from an omniscient author in a specific physical location. Thus elements of the scene move out of the poet's

range of perception, both visually and audibly:

The mower, too, lapt up his scythe from our sight,
And put on his jacket, and bid us good night;
The thresher once lumping, we heard him no more,
He left his barn-dust, and shut up his door.

And others are brought to his attention not by the whim of an all-seeing mind, but by their emergence upon the poet's immediately visible landscape:

And numbers of creatures appear'd in our sight,
That live in the silence and sweetness of night,
Climbing up the tall grasses or scaling the bough,
But these were all nameless, unnotic'd till now.

Clare is more conscious in this poem, too, of the necessity of making his own actions more consonant with his descriptions, hence clearer to his reader. Thus he opens the poem with a determination to outline its ensuing structure:

Just as the even-bell rang, we set out
To wander the fields and the meadows about;
And the first thing we mark'd that was lovely to view
Was the sun hung on nothing, just bidding adieu.

He not only establishes the central situation, here, but also suggests that the movement of the poem will be a wandering one, involving a series of perceptions following his initial remarking of the sun. He enforces his own presence in the poem with allusions to the effect of his footsteps on one of the objects he describes (l. 34) and with direct description of his movements in lines thirty-nine and forth-five. And appropriately the poem is forced to a conclusion by the conditions he established in the opening lines. An evening walk is by definition limited, and Clare accepts this limitation for the poem as well:

And then we turn'd up by the rut-rifted lane,
 And sought for our cot and the village again;
 For night gather'd round, and shut all from the eye,
 And a black sultry cloud crept all over the sky.

When the poet can no longer see, he ceases to write; his poem is governed by the perceptions which the experience will allow him.

Although the experience in this poem is subordinated to a catalogue description of country scenes, it does tend to aid Clare in the selection of his material and the organization of it in the work itself. It is significant, though, that this experience is not the poetic experience which forms the topic of this essay. He describes no process of selection, rapture and metaphorization, nor does he reveal the incident which caused him to actually write the poem. Thus the form seems not to have grown directly out of the experience. Mastery of this technique did not come until later, but some of the poems of this period contain examples of attempts to use a description of this poetic experience as a framework for composition.

Such a poem is "Narrative Verses" (TP I, 31-5).

Although the descriptions of mental reactions in this poem are often vague they do reveal an effort to express the mental experience the poet is going through and to describe the poetic process in relation to what it is perceiving. Thus the second stanza establishes the situation of solitude necessary for such an experience, and the third stanza indicates the selective activity of taste in reacting to nature's beauties:

The glowing landscape's charms I caught,
 Where'er I look'd or wander'd o'er,
 And every wood and field methought
 A greener, brighter clothing wore.

There follows a description of the state of mind required for the mental activity of the process:

A vacant opening in my mind
 To think and cherish thy fond scenes....

Sometimes musing on the sky,
 Then list'ning to the waterfall.

And eventually comes the mental excitement:

But oh, so tempting was the muse,
 She made me wish, she made me hope;
 I wish'd and hop'd that future days
 (For scenes prophetic fill'd my breast)
 Would grant to me a crown of bays
 By singing maids and shepherds drest.

In spite of the coherence of this experience when examined in isolation, it does not give a similar coherence to the poem. For Clare has not yet allowed the experience to govern the composition and consequently includes numerous descriptions which are not directly related to the mental experience itself. He also includes irrelevant details which change the mood of the experience. Such a detail is his description of his fear:

[I] watch the owners of the grounds;
 Their presence was my only fear,
 No boughs to shield me if they came,
 And soon amid my rash career
 I deem'd such trespassing to blame.

This digression bears no relation to the poetic experience he is describing, and although it actually was part of his experience it is irrelevant to the main progression of his mind from initial perception to rapture to the desire for composition. But for all its weaknesses, this is perhaps the most consistent poem of experience in Clare's early work.

Perhaps because of his inability to adequately utilize this experience, Clare's metaphors in this period are stereotyped, often rising out of literary convention rather than the poetic process. Unlike "The Flood," where the metaphors grow out of an accumulation of terms used to describe the scene which eventually become identified with the monster to give a coherent picture of the destructive forces in life, his early poems contain metaphors which have been imposed upon them from without. For example, in "Summer Evening" there is a conglomeration of individual metaphors which, if they are not simply idiomatic expressions, are used only to describe individual objects with no relation either to each other or to the overall plan of the poem. There is the conventional personification of Providence, ignorance and sleep and, with the exception of an effective picture of the bat "in hood and cowl," very little beyond the "murmuring" brook and "sleeping" flowers. A similar lack of pattern characterizes "Recollections After an Evening Walk" in which the individual metaphors are more colorful but fail to provide evidence that the poetic process does indeed create metaphors rather than just impose conventional ones. "To An Insignificant Flower" (TP I, 84-5) attempts, somewhat clumsily, to create a pattern of metaphor involving the flower's equation with the poet, Emma, beauty and a swain, but the result is a naive and obviously contrived lyric. More evidence of experimenting with patterns of metaphor can be found in "Recollections After a Ramble," in which a series of references to the lark's "anthem," the wood's "song," bird's "songs," nature's "anthem,"

etc., suggests an underlying metaphoric structure. The references are too few for a poem of this length, however, and not clearly enough related to each other or a central metaphor to be considered a successful pattern.

The first Helpstone period, then, is characterized by experimentation not only with the use of personal experience in structuring his poetry, but also with the metaphors which his mind perceived. It is impossible to demonstrate any growth in achievement over the fifteen years embraced by the period, however, because no dates exist in publication to enable a chronological arrangement of the poems.

Following his return from London in 1824, Clare embarked on a period of prolific composition in both prose and verse. He began an autobiography, a journal, numerous essays and poems, and a series of "Natural History Letters," which he planned to publish under the title Biographys of Birds and Flowers. This industry was interrupted by anxiety arising from the delay in publication of The Shepherd's Calendar, however, and several of these projects remain incomplete. In November of 1825 he published his essay on "Popularity in Authorship" in The European Magazine, and in the period 1824-7 he published several poems in imitation of older poets. But his remaining years at Helpstone were characterized by unsuccessful attempts at prose works such as a tragedy in the style of Marlowe on "Jealousy" or "Conscience" (Letters, p. 185), of which he wrote only 400 lines, a novel which remains only in fragments, and two incomplete prose tales, "The Stage Coach" and "The Two Soldiers."

He began a collection of old ballads and folk-songs about this time, too, and wrote well over one hundred sonnets, a large number of which are occasional pieces but several of which, including "The Flood" and "Winter Snowstorm," are among his best works. The period also includes his fourth visit to London in February and March of 1828. He returned from this visit compelled to peddle ignominiously his own books around the countryside to support his family, and advised by Alan Cunningham to cease, for health reasons, his writing, advice which Clare followed for most of 1828-9. In 1830 his increasing physical and mental illness resulted in a public outburst against Shylock at a performance of The Merchant of Venice and his plight consequently gained the attention of local aristocrats. The eventual result was their provision of a new cottage at Northborough and Clare's removal to it in May 1832.

The poetry he composed at Helpstone between 1824 and 1832 reveals a more sophisticated use of the experience as a structural device and a more confident, though still often awkward, utilization of metaphor. Although many of the poems of this period have a tendency to ramble without a controlling structure, others indicate an increasing adherence to the truth of the experience, a tendency to dwell on the imaginative experience rather than the physical, and a conscious attempt to demonstrate within the poem how it arose from the experience itself. And although he often uses conventional metaphors expressed through archaic diction and syntax, he increasingly derives his metaphors from the scene he is describing.

This results not only in a much more natural and uniquely Clarean mode of description, but also in the use of a central or controlling image which gives these poems a superior unity and economy.

The development in his use of the experience becomes evident in a comparison of "Autumn" and "Walks in the Woods." The former (SP, 134-7), in spite of its affected language, is perhaps one of the finest pieces of the period. It is structured around an experience which is conveyed economically and links the descriptive passages without detailing the poet's irrelevant movements, as it so often did in his earlier work. The poet enters the poem by moving into "solitudes...to meditate [autumn's] end." As he executes this movement he describes the setting, linking the several elements of the scene syntactically, by including the three and a half stanzas which describe them into one skillfully composed sentence. Thus the details are related to each other and to the poet's immediate actions, since these movements are conveyed in the same sentence. There follows a two-stanza explanation of the impulse which caused him to extract the poem out of his experience, one stanza of which is particularly explicit:

These haunts long favoured but the more as now
 With thee thus wandering moralizing on
 Stealing glad thoughts from grief
 And happy tho I sigh
 Sweet vision with the wild dishevelled hair
 And raiments shadowy of each winds embrace
 Fain would I win thine harp
 To one accordant theme.

Thus the experience, unlike those seen in the previous period, is the direct source of the poem, since the direct result of the poet's desire to emulate the wind's music. And the experience, after the initial brief establishment of the poet's physical position, takes place in the mind:

We'll pillow on the grass
Our thoughts and ruminate
O'er the disorderd scenes of woods and fields.

Clare follows this passage with a series of scenes which are related to the experience by their being material for his mental rumination, and concludes with a direct metaphoric address to Autumn. However the experience which he developed imaginatively to this point is left disappointingly open-ended. The experience ceases arbitrarily and not altogether satisfactorily, but before it does it fuses itself with another cohering device, the controlling metaphor of the goddess Autumn.

Since the experience described is a poetic one, the movement from observation to rapture to metaphorization and finally to the desire for composition is evident. Although these steps are not presented in that order they do exist in the poem and therefore present a link between the experience and the poem itself. The most important aspect of this link is summed up in the following stanza:

And yet sublime in grief thy thoughts delight
To show me visions of most gorgeous dyes
Haply forgetting now
They but prepare thy shroud
Thy pencil dashing its excess of shades
Improvident of waste till every bough
Burns with thy mellow touch
Disorderly divine.

The metaphoric vision of autumn results in a poem which centers around the image of a female artist, sorceress and siren. And Clare subordinates all other metaphors in the poem to this central one, the result being much more effective than the random, disjointed variety of individual metaphors to be found in his early work. True, the metaphors are rather conventional in "Autumn," but they are consistently developed and they do arise out of the central poetic experience. Thus Clare has progressed in his use of the experience and metaphors to the stage where he consciously relates the two and shows the cause and effect relationship which we have seen his theory to propose.

Although Clare demonstrates in several poems of this period his ability to exploit the immediate experience for an artistic purpose, he does not do so consistently. For example, "Walks in the Woods" (TP II, 51-5) is only loosely organized and poorly structured although it is obviously an improvement on poems of the first Helpstone period. There is only a casual connection between descriptive passages, provided by the poet's actions, but, unlike in his early work, they are credibly linked. Similarly we are now constantly reminded (e.g., l. 81, 102, 107) that the poem's scope is limited by the poet's physical range of perception; but as in his early work he breaks out of this limitation into digressions which tend to detract from the structure. Also the experience described is obviously a poetic one although there is only passing reference to, and partial development of, the poetic process. For example, the following lines suggest the mental nature of the

experience, but are not extended to the rest of the poem:

--Oh, I love
To sit me there till fancy weaves
Rich joys beneath a world of leaves.

The moss stump grows the easiest chair;
Agen its grain my back reclines;
And woodbine's twisted fragrance there
In many a yellow cluster shines;
The lonesome bees that hither stray
Seem travellers that loose their way.

Out of the mental process the moss stump becomes a metaphorical chair and the bees become travellers, but unlike "Autumn" they result in no controlling metaphor. Nor does this poem arise directly out of the poetic experience; there is no suggestion of the impulse to composition which resulted in the poem, as there is in the other poem. In fact there is implied a denial of the possibility of expression, a rejection of a possibility of connection between the experience and the artistic expression of it:

A rapture rushes at the heart,
A joy comes flushing in the face;
I feel so glad I can't explain
My joy, and on I rush again.

Having reached this point in the mental experience, Clare relapses to the physical as he rushes on through the woods. The poem is finally brought to an end by the conclusion of the experience, but it remains a physical experience, and the ^{re} remains within the poem no developed tie between it and the poem itself.

The token gesture towards deriving metaphors out of the situation in "Walks in the Woods" is characteristic of Clare's experimentation in this period and is repeated continually in

the poetry of these years. "Pastoral Fancies" (TP II, 15-16) contains two awkward attempts which illustrate his desire to create his own metaphors out of the material at hand, as well as his reluctance to develop these metaphors into either a dominant metaphor or a pattern of them. Thus the sight of his fishing rod leads to an awkward metaphoric statement that is entirely contained within four lines and not directly related to the remainder of the poem:

My rod and line doth all neglected lie;
 A higher joy my former sport destroys:
 Nature this day doth bait the hook, and I
 The glad fish am, that's to be caught thereby.

Similarly self-contained is his metaphor of bird choristers later in the poem.

The most successful poems of the period, however, overcome this reluctance to trust his own metaphorization. Besides the example of "Autumn," "Winter Snowstorm" (TP II, 123) demonstrates at least a partial triumph over this shortcoming. The Tibbles publish this poem as two sonnets, but it is obvious from the second sonnet's reliance on the first for its intelligibility that he intended the two to constitute one twenty-eight line poem. Considered as such it reveals a physical experience which merges into an imaginative one and in the process develops a metaphor out of the physical appearance of the scene. The physical action indicated by "underfoot" and "where we go" gives way to the perception of contrasting light and shade which in turn becomes a mental phenomenon: "fancy's pliant eye/delighted sees a vast romance displayed/and fairy halls descended from the sky." To this metaphor all subsequent ones are related and

in conjunction with it "a little shed beside the spinney wears/ the grotesque semblance of a hermitage." Thus the metaphor arises from the physical object, colored by the imagination, and leads to an imaginary description of the hermit. Significantly this hermit is only "almost" seen, and the details of his life are "shaped" by the mind. Such qualification eliminates the charge of being untrue to the experience, of describing things not actually perceived, which was so easily levelled against his less mature work. After describing this metaphoric scene Clare re-establishes the notion that the experience takes place in the mind and then confidently extends the romance metaphor to its logical conclusion:

Domestic spots near home and trod so oft,
Seen daily, known for years--by the strange wand
Of winter's humour changed; the little croft
Left green at night, when morn's loath looks obtrude,
Trees, bushes, grass, to one wild garb subdued,
Have gone and left us in another land.

Thus the snow becomes a metaphor for the imagination (or what Clare called genius) which transforms ordinary objects into the romance world of metaphor, and this metaphor is derived not from the storehouse of conventional images which supplied Clare previously, and in many cases in this period too, but from the actual experience upon which the poem is based.

An innovation of this method is employed in several of the sonnets of the period. In these Clare utilizes the limitation of the short form to describe only one part of the poetic experience, leaving the remainder only implied. This method is particularly effective in "Glington Spire":

GLINTON, thy taper spire predominates
 Over the level landscape; and the mind,
 Musing the pleasing picture, contemplates
 What elegance of beauty, much refined
 By taste, effects. It almost elevates
 One's admiration, making common things
 Around it glow with beauties not their own.
 Thus in this landscape, earth superior springs;
 Those straggling trees, though lonely seem not lone,
 But in thy presence wear a conscious power;
 Even these tombs of melancholy stone,
 Gleaning cold memories round Oblivion's bower,
 Types of eternity appear, and hire
 A lease from Fame by thy enchanting spire.
 (TP II, 113)

The mental nature of the experience is established in the second line and the poet proceeds to describe the process by which the mind transforms the landscape into metaphor, culminating in the transformation of stones into "types of eternity."

Similarly "Wood-pictures in Spring" captures the essence of the process of metaphorization:

The rich brown-umber hue the oaks unfold
 When spring's young sunshine bathes their trunks in gold,
 So rich, so beautiful, so past the power
 Of words to paint, my heart aches for the dower
 The pencil gives to soften and infuse
 This brown luxuriance of unfolding hues,
 This living, luscious tinting woodlands give,
 Into a landscape that might breathe and live;
 And this old gate that claps against the tree
 The entrance of spring's paradise should be;
 Yet paint itself with living nature fails;
 The sunshine threading through these broken rails
 In mellow shades no pencil e'er conveys,
 And mind alone feels, fancies, and portrays.
 (TP II, 121)

He is describing the moment of rapture in which the heart aches to reproduce the beauty it feels. Thus he sees the gate not as simply a physical thing, but as the potential for a metaphor of

paradise, a metaphor which he concludes can be realized only in the mind.

Development, then, is the key word in a discussion of the second Helpstone period. This development is revealed not in large numbers of mature poems, but in a few consummately handled works like those we have discussed. He relies more now on mental experiences than physical, more on natural metaphors than on artificial ones, and more on relating the poem and metaphor to the impulse from which they arose.

The next period, which began with his removal to Northborough in 1832, was one of continuous personal misfortune, but also of mature poetic accomplishment. It began in September, 1831, with a proposal for publication of The Midsummer Cushion, the publication of which was continually delayed to the detriment of Clare's financial situation and state of mind. Anxiety over his increasing debt and growing family led to a further deterioration of his health, which in turn resulted in his doctor's forbidding him to read or write in 1833. This situation was alleviated somewhat in the following year by payments for the copyright of what was now to be titled The Rural Muse and a gift from the Literary Fund. The publication of this volume in 1835 further restored Clare's peace of mind, but its failure with the public soon resulted in more illness. The letters of the period reveal several attempts to describe his illness to interested correspondents and to solicit their help in its treatment. As a result Dr. Darling prescribed an exercise in paraphrasing the Psalms to

help quiet his mind. But if this had any effect at all it was a temporary one and Clare was eventually taken, in June 1837, to Dr. Matthew Allen's new asylum at High Beech. In his four years at the asylum his mind stabilized considerably, and he continued to write poetry and read as many books as he could manage to borrow. His sense of isolation from home, both his real one with Patty and his imaginary one with the now deceased Mary Joyce, permeates the poetry of the period, especially "Child Harold" and the songs, and eventually motivated his escape from High Beech in 1841. He composed a detailed prose account of his escape and several verse accounts of the disappointment he suffered on arrival. He was allowed to remain at home until December of that year, when he was taken to the Northampton General Lunatic Asylum for the remainder of his life.

Such a disastrous period in his personal life was accompanied by a period in his artistic life which produced the majority of his masterpieces. Some, like "The Badger," fall outside the scope of this study, but others, especially "Song's Eternity," reveal a new dimension in his treatment of experience and metaphor. He did continue writing sonnets much like those of the previous period and nature poems like "To the Nightingale" (PM, 59-60) which are structured around the experience in the same way as those of the former period, but his greatest advance is in two poems which consider the validity and significance of the poem's individual experience to other possible situations in both time and place. In addition he began writing more and more songs which, though often traditional

in both form and content, relied, occasionally in this period and increasingly in the next, on an inspirational experience similar to that we have seen in his descriptive poems.

Similar to the poems of the last period but more polished in some respects is "On Visiting a Favorite Place" (TP II, 259-61). Here he establishes the present situation in the first stanza and goes on to describe a similar experience from his past. He merges the two experiences in the third stanza and emphasizes the poetic impulse which makes both significant:

With verses dancing on my tongue,
 The rapture of a heart at ease,
 A fondness and a taste for song,
 And love for places such as these,
 A mind o'erflowing with excess
 Of joys that spring from solitude,
 That sees all nature's spring to bless
 The heart away from noises rude;
 So did its sunshine warm my brow,
 And sure it gleams as lovely now.

One result of this poetic experience is a simple form of metaphorization in the following lines:

The trees their friendly arms extend
 And bid me welcome to their shade;
 The old mole-hills their welcome lend
 As if for rest on purpose made.

But another result is a more sophisticated form which demonstrates just how far Clare has progressed from his previous attempt to create a metaphor out of the fishing rod which was similarly a part of his experience in "Pastoral Fancies." Here the object is a book, and the metaphorization is much more accomplished:

When last I paid a visit here,
 The book I brought for leisure's way
 Was useless, for a volume dear
 In crowds of pictures round me lay;
 The woods, the heath, the distant field,
 In strips of green and russet dye,
 Did such delicious pleasure yield
 I shut and put the volume by;
 The book at home was sweet indeed,
 But there I felt I could not read.

This metaphor arises unobtrusively out of a particular aspect of a specific experience to make a significant contribution to the poet's attempt to convey his attitude to the scene.

Even more importantly he uses metaphor to unite the two experiences which constitute the poem. Thus the memory of the conversion in his mind of furze clumps into Eden, described in the last two lines of the poem, sparks the writing of this poem, as is indicated by his statement in the opening lines that

There is a breath--indeed there is--
 Of Eden left--I feel it now--
 Of something more than earthly bliss,
 That falls and cheers my sullen brow.

He feels the same sensation now that led to the Eden metaphor in his previous experience and he consequently unites both experiences in the same poem.

But the two advanced nature poems of the period--there may be others yet unpublished--are "Song's Eternity" and "What is there in the distant hills." The latter (SP, 100-104), though rather loose in organization, creates an effective polarity between fanciful and physical experiences which is based on a contrast between two geographical locations, "here" and "there." These two physical situations become, in turn,

metaphors for two aspects of a discussion of the relationship between individual and common preceptions (or experiences, since the act of perceiving is a cerebral experience). He opens the poem by questioning the role fancy plays in making the distant scene attractive to him and continues to question this for seven stanzas. In so doing he questions the value of the individual, present experience as a basis for the imaginative experience:

Do old oaks thicken all the woods
With weeds and brakes as here
Does common water make the floods
Thats common every where.

If the present scene and experience of perception are "common" and therefore universal, his poetry based on them would be likewise universal. Thus the individual experience would contain the essence of all other experiences and reliance on imaginary, fanciful experiences would consequently be invalid. He suggests such a conclusion in stanza eight:

If so my fancy idly clings
To notions far away
And longs to roam for common things
All round her every day.

But he expands this concept later in the poem. He finds that fanciful, or unexperienced, experiences are inferior to the real type on which his poem is based because they are untrue to nature and not capable of producing repeated pleasures:

The poets in the tales they tell
And with their happy powers
Have made lands where their fancys dwell
Seem better lands then ours

Their storied woods and vales and streams
 Grow up within the mind
 Like beauty seen in pleasant dreams
 We no where else can find.

His criterion for validity is that the experience be found in more than just the poet's mind. For its pleasure resides in the possibility for its recurrence:

O nature's pleasant moods and dreams
 In every journey lies
 That glads my heart with simple themes
 And cheers and gratifies.

Every venture into real experience results in a gladdened heart and "simple themes."

Although the moralizing of the two final stanzas is a disappointing conclusion to the discussion carried on in the poem, the poem itself effectively conveys Clare's view that poetry which stems from the real physical situation is the only valid type because the only one capable of repetition.

He conveys this theme by setting up a geographical distance between the perception which constitutes his immediate experience and that which would constitute an imaginary one. Thus he is able to develop his argument in terms of "here," the actual scene perceived, and "there," the scene which can only be perceived by the mind without a basis in nature; as well as of two alternatives: "nowhere," the non-existent therefore unattainable experience, and "everywhere," the ultimately experiential. This pattern resolves itself into Clare's approval, in the last two words of the poem, of "everywhere," but not before each element of the pattern has been established as a metaphor. The old oaks and mud cottages combine into the

physical scene that represents the immediate perception or experience, the storied woods represent the imaginary experience, the daisies and violets of stanzas nineteen and twenty are metaphors for the universal or common experience, and the pleasant dreams are associated with "nowhere," the non-experience. Thus experiences, in the form of perceptions, become metaphors for abstract concepts in a discussion of the validity in poetry of such experiences.

Such a fusion of metaphor and experience is more effectively achieved in "Song's Eternity" (TP II, 266-8). The entire statement of this poem is contained in the physical situation to which the poet draws our attention. He does this in the first couplet:

What is song's eternity?
Come and see.

The answer to the initial question is a simple pointing out verbally of the demonstration of song's eternity in the experience described. The physical situation thereby becomes a metaphor for the several aspects of the answer which Clare suggests in the course of the poem, aspects such as the everlasting quality of song (l. 57-60) and its living quality (l. 19-20). What is this situation?

Dreamers, list the honey-bee;
Mark the tree
Where the bluecap, 'tootle tee,'
Sings a glee
Sung to Adam and to Eve--
Here they be.
When floods covered every bough,
Noah's ark
Heard that ballad singing now
Hark, hark.

From this physical scene, the "here" and "now" of the poem, Clare makes profound implications about the "then" and "there." In other words he views the present experience as a universal one which contains within it the essence of melodies in different locations both geographically and chronologically. Thus to the question "Mighty songs that miss decay,/What are they?" Clare can point to this experience as a demonstration of the answer because

The eternity of song
 Liveth here;
 Nature's universal tongue
 Singeth here
 Songs I've heard and felt and seen
 Everywhere;
 Songs like the grass are evergreen:
 The giver
 Said 'live and be'--and they have been,
 For ever.

Thus the poet's immediate experience becomes a metaphor for the eternity of song; it becomes a physical embodiment of an abstract concept to which the poet need only point to provide not only focus for the poem, but also a profound understanding of what makes song universal in both time and space.

This poem is the height of Clare's achievement in experimentation with the poetic process. The metaphor here not only arises out of the experience, it fuses with it to provide both structure, through focus, and message, through the situation's implications which Clare refuses to break down into logical terms.

But Clare's most consistent accomplishment of this period is contained in the songs. Many of them are stereotyped love songs and imitations, but several are original in that they

draw on an immediate experience for their substance. Such is the case with "'Tis Autumn Now" (PM, 103-4) in which physical description of a landscape leads to thoughts of change associated with the season and hence by contrast to constancy and its embodiment in Mary. The remainder of the song draws a parallel between the scene and his love:

To Mary first my heart did bow
 And if she's true she keeps it now,

 Just as the summer keeps the flower
 Which spring concealed in hoods of gold,
 Or unripe harvest met the shower
 And made earth's blessing manifold;
 Just so my Mary lives for me
 A silent thought for months and years;
 The world may live in revelry;
 Her name my lonely quiet cheers,
 And cheer it will, whate'er may be,
 While Mary lives in bloom for me.

Similarly in "I've wandered many a weary mile" (LP, 38) the poet's experience is the basis of a song reaffirming his love for Mary; but perhaps the most successful use of experience in a song is in "The floods come oer the meadow leas" (LP, 63):

The floods come oer the meadow leas
 The dykes are full and brimming
 Field furrows reach the horses knees
 Where wild ducks oft are swimming
 The skyes are black the fields are bare
 The trees their coats are loosing,
 The leaves are dancing in the air
 The sun its warmth refusing

Brown are the flags and fadeing sedge
 And tanned the meadow plains
 Bright yellow is the osier hedge
 Beside the brimming drains
 The crows sit on the willow tree
 The lake is full below
 But still the dullest thing I see
 Is self that wanders slow

The dullest scenes are not so dull
 As thoughts I cannot tell
 The brimming dykes are not so full
 As my hearts silent swell
 I leave my troubles to the winds
 With none to share a part
 The only joy my feeling finds
 Hides in an aching heart.

Here description of the poet's perception occupies the first two stanzas but gains added significance at the end of the second with the poet's comparison of himself with the scene perceived. The final stanza compares the dullness of the scene and fullness of the floods to the dullness of his thought and the fullness of heart which is indicative of his sorrow. He concludes by adding a new dimension to his predicament, a loneliness based on his lack of comfort from other humans. His experience, the initial perception, thus provides an objective correlative for his emotion.

In the last period of his life, in the asylum at Northampton, this particular role of experience becomes increasingly the common one. The bulk of his work written between 1842 and his death in 1864 consists of songs; consequently most of the experiences he utilizes in poetry are found in these songs. Often, however, they deal with no particular experience and depend more on the traditional song forms for their unity. For during this period Clare seems to have been unable to sustain the experimentation with experience and metaphor which reached its high point in his High Beech days, possibly because of his increasingly disturbed mind which was obviously capable of fine outbursts of song and poetry but not of consistent accumulative composition. Even the long poems of the period, "Child Harold"

and "Don Juan," are powerful because of their songs and series of individual stanzas rather than their sustained power. But a more likely reason for this decline stems probably from his being allowed less frequent rambles outside the asylum walls, hence fewer poetic experiences upon which to base his poems. As a result he wrote made-to-order love songs and several poems from remembered experiences, as well as several sea-songs and drinking songs which have not been published. And the few poems in which he did employ personal experiences use it very simply, with none of the complexity or subtlety of his best previous ones.

The most common technique of these few poems is to describe the physical situation and move from it to praise of woman, thus creating out of it a love song. Such is the case in "Early Morning" (PM, 144-5) where the poet wanders out at dawn describing what he sees until he encounters "a sweet maid." He then continues to describe the experience including praise of the girl within the description. Thus the walk which would have led to a poetic experience in his earlier work ends with a kiss and a promise to return. Such a movement in the poem is symptomatic of a corresponding shift in Clare's emphasis from concern for his development as a poet to enjoyment of escape into a world of fantasy. This shift is evident from the number of poems which contain remnants of his past method of composition, based on the experience, in conjunction with token praises of neighboring or remembered girls. Some of these poems contain their own charm, however, and the technique is effective

in a few like "The Winds Blow Softly" (PM, 180) and "The Sweetest Woman There" (PM, 187-8). This second poem begins by describing a physical scene that conveys a mood of gloom which we find out later (l. 18) is shared by the poet. He justifies his speaking of the woman by relating her to the scene, and by including her in the actual experience:

And there I saw a bonny maid
That proved my heart's delight--
All day she was a goddess made,
An angel fair at night.
We loved, and in each other's power
Felt nothing to condemn,
I was the leaf and she the flower
And both grew on one stem.

Note here the metaphors arise out of the objects of both the experience and the scene and become, in the last two lines, the vehicle for describing the action of the experience. He follows this stanza with mention of the change she causes in his view of the scene, and concludes the poem by relating the description in the opening stanza to his sentiment of love:

She lives among the meadow floods
That foam and roar away,
While fading hedgerows, distant woods,
Fade off the naked spray.
She lives to cherish and delight
All nature with her face,
She brought me joy, morn, noon and night,
In that too lonely place.

The progress of the experience and the description of the situation are simple but effective, and add an element of sophistication to what would otherwise be just another love song.

Perhaps the finest poem of this period to use an experience and its resulting metaphorization is "Clifford Hill"

(PM, 166). In its opening stanza the river is established as a metaphor for the passing life of man and in the second, the time of day, sunset, suggests Clare is concerned with the twilight of life. Both metaphors are derived directly from the experience and continue to work throughout the poem with no overt reminders of their significance. Thus the flowing waters cause grief in the poet, though he is still capable of delight in the brightness and vitality of things around him:

I smile, and yet my heart will grieve
 To see the waters flow,
 To see the flags that look so green,
 The sungilt waves so bright.
 I wander here this lovely e'en
 In wonder and delight.

This contrast is reiterated in the "dark" and "bright" of the next two lines and symbolized by two lines in the last stanza:

There all secure does build the dove,
 While click-clack goes the mill.

The mill, of course, is an audible reminder of the flowing of the water which occurs while nature continues with its process of rebuilding. The experience finishes equally symbolically:

And now in Nature's sweet repose
 I leave this spot awhile;
 The bee is buried in the rose,
 And man gone from his toil.

Night has come, man's toil is over, and the poet passes on.

This symbolic submission to death is conveyed with the same economy as the rest of the poem and illustrates Clare's ability to work effectively with metaphors even this late in his life.

This success is not often achieved in the poems we are concerned with, however. The final period of his life was not one of triumph but of decline. He turned his mind to other types

of poetry, pausing only now and then for outbursts such as this, which indicate the reawakening of the poetic impulse:

How beautiful is Sunset:
 Eye and breast
 Is filled with ecstasies
 Of love and joy
 The gorgeous livery,
 The glorious west,
 Is one short glance of
 Heaven from the sky. (PM, 190)

Most of his life at Northampton was uneventful save for his fortunate contact with W. F. Knight, an asylum employee who encouraged Clare to write and who collected and transcribed most of the poems, and his employment at helping Anne Elizabeth Baker compile her Glossary of Northamptonshire Words and Phrases. In early spring of 1864 he wrote his last poem, "Bird's Nests" and on May 20, 1864 he died peacefully at the asylum.

His achievement is considerable and this chapter has dealt with only a very limited part of that achievement. But even this development reveals the experimentation through which he tried to control and record the mental excitement he experienced during the poetic process.

CHAPTER III

THE MAJOR METAPHORS

Clare's work reveals a consistent use of certain major metaphors which tends to give it a unifying pattern. Eric Robinson and Geoffrey Summerfield suggest this consistency in their refutation of John Middleton Murry's charge that Clare "had nothing of the principal of inward growth which gives to Wordsworth's most careless work a place within the unity of a great scheme."¹ They answer:

In the landscape of Eden before the Fall, Clare's boyhood love, Mary Joyce, is present--she is the Eve to Clare's Adam. Unless we recognize that this is the conscious pattern of imagery in Clare's poetry, we are bound to miss a great deal of his point. Everything in his boyhood environment assumes a new character, a vividness far beyond accurate natural history, a deeper identity because it is part of what Clare calls 'Loves register.' In this 'register,' not just trees but every single tree, not just grass but every single blade of grass is a special act of the Creator and participates in the freshness before the Fall. (SP, xvii)

This pattern is made possible by Clare's conscious attempt to apply the process of metaphorization to all aspects of his work, including the underlying structure to which he related his poems. Thus major metaphors, consistently utilized and developed, lend an organization to his work. They include the book, which he uses to represent nature, and the bird, a symbol of the poet, as well as the Eden and Mary metaphors referred to by Robinson

¹John Middleton Murry, John Clare and Other Studies (London: Peter Nevill, 1950), p. 8.

and Summerfield. These latter two are most important, though, and serve best to show the unity of Clare's scheme.

In this scheme Eden is a metaphor for a complex state of mind which he found could only be experienced in childhood and in select, but brief, periods throughout the rest of his life. The decreasing ability to maintain this state of mind as he grew older, therefore, represented for him the loss of Eden, and the mental state which resulted from this loss he expressed in a wasteland metaphor. Thus the bulk of his mature work is concerned with this wasteland and with momentary glimpses of Eden, which were in fact revivals of the state of mind which he associated with the bliss of his early life. This progression from Eden to the wasteland is clearly marked in Clare's poetry and often remarked upon in his prose. It gives to the body of his work a coherence and structure which reveals his ability to conceive larger metaphors than those confined to a single poem, and to apply them more or less consistently throughout his career.

He outlines what he has tried to do in "I Am":

I was a being created in the race
Of men disdaining bounds of place and time--
A spirit that could travel o'er the space
Of earth and heaven--like a thought sublime,
Tracing creation, like my maker, free. (SP, 196)

The creation which Clare has traced is that of one man, himself, but the consequent parallel between his life and that of humanity has been the aim of his poetry. Earlier in his career he acknowledged this attempt and outlined briefly the form his

canon would assume:

Ah what a paradise begins with life &
what a wilderness the knowledge of the world
discloses Surely the Garden of Eden was
nothing more than our first parents entrance
upon life & the loss of it their knowledge of
the world. (Prose, 17-18)

Thus Eden represents the state of existence not only of prelapsarian man but also of the beginning of each individual's life. And he remained faithful to this conception of paradise throughout his writings.

That this paradise is a state of mind, rather than simply a chronological period or geographical location to which Clare was attracted, is obvious from a glance at almost any of his poems in which he describes it. For example, "Joys of Childhood" stresses the role of imagination:

Fancy spreads Edens wheresoe'er they be;
The world breaks on them like an opening flower,
Green joys and cloudless skies are all they see;
The hour of childhood is a rose's hour. (TP II, 41)

And "Childhood" reiterates the importance of the fancy in establishing the truth, or mental reality, of this state:

We even fancied we could fly
—— And fancy then was true;
So with the clouds upon the sky
In dreams at night we flew. (TP II, 28)

But the most profound, as well as artistically satisfying, exploration of this state of mind is found in "The Dying Child":

He could not die when trees were green,
For he loved the time too well.
His little hands, when flowers were seen,
Were held for the bluebell,
As he was carried o'er the green.

His eye glanced at the white-nosed bee;
 He knew those children of the spring:
 When he was well and on the lea
 He held one in his hands to sing,
 Which filled his heart with glee.

Infants, the children of the spring!
 How can an infant die
 When butterflies are on the wing,
 Green grass, and such a sky?
 How can they die at spring?

He held his hands for daisies white,
 And then for violets blue,
 And took them all to bed at night
 That in the green fields grew,
 As childhood's sweet delight.

And then he shut his little eyes,
 And flowers would notice not;
 Birds' nests and eggs caused no surprise,
 He now no blossoms got:
 They met with plaintive sighs.

When winter came and blasts did sigh,
 And bare were plain and tree,
 As he for ease in bed did lie
 His soul seemed with the free,
 He died so quietly. (TP II, 467)

The mental state associated with the paradise of childhood, though in this case not specifically with Eden, precludes the concept of death. Likeⁱⁿ Eden before the fall, death is an unknown phenomenon to a child, and is incongruous with his concept of existence. Conversely, the state of mind associated with the winter of life accepts death easily and quietly.

The complexity of this Eden metaphor, however, is revealed by the variety of concepts contained within it. It is certainly not easily defined, but an exploration of at least some of the ideas Clare relates to it is possible. And since love, for Clare, was "the mainspring of existence" (LP, 38) it

is not surprising that it is the major contributor to the Edenic state of mind. For it was Eden's contribution to creation:

Tw'as matchless Eve in paradise
With beauty from above
That gave to Man without Earth's vice
Her love

Adah and Zillah next in flower
About their Adam move
They slept beside him in the bower
In love. (LP, 195)

And it is the major force in the corresponding stage of the individual life: "love is life's spring, the summer of the soul,/ the Eden of earth's happiness" (PM, 118). Elsewhere love is equated with beauty as a contributor to that state of mind which produces a paradisaal view of the world:

I sat with love by pasture stream
Aye beautys self was sitting bye
Till fields did more then edens seem. (SP, 183)

In another poem even this beauty is based on its affinity with the creation:

Creations steps ones wandering meets
Untouched by those of man
Things seem the same in such retreats
As when the world began

Furze ling and brake all mingling free
And grass forever green
All seem the same old things to be
As they have ever been. (SP, 167)

Furthermore, innocence is an aspect of this state of mind, as are freedom and security:

Then I played like a flower in the shade and the sun
And slept as in Eden when daylight was done
There I lived with my parents, and felt my heart free.
(LP, 170)

Thus Eden stands as a metaphor for a particular mental state which embraces several concepts more or less associated with the original Eden.

Clare makes a point of linking, in his metaphoric statements about this frame of mind, both the original paradise and childhood, the period in which love, beauty, innocence and freedom are most concentrated. He therefore sees nature as a reminder of the prelapsarian condition of man because it possesses the same pleasure-giving elements as did Eden:

All tenants of an ancient place
 And heirs of noble heritage
 Coeval they with Adams race
 And blest with more substantial age
 For when the world first saw the sun
 These little flowers beheld him too
 And when his love for earth begun
 They were the first his smiles to woo...

And still they bloom as in the day
 They first crowned wilderness and rock
 When Abel haply crowned with May
 The firstlings of his little flock. (SP, 180)

His descriptions of childhood also reveal paradisaal qualities which are unmistakably related to the Edenic state of mind. Thus he writes, "there is nothing but poetry about the existence of childhood real simple soul-moving poetry laughter and joy of poetry & not its philosophy & there is nothing of poetry about manhood but the reflection & the remembrance of what has been" (Prose, 44-5). He describes childhood in terms of the Eden metaphor in several poems and in terms of paradise in many more. For example, "Childhood" contains the following description which reveals the intensity of his nostalgia for his former paradise:

The past it is a magic word
 Too beautiful to last
 It looks back like a lovely face
 Who can forget the past
 Theres music in its childhood
 Thats known in every tongue
 Like the music of the wildwood
 All chorus to the song

The happy dream the joyous play
 The life without a sigh
 The beauty thoughts can neer pourtray
 In those four letters lye
 The painters beauty breathing art
 The poets speaking pens
 Can neer call back a thousand part
 Of what that word contains. (SP, 14-15)

Thus Eden is a metaphor for the state of mind which characterizes childhood; and consequently it represents the initial stage of the developing organization of Clare's work. It contains within it all the associations which awoke in him both an appreciation of nature and an impulse to communicate the intensity of feeling which this mental state involved. But he was also aware of the transitoriness of this state, and therefore includes within the overall metaphor the concept of the loss of Eden. He realized that

As we grow into life we leave our better
 life behind us like the image of a beauty seen
 in a looking glass happiness only disseminates
 happiness while she is present & when she is
 gone we retain no impression of her enjoyments
 but a blank of cold imaginings & real
 dissapointments. (Prose, 224)

This realization resulted in a preoccupation in his mature works with the loss of his ability to experience the Edenic state of mind, as well as with some of the reasons for this loss.

This preoccupation is revealed in several descriptions of loss, but is particularly well depicted in "Remembrances":

O I never dreamed of parting or that trouble had a sting
 Or that pleasures like a flock of birds would ever take to wing

Leaving nothing but a little naked spring...

But alack I never dreamed that the world had other toys
 To petrify first feelings like the fable into stone
 Till I found the pleasure past and a winter come at last
 Then the fields were sudden bare and the sky got over cast
 And boy hoods pleasing haunts like a blossom in the blast
 Was shrivelled to a withered weed and trampled down and done
 Till vanished was the morning spring and set the summer sun
 And winter fought her battle strife and won. (SP, 174-5)

Here, as elsewhere in his work, the concept of childhood is inextricably linked with the geographical area in which it occurred and the loss of his Edenic state of mind is paralleled by a corresponding decline of beauty in the landscape. This loss is a seasonal one, but in other poems it is a permanent one:

Far spread the moorey ground a level scene
 Bespread with rush and one eternal green
 That never felt the rage of blundering plough
 Though centurys wreathed springs blossoms on its brow
 Still meeting plains that stretched them far away
 In unchecked shadows of green brown and grey
 Unbounded freedom ruled the wandering scene
 Nor fence of ownership crept in between
 To hide the prospect of the following eye
 Its only bondage was the circling sky
 One mighty flat undwarfed by bush and tree
 Spread its faint shadow of immensity
 And lost itself which seemed to eke its bounds
 In the blue mist the orisons edge surrounds

Now this sweet vision of my boyish hours
 Free as spring clouds and wild as summer flowers
 Is faded all--a hope that blossomed free
 And hath been once no more shall ever be. (SP, 169-70)

The freedom and beauty associated with childhood was reflected in his surroundings, and their loss is reflected in a similar destruction of nature.

The reasons Clare gives for the loss of Eden are manifold. But appropriate to the metaphor is one reason, the gaining of knowledge which results in the fall:

ERE I had known the world and understood
 How many follies wisdom names its own,
 Distinguishing things evil from things good,
 The dread of sin and death--ere I had known
 Knowledge, the root of evil--had I been
 Left in some lone place where the world is wild,
 And trace of troubling man was never seen,
 Brought up by Nature as her favourite child,
 As born for naught but joy where all rejoice,
 Emparadised in ignorance of sin,
 Where Nature tries with never chiding voice,
 Like tender nurse, our careless smiles to win--

The future, dreamless, beautiful would be;
 The present, foretaste of eternity. (TP I, 520)

A similar cause is explained in "Childhood":

Youth revels at its rising hour
 With more then summer joys
 And rapture holds the fairey flower
 Which reason soon destroys. (SP, 15)

Reason and knowledge destroy the innocence of childhood by bringing awareness of good and evil, consequently eliminating the possibility of the mind finding pleasure in everything it perceives. Innocent love is thereby corrupted by inconstancy:

I thought myself a king that day
 My throne was beauties bosom

And little thought an evil hour
 Was bringing clouds around me
 And least of all that little flower
 Would turn a thorn to wound me
 She showed me after many days
 Though withered how she prized it
 And then she leaned to wealthy praise
 And my poor love despised it. (SP, 38)

And Clare relates this inconstancy directly to his Eden metaphor:

The Bible says that God is love
I like so wise a plan
But was it ordered from above
That love was [not] wi' man

This contradiction puzzles me
And it may puzzle all
Was Adam thus foredoomed to be
Our misery by his fall
Eves fall has been a fall to me
And do the best I can
Woman I neither love nor see
And cannot be a man. (LP, 184)

The physical destruction of Clare's environment which corresponded to the decline of Eden resulted mainly from enclosure. A striking contrast between his pre-enclosure surroundings and those after the "fall" is presented in "The Mores," and his bitterness toward this act of parliament is evident:

Fence now meets fence in owners little bounds
Of field and meadow large as garden grounds
In little parcels little minds to please
With men and flocks imprisoned ill at ease
Each little path that led its pleasant way
As sweet as morning leading night astray
Where little flowers bloomed round a varied host
That travel felt delighted to be lost...
These paths are stopt--the rude philistines thrall
Is laid upon them and destroyed them all
Each little tyrant with his little sign
Shows where man claims earth glows no more divine
But paths to freedom and to childhood dear
A board sticks up to notice 'no road here'
And on the tree with ivy overhung
The hated sign by vulgar taste is hung. (SP, 170-1)

As this passage indicates the loss resulted in a restricted and uninspiring landscape. And outside Eden Clare found a wasteland which he also describes in terms of his major metaphor. Thus the garden becomes a desert, cursed by toil as Adam and Eve were:

I hate the plough that comes to dissaray
 Her holiday delights--and labours toil
 Seems vulgar curses on the sunny soil
 And man the only object that distrains
 Earths garden into deserts for his gains.

(SP, 80)

He describes this desert in "Child Harold":

... Life Betrays
 Quicksands and Gulphs And Storms That Howl And Sting
 All Quiet Into Madness And Delays
 Care Hides The Sunshine With Its Raven Wing
 And Hell Glooms Sadness Oer The Songs Of Spring

Like Satans Warcry First In Paradise
 When Love Lay Sleeping On The Flowery Slope
 Like Virtue Wakeing In The Arms Of Vice
 Or Deaths Sea Bursting In The Midst Of Hope
 Sorrows Will Stay--And Pleasures Will Elope
 In The Uncertain Cartnty Of Care [certainty]
 Joys Bounds Are Narrow But A Wider Scope
 Is Left For Trouble Which One Life Must Bear
 Of Which All Human Life Is More Our Less The Heir. (LP, 69)

And he identifies his "fallen" state of mind with natural
 inhabitants of a physical wasteland:

Thou hermit haunter of the lonely glen
 And common wild and heath--the desolate face
 Of rude waste landscapes far away from men
 Where frequent quarrys give thee dwelling place
 With strangest taste and labour undeterred
 Drilling small holes along the quarrys side
 More like the haunts of vermin than a bird
 And seldom by the nesting boy descried
 Ive seen thee far away from all thy tribe
 Flirting about the unfrequented sky
 And felt a feeling that I cant describe
 Of lone seclusion and a hermit joy
 To see thee circle round nor go beyond
 That lone heath and its melancholly pond. (SP, 69)

Although this identification causes joy, it is the joy of the
 outcast, the hermit who is incapable of experiencing the pleasures
 of Eden.

But the joy in this poem is symptomatic of the possibility
 Clare felt of the Edenic state of mind recurring, even during

that part of life which he designated a wasteland. For even in this desert we get glimpses of paradise, glimpses which make life outside Eden tolerable and at times even pleasurable. Clare had no formulated theory, either psychological or philosophical, to support this view, but he was constantly aware of these glimpses in his own experience and of their effect on his mind. Consequently he recorded in his poems several such moments of perception.

The most elementary and least profound of these insights are those which are composed of memories of a former Edenic condition, either an imaginative one of the original Eden or the real one of childhood. The former condition is remembered in a statement which, although it contains suggestions of the individual paradise of youth, contains an awareness of what is symbolized by the prelapsarian state of existence:

If love you believe in Belief is my love
As it lived once in Eden ere we fell from above
To this heartless this friendless this desolate earth
And kept in first love Immortality's birth. (LP, 232)

This passage is a conditional statement, but it does hold credible the possibility that the original Edenic love is retained in the individual's experience of first love. Memory of this initial love is a pervasive element of Clare's poetry and is responsible for the majority of his recurring glimpses of Eden. First love of woman results in such a glimpse:

...and still my song
Is her through sun and shade through right and wrong
On her my memory forever dwells
The flower of Eden--evergreen of song
Truth in my heart the same love story tells. (LP, 59-60)

A similar result comes from the memory of early love of nature:

I love to walk the fields they are to me
 A legacy no evil can destroy
 They like a spell set every rapture free
 That cheered me when a boy
 Play pastime--all times blotting pen conseals
 Come like a new born joy
 To greet me in the fields. (SP, 150)

But the closest Clare comes to analyzing this particular phenomenon is his brief analysis of its effect on him in "The Wild-Flower Nosegay":

'Tis sweet to view, as in a favour'd book,
 Like's rude beginning page long turned o'er;
 'Tis nature's common feeling, back to look
 On things that pleas'd us, when they are no more:
 Pausing on childish scenes a wish repeat,
 Seeming more sweet to value when we're men,
 As one, awaken'd from a vision sweet,
 Wishes to sleep and dream it o'er agen. (TP I, 227)

Thus the memory of a former Edenic state produces moments of pleasure in his post-lapsarian condition.

But a deeper, more profound experience results from the mind momentarily transforming the wasteland into its own Eden, a transformation which results directly from the poetic process of perception outlined in the first chapter. Clare describes this power of the mind in a fragment of Manuscript 110:

The healthful mind that muses and inhales
 The green eyed dews of morning finds his way
 To Paradise Gods choice self-planted vales. (LP, 151)

The Eden allusion here is obvious and the mental requirement for the experience is also clear; the mind, in the proper condition, moves from the perception of dews to a metaphoric glimpse of the Garden of Eden. A similar concept is stated in "Sighing for Retirement" with the addition of the wasteland--Eden dichotomy:

To common eyes they only seem
 A desert waste and drear;
 To taste and love they always shine,
 A garden through the year. (PM, 58)

Taste and love, both qualities of the mind, combine to transform nature into a paradise. He describes this process more precisely in "Shadows of Taste":

Minds spring as various as the leaves of trees
 To follow taste and all her sweets explore
 And Edens make where deserts spread before
 In poesys spells some all their raptures find
 And revel in the melodies of mind
 There nature o'er the soul her beauty flings
 In all the sweets and essences of things. (SP, 113)

The results of this conversion were brief periods of intense response to the beauties of nature, which provide the germ for most of Clare's poems. A good example occurs in "On Visiting a Favourite Place":

A power divine seemed everywhere
 And joy's own rapture where I lay;
 The furze clumps in their golden flowers
 Made Edens in these golden hours. (TP II, 261)

And often these experiences revealed glimpses of a future paradise:

Is there another world for this frail dust
 To warm with life and be itself again?
 Something about me daily speaks there must,
 And why should instinct nourish hopes in vain?
 'Tis nature's prophecy that such will be,
 And everything seems struggling to explain
 The close-sealed volume of its mystery.
 Time wandering onward keeps its usual pace
 As seeming anxious of eternity,
 To meet that calm and find a resting-place.
 E'en the small violet feels a future power
 And waits each year renewing blooms to bring,
 And surely man is no inferior flower
 To die unworthy of a second spring. (TP I, 522)

The recurring glimpses of a past Eden and this suggestion that nature daily reveals the prospect of a future paradise served to sustain Clare in the wasteland to which he compared his later life. Although the details of these insights differ from those of Wordsworth's "spots of time," their essential character and certainly their effect is similar. Clare found, as did Wordsworth, that

Invigorating thoughts from former years,
Might fix the wavering balance of my mind,
And haply meet reproaches, too, whose power
May spur me on, in manhood now mature,
To honorable toil. (Prelude [1805] , I, 649-53)

Eden, then, is a metaphor in Clare's work for the state of mind primarily associated with childhood but often attainable even in later life. It provides structure to the body of his work by creating a polarity, embodied in metaphors, between the state of mind which maintains a sensitivity to beauty, a freedom of expression and a love for other natural things, and a state of mind (characterized by the wasteland) which lacks sensitivity, freedom and love. It also provides development by demonstrating the gradual decline of Edenic experiences into the predominantly barren landscape of Clare's later years. But it also represents the recurring moments in his life in which his sensitive state of mind predominates, and in so doing explains the possibility of his poetry of enthusiasm being composed during these otherwise barren years.

Another metaphor which has its origin in his youth and serves to demonstrate a "principle of inward growth" in his poetry is that of Mary Joyce. She was a childhood sweetheart

whom he met at the local dayschool held in the vestry of Glinton Church. Clare himself describes this acquaintance:

I was a lover very early in life my first attachment being a schoolboy affection was for Mary who cost me more ballads than sighs & was belovd with a romantic or Platonic sort of feeling If I could but gaze on her face or fancy a smile on her countenance it was sufficient I went away satisfyd we played with each other but named nothing of love yet I fancyd her eyes told me her affections we walked together as school-companions in leisure hours but our talk was of play & our actions the wanton nonsense of children.
(Prose, 44)

When he left school this relationship was interrupted, but it was renewed temporarily sometime during their teenage years. This second friendship was terminated by Mary's father, and the two were forced to part. Much later, in 1821, Clare records another glimpse of her, and subsequently vows to forget her: "I have had the horrors agen upon me by once agen seeing devoted Mary & have written the last doggerel that shall ever sully her name & her remembrance any more tis reflection of the past & not of the present that torments me" (Letters, 123). But he continually expressed his desire to regain contact with her thereafter, although his efforts were never successful.

At this point Clare's imagination took over and began to transform her image into a metaphor. The metaphor which resulted was much more complex than the Eden metaphor and less easily defined. It is perhaps more valuable, then, to attempt a description of her role in Clare's poetry and her function as a unifying metaphor in his canon, than to specify any consistent concept which she represents. Because, although she is

associated with beauty, youth and love, and is at times referred to as the source of poetic inspiration--his muse, she tends to represent the accumulation of these concepts rather than one specific idea.

That Clare was conscious of creating an imaginary woman out of the real Mary Joyce is obvious from his statements in prose and verse concerning his relationship to her. Indeed the potential for this metaphoric conception of her was present in their initial acquaintance. For Clare writes that his "regard for her lasted a long time after school days was over, but it was platonic affection, nothing else but love in idea, for she knew nothing of my fondness for her" (Sketches, 86-7). And this love in idea developed into an ideal love, residing entirely in the imagination of the poet: "fearing to meet a denial, I carried it on in my own fancies to every extreme, writing songs in her praise, and making her mine with every indulgence of the fancy."² Further evidence that Clare was aware of the imaginative nature of his conception is provided by at least two poems, "Daydream in Summer" and "Child Harold." The former discusses "youth and Mary," concluding "that both were shadows of the mind" (TP I, 428-9), and the latter reveals his knowledge of the difference between the reality and the imaginary in their relationship:

²Quoted in J. W. and Anne Tibble, John Clare: A Life (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1932), p. 58.

When words refuse before the crowd
 My Marys name to give
 The muse in silence sings aloud
 And there my love will live. (LP, 52)

Although in reality his love remains unexpressed, it gains expression and life in his imaginative conception of it. He is aware that he is creating metaphor out of the material provided by his real childhood sweetheart.

The creation of this metaphor becomes a major pre-occupation of both his prose and verse, and, aided by a series of dreams which reveal the extent to which his mind was affected by this preoccupation, eventually produces a goddess to which Clare gave credit for inspiring and sustaining his creativity. The first of these dreams occurred before he had written any poetry, therefore before his second acquaintance with Mary, and featured a prophetess who dramatically, though inaccurately, forecast his future literary success. After a series of preliminary experiences

...the scene turned to a city where she led me to what appeared to be a booksellers shop where I reluctantly followed she said something to the owner of the place who stood behind a counter when she smiled & at his back on a shelf among a vast crowd of books were three vols lettered with my own name--I see them now I was very astonished & turning to look in her face I was awake in a moment but the impression never left me I see her still she is my good genius & I believe in her ideally almost as fresh as reality. (Prose, 232)

The second visit of this woman occurred in 1832:

...she was in white garments beautifully disordered but sorrowful in her countenance yet I instantly knew her face again--when we got into the church a light streamed in one corner

of the chancel & from that light appeared to come the final decision of man's actions in life I felt awfully afraid tho not terrified & in a moment my name was called from the north east corner of the chancel when my conductress smiled in exstacy & uttered something as prophetic of happiness I knew all was right & she led me again into the open air when I imperceivably awoke to the sound of soft music. (Prose, 232)

These dreams convinced Clare of the existence of a guardian spirit:

I feel a beautiful providence ever about me as my attendant deity she casts her mantle about me when I am in trouble to shield me from it she attends me like a muse when I am in sickness puts her gentle hand under my head to lift it out of pains way & lays it easy by laying hope on my pillow she attends to my every weakness when I am doubting like a friend & keeps me from sorrow by showing me her pictures of happiness & then offering them--she places herself in the shadow that I may enjoy to my service the sunshine & when my faith is sinking into despondency she opens her mind as a teacher to show me truth & give me wisdom. (Prose, 226)

That this deity also filled the role of a muse is obvious from his conclusion to "The Dream":

...these dreams of a beautiful presence a woman deity gave the sublimest conceptions of beauty to my imagination & being last night with the same presence--the lady divinity left such a vivid picture of her visits in my sleep dreaming of dreams that I could no longer doubt her existence so I wrote them down to prolong the happiness of my faith in believing her my guardian genius--the cause I cannot tell the fact is truth if so be it may be said of dreams. (Prose, 232-3)

Clare took the next obvious step in his poetry and united this dream deity with his imaginative conception of Mary Joyce, especially in "The Nightmare" to be discussed later in this chapter. He was consequently able to call her "the muse of every song I write" (LP, 48) and credit her with having made

his songs divine (LP, 45). But he also unites his concept of nature with this goddess:

The Muses--they are living things,
And Beauty still is dear;
But, though I worshipped stocks and stones,
'Twas Woman everywhere.

In Love's delight my steps were led,
I sang of Beauty's choice;
I saw her in the books I read,--
All then was MARY JOYCE.

I saw her love in Beauty's face,
I saw her in the rose;
I saw her in the fairest flowers,
In every weed that grows;

Till PATTY, lighting in my path,
Did fonder love recall;
She stood a flower in Beauty's way,
The Lily of them all! (PM, 62)

This passage also reveals an additional aspect of Clare's metaphorization of Mary--that she is manifest in several other women in his poetry. Thus although his tribute to Patty, his wife, is perhaps sincere it is only another aspect of the Mary worship which produced similar poems, to Patty as well as to several other woman. Clare gives evidence himself:

But other Marys, etc., excited my admiration, and the first creator of my warm passions was lost in a perplexed multitude of names, that would fill a volume to calendar them down, ere a bearded chin could make the lawful apology for my entering the lists of Cupid. (Sketches, 87)

And he demonstrates this technique in concentrated form in his description of his pastime during his third visit to London:

On this my last visit I amused my illness by catching the most beautiful women faces in the crowd as I passed on in it till I was satiated as it were with the variety & the multitude & my mind lost its memory in the

eternity of beautys successions & was glad to
 glide on in vacancy with the living stream.
 (Prose, 94)

Thus the qualities for which the image of Mary stood become dispersed in a series of minor deities, each one more metaphoric than real.

But the major metaphor remains concentrated in his conception of Mary, the consistency of which gives unity and a degree of progression to his work. This unity and progression can be demonstrated by studying several selected works. For the early lyrics, perhaps because they are closer in time to the real acquaintance with Mary, reveal a measure of realism which gives way to almost allegorical qualities in "The Nightmare," and to extremely ideal attributes in "Child Harold."

The early poems to Mary tend to be more confined to the real Mary Joyce than to the goddess she becomes in the later works, although "The Nightmare" has no such restricted conception. "My Mary," an improvisation of Cowper's much more solemn "To Mary," goes so far as to exaggerate, or perhaps even create, faults in Mary's beauty for the sake of emphasizing rather comically his attachment to her:

Who, low in stature, thick and fat,
 Turns brown from going without a hat,
 Though not a pin the worse for that?
 My Mary.

Who's laugh'd at too by every whelp,
 For failings which she cannot help?
 But silly fools will laugh and chelp,
 My Mary.

For though in stature mighty small,
 And near as thick as thou art tall,
 The hand made thee that made us all,

My Mary. (TP I, 97)

More is revealed here about the unappealing object of his love than about the ideal nature of his emotion. In fact this picture of Mary was so grotesque to his publishers that the poem was omitted from the third and fourth editions of Poems Descriptive. But it does demonstrate a willingness to have fun with the image of his former love and to give human attributes to her. On the other hand "Dedication to M***," not dated but obviously written while Clare was still at Helpstone, makes no sport of Mary although it too dwells on her human qualities. Here he betrays the urge to idealize her, though, and the poem gains its poignancy from the blending of human and ideal attributes, as well as from the poet's expressed awareness that he is idealizing:

Tho thy sweet face so long unseen
 Seems types of charms that neer hath been...
 And tho thy presence warms my theme
 Like beauty floating in a dream. (SP, 3)

In other poems of the period this idealization is even more pronounced, with her elevation at times even to the status of a goddess. For instance, "The Progress of Rhyme" contains an admission of his awareness of this elevation:

And all ambitious thee to please
 My heart was ever ill at ease
 I saw thy beauty grow with days
 And tried song-pictures in thy praise
 And all of fair or beautiful
 Were thine akin. (SP, 125)

At this stage in the poem the reader is awakened to the fact that the goddess of beauty referred to earlier in the poem was actually Mary:

I glowered on beauty passing bye
Yet hardly turned my sheepish eye
I worshipped yet could hardly dare
To show I knew the goddess there...
The very fields would seem to hum
Those burning days when I should dare
To sing aloud my worship there
When beautys self might turn its eye
Of praise--what could I do but try. (SP, 118)

Thus it is obvious that Clare very early forsook his view of Mary as a human being and concentrated on his metaphoric conception of her.

This conception gained a new dimension of ideality in "The Nightmare" (TP I, 404-8) where she becomes the guardian spirit which he described in his prose. In this poem, based roughly on the first dream visit of the goddess, Clare portrays a dream sequence which demonstrates the biographical impact on his imagination of his meeting Mary, and indicates the shock which resulted from their parting. The first two lines of the poem suggest he intends to move from reality into the realms of fancy: "My dream began in bliss and lifted high/my sleeping feelings into fancy's joy." His introduction into this world of the imagination, where the remainder of the events take place, is accompanied by

a feeling of joy, hopes, and fears,
Mingling together; yet I knew not why,
Where all was beauty, trouble should be by.

This apprehension is somewhat alleviated by his realization that

this new world has a point of contact with the real world, the necessary correspondence between physical reality and creations of imagination, which is contained in nature: "But there was the earth and sky and trees and flowers,/different in kind and yet resembling ours." His entrance to this new world is marked by the mansion which "wakened fancy's wonders there," and which provides a meeting place for the throngs of inhabitants who have been "urged by an impulse;" in other words by those who have felt an imaginative impetus similar to Clare's. The next event needs little explanation:

At length one singled from the mighty throng
 Where I had gazed on vacant looks so long,
 With flowing robes, blue eyes, and face divine,
 Came forth and fixed her tender gaze on mine.
 It looked familiar as I'd seen the same;
 But recollections of her earthly name
 Were lost, if e'er she had a claim to one;
 She joined my steps and seemed to lead me on.
 We entered with the rest, and by my side
 She stood, my all companion, friend, and guide.

That this companion is his attendant spirit is reinforced by the role she plays. That she is his muse is evident from the break in silence which follows her entry on the scene. This awakening of vocal expression in the realm of the imagination results in Clare's fear in the presence of the power of his own poetic gifts:

Yet woman seemed (though beauty's face beguiles
 One's heart to favour) checking fears with smiles;
 And my companion seated by my side
 Seemed checking mine and strove her own to hide;
 Her long white hand pressed mine with cheering power
 As offering safety in a dangerous hour.

This fear and its alleviation by the muse is not peculiar to this poem, but gains validity as an element of Clare's biography from his numerous similar statements, one of which occurs in "To the Rural Muse":

...I
 Have much of fear to mingle with my dreams.
 Yet, lovely muse, I still believe thee by,
 And think I see thee smile, and so forget I sigh.
(TP I, 449)

The increasing sound in "The Nightmare" with its overtones of Babel signifies an increasing artistic output of the throng, although with no unique sound from any individual artist: "Voices awoke from many a troubling tongue,/but no words came distinctly from the throng." Meanwhile Clare is becoming aware of a significant change in his guide from physical ("living") beauty to imaginative ("dream") beauty:

The looks of one I had not power to name;
 She seemed at first as living beauty seems,
 Then changed more lovely in the shade of dreams.

This is perhaps an allusion to his metaphorization of Mary in his real life.

But with the subsequent lines interpretation gets even more hazardous than previously, as the background sound is "gathering and gathering to its highest bound,/and burst at last in mystery's mightiest sound." Perhaps this indicates Clare's first outburst of poetry and the sound is mightiest because now coming from him as well as the throng, or perhaps it is some mysterious climax of the collective imagination which this crowd seems to represent. At any rate it brings with it

his last glimpse of his guide, for "something drew near me and my guide withdrew,/beauteous as ever but in terror too." A fiend replaces her and she is revealed for the first time to be Mary:

Twas Mary's voice that hung in her farewell;
The sound that moment on my memory fell--
A sound that held the music of the past;
But she was blest and I alone was cast.

The next line indicates the identity of the fiend whose presence hastened the withdrawal of Mary. Clare's "dangers dimmed the glory of her eyes/and turned her smiling and her hopes to sighs." The immensity of his troubles, personified in a fiend, causes the youth and beauty of the world, in the form of his guardian angel, to flee in terror leaving the poet in an even more desperate situation:

The fiend drew near to make my terrors ache--
Huge circles lost to eyes, and rotten hulls
Raised with dead groans from the dread 'place of skulls,'--
Then turned with horrid laugh its haggard head
To where the earth-loved shadow dimly fled,
As mockery--waking hell with horrid sound
Like many murmurs moving underground.

Clare based this poem on an actual dream but seems to have adapted it to his own purpose. He acknowledged his debt to De Quincey in a note to the poem, and the details vary greatly from the prose account he gives of the actual dream. What he makes out of it is his own creation and prominent in it is his metaphoric, and highly ideal view of Mary.

This view persisted to the end of his life and was responsible for at least one long asylum poem, "Child Harold." The final structure intended for this poem is not known.

It exists in three different published forms, so a discussion of Mary's structural role in the poem is impossible. But thematically her metaphoric function is all important; it gives a focus to the several themes in the poem. Since she is seldom mentioned specifically in the Knight Transcripts and Manuscript 110, the two other major groups of asylum poems, it is reasonable to assume that her constant presence in "Child Harold" is a significant and conscious attempt to use her as a central metaphor.

The poem has several themes, but the most significant one is Clare's examination of the validity of his assumption that there are constant qualities in the world. He therefore establishes several constants, and questions their ability to remain firm in the chaos of his world. Thus he asks at one point, "Say what is love" (LP, 70) and at another, "Are truth and love contrary" (LP, 38). His answer to these and other similar questions results in his establishing nature and love as his two major constants and suggesting they are two aspects of an abstract and constant "truth." From this point he proceeds to question their validity.

Nature is one of his constants, and he expresses his faith in it:

Nature's love is eternal
In forest and plain
Her course is diurnal
To blossom again. (LP, 35)

Elsewhere he describes nature as a teacher of truth: "How sweet are the lessons that nature still teaches/for truth is her

tidings wherever I go" (LP, 37). And again:

I love thee nature in my inmost heart
Go where I will thy truth seems from above
Go where I will thy landscape forms a part
Of heaven. (LP, 47)

But on still another occasion he questions its ability to sustain him:

The heavens are wrath--the thunders rattling peal
Rolls like a vast volcano in the sky
Yet nothing starts the apathy I feel
Nor chills with fear eternal destiny. (LP, 42)

Similarly he sees love as a constant:

True love is eternal
For God is the giver
And love like the soul will
Endure--and forever. (LP, 36)

And he refutes the suggestion that truth and love are contrary:

Love is the mainspring of existence--It
Becomes a soul whereby I live to love
On all I see that dearest name is writ
Falsehood is here--but truth has life above
Where every star that shines exists in love. (LP, 38)

But again he continually mourns the inconstancy of love, as in the following song:

But love inconstant as the wind
Soon shifts another way
No other home my heart can find
Life wasting day by day. (LP, 67)

Furthermore he unites these concepts of nature and love into one symbol of constancy, Mary. Thus his reason for loving nature in the passage cited from page forty-seven is because "one dwells nigh that secret hopes prefer/above the race of woman" (LP, 47). And he reiterates this sentiment in a description of Mary's cottage:

My heart to nature there was early won
 For she was natures self--and still my song
 Is her through sun and shade through right and wrong.
 (LP, 59)

Likewise the constancy of love is embodied in Mary. She is
 "loves register for years, months, weeks--time past and gone"
 (LP, 47), and she is the "pole star of [his] being" (LP, 37):

Skys vary in their clouds--the seasons vary
 From heat to cold--change cannot constant prove
 The south is bright--but smiles can act contrary
 My guide star gilds the north--and shines with Mary.
 (LP, 39)

This navigational image runs throughout the poem, and pictures
 Mary as "true as the needle to the pole" (LP, 46) and "the only
 harbour in my days of strife" (LP, 44).

Once Clare has established Mary as a metaphor for
 constancy, however, he vacillates between faith in her and
 disillusionment at her inconstancy. Thus he can write of the
 pole star of his being, "In my loves home and thy own faithless
 breast/truths bonds are broke and every nerve distress" (LP, 43),
 and in the next stanza, "Mary in truth and nature still my own/
 that warms the winter of my aching breast" (LP, 43). But more
 often he speaks conditionally:

But love is an eternal flower
 Like purple amaranths in heaven
 To Mary first my heart did bow
 And if she's true she keeps it now. (LP, 57)

Likewise in another song he vows "if theres truth in her bosom/
 I shall see her again" (LP, 61). In fact the only real constancy
 in the poem is Clare's continual reference to the theme of his
 love for Mary, a constant which he seems aware of when he

states: "Whether in freedom or in thrall/Mary I think of thee" (LP, 65). Whether enthralled by doubts of her faithfulness or liberated by the constancy he finds in her, his thoughts are always fixed on this pole star.

The vacillation between his attitudes results in a variety of moods which are responsible for much of the poem's considerable appeal. When certain of his love for her and of her constancy his tone has great lyrical tenderness:

I saw her when her heart was young
I saw her when my heart was true
When truth was all the themes I sung
And Love the only muse I knew

Ere infancy had left her brow
I seemed to love her from her birth
And thought her then as I do now
The dearest angel upon earth. (LP, 78)

But melancholy pervades the passages of doubt:

For night nor day nor sun nor shade
Week month nor rolling year
Repairs the breach wronged love hath made
There madness--misery here
Lifes lease was lengthened by her smiles
--Are truth and love contrary
No ray of hope my life beguiles
I've lost love home and Mary. (LP, 38)

The other extreme is indignation at the inconstancy he finds everywhere about him:

This life is made of lying and grimace
This world is filled with whoring and decieving
Hypocrisy ne'er masks an honest face
Story's are told--but seeing is believing
And I've seen much from which there's no retrieving
I've seen deception take the place of truth
I've seen knaves flourish--and the country grieving
Lies was the current gospel in my youth
And now a man--I'm further off from truth. (LP, 52)

This admission is not his final statement on constancy, however. The lack of arrangement of the stanzas makes any conclusion as to what Clare decided impossible and perhaps undesirable. The fact that Mary dominates the poem as she does explains at least his own constant love for her, and in this sense she acts as a focus for his vacillating thoughts and moods.

What is also significant about the role of Mary in his poetry is her relationship to the Eden image. In "Child Harold" he makes this relationship clear:

...and still my song
Is her through sun and shade through right and wrong
On her my memory forever dwells
The flower of Eden--evergreen of song. (LP, 59-60)

But even in his earlier work there is evidence of this connection, as in "My Mary" where he refers to her as his "low kindred stump of Eve" (TP I, 95). Robinson and Summerfield are perhaps being overly precise in identifying her with Eve, but there is certainly a suggestion that she was Clare's major attraction in his childhood Eden, and that subsequent memories of her provoked periods in which his state of mind was similarly Edenic.

At any rate Clare's consistent use of these two major metaphors demonstrates his careful practice of the theory of poetic composition to which he adhered. He used these metaphors to provide a pattern of imagery throughout his work, and he thereby gains at least a measure of "inward growth." Eden and the loss of it provided a progressing pattern underlying his work; and Mary, a focus for his changing opinions of his major theme, faith and inconstancy.

CONCLUSION

In Clare's view the poet's mind is uniquely endowed with functioning powers which he calls taste and genius, and with which he responds to the beauty in nature. They combine to enable the poet "to look on nature with a poetic eye," and thereby alter his initial perception. The alteration results in metaphors which, when recorded in words, become poetry. But it is also governed in better poets by an artistic integrity which confines the poet to recording only those metaphors which have a basis in nature; any other type of alteration is deformity:

Many of the best productions of this age
are among the fanciful in poetry beautiful
incongruities of the imagination not bearing
the likeness of anything that is on the earth
& therefore may be stiled 'handsome pieces of
deformity'. (Prose, 221)

When taste and genius are united in an artistically honest mind, however, true art is possible. The mind intensifies the beauty of natural objects, but its creations are still based on nature--are still "shadows" of its beauty:

BEAUTY is nothing but the power
Which the admirer gives,
The shadow of the fading flower
That in the fancy lives. (TP II, 271)

This faith in the mind is evident in Clare's theory of poetry, as well as in his practice of it.

In practice, he used the mental experience of the poetic process to provide structure for his individual poems. The

best of these poems of experience describe the progress of the mind from the initial response to an object in nature, to a state of mental excitement during which the object is transformed into a metaphor, and finally to an impulse toward recording these images. An abbreviated example of this method is found in the following lines from "Rural Scenes":

There I meet common thoughts, that all may read
 Who love the quiet fields: I note them well,
 Because they give me joy as I proceed,
 And joy renewed when I their beauties tell
 In simple verse and unambitious songs. (TP II, 128)

Thus within the poem itself is contained a description of the process which led to its composition; the result is a direct relationship between the experience and the work of art, hence an explicitly organic development for the poem. Clare's work demonstrates constant experimentation with the use of the mental experience as a structuring device, which culminates in a few consummately unified poems of experience. In these mature works, too, the metaphors used are those which arise from the poetic process described in the poem. Unlike his early work where he imposed conventional metaphors onto his poetry, these later works gain an added element of unity from his creation of metaphors out of the material provided by the experience itself.

On a larger scale he utilized these metaphors to provide a framework for the body of his poetry. He uses certain major metaphors consistently throughout his work, and in so doing provides a scheme to which the individual poems can be related. Thus the poems in praise of childhood and those of disillusionment at his waning appreciation of nature can be related to each

other by the encompassing pattern of the Eden-Wasteland metaphor. Similarly many of the songs, as well as "The Nightmare" and "Child Harold," are interrelated by their participating in the major metaphor embodied in Mary. The result is an enjoyment derived not only from reading select individual poems, but from extensive reading within the canon.

Clare is very gradually gaining recognition by those who are reading in the body of his available writings. And the amount of these that are available is slowly increasing. Thus his reputation continues to grow according to the formula he himself approved: "the quiet progress of a name gaining its ground by gentle degrees in the world's esteem is the best living shadow of fame to follow" (Prose, 210).

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