

# “Trembling grass / Quakes from the human foot”: Animal Rights Legislation, John Clare, and the Lines between Nature and Humanity

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## Abstract

*Today the prevention of cruelty to animals is generally regarded as a desirable ambition. In this paper, I examine parliamentary discussions over animal rights legislation that rose in objection to brutal practices – particularly bull and badger-baiting – that took place in England across the first quarter of the 19th century. The sports involved the atrocious treatment of both domestic and wild animals; however, a close reading reveals that Parliamentary notions were inextricably rooted in concerns for humans, rather than in actual sympathy towards animals. These ideas ranged from a speciesism reactive to the French Revolution, to more devoutly Christian ideas, and finally to a conception of morality as a teachable entity. The critical reading of the period’s legislation allows one to distinguish and elaborate more fully the “radical” beliefs of John Clare, a Romantic writer of the period, whose poetry constructs the natural world as separate from the human. Clare delineates the imposing position of humans in relation to natural creatures, and ultimately illustrates that a quiet approach that places inherent value upon the natural world itself is the only proper mode of our interacting with and within Nature.*

From birth, John Clare was considered one of the lower order. Born a twin in 1793 to peasant parents in Helpston, a rural village settled in the English countryside, nearly all of Clare’s youthful acquaintances were in want of luxury. Yet Clare’s family, after the death of his sister being composed only of the young poet, his father and mother, were the “poorest of the poor” according to biographer Frederick Martin, and daily life for the Clares was a struggle to attain and maintain any source of sustenance (5). Amenities were hard to come by and savored when found, and thus indulgences were non-existent. For

the young John Clare, however, such inopportune circumstances never wore on an inherent sense of wonder, joy, and curiosity (Martin 6). Days were spent exploring the surrounding world of Helpston, traversing every meadow, field, and coppice that crossed his vision; in these spaces, Clare sought an omnipresent and pervasive beauty. Primarily self-taught following the age of twelve, he learned through his observations, incorporating what he saw into the conversations that took place with his few acquaintances (Thornton). From the singing of birds in spring to the summer buzz of insects and

the flush foliage of autumn, every living creature was subject to Clare's eye (Martin), and the young boy began to develop a conception of the natural world that would prove vastly influential in his later poetry.

Years spent immersed in the English countryside left Clare believing that to truly understand the infinite workings of Nature, one must situate oneself quietly within its world, and without conscious reflection, remain attentive only to the beautiful "material" before him. Such "materiality" is a notion Louise Economides details in her discussion of Shelley's "Mont Blanc". Economides differentiates the materiality of nature from the "anthropocentric sublime" of Wordsworth and Coleridge, in which the human mind connects with Nature and subsequently transcends the tangible material of the natural world itself. Rather, the "sublimity of materiality" reveals the "mystery" that is the natural world, a space apart from anything human (90). This latter piece of Economides' distinction ties closely to Clare's incessant verse, which includes an abundance of poems descriptive of animal life and behavior; leafing through Clare's Northborough Sonnets, readers will find poems titled "The Fox", "The Vixen", or even simply, "Marten". Each is specific to the animal named, and offers a space for readers to peer closely into the creature's world; we sit alongside as the hedgehog builds his "nest of grass and sedge", and makes small noises "like a cricket as he goes" (lines 2, 10, Clare 29). Such descriptions are intimate, curiously interested only in the mannerisms of the creature subject. The speaker of Clare's sonnets rarely acknowledges himself, or takes the time to engage in the type of self-conscious reflection seen in the poetry of Wordsworth and other Romantic poets (Economides).

Even in Clare's poems that include a more active speaker, the materiality of the natural world is still the primary focus of the verse. In "The Nightingales Nest", the speaker beckons the reader on a hunt for the bird, pulling him down into the brush. Unlike Keats' transient nightingale, leading the speaker through a dreamlike vision, Clare's bird and its abode are much more tangible:

--- dead oaken leaves  
 Are placed without & velvet moss  
 within  
 & little scraps of grass ---& scant &  
 spare  
 Of what seems scarce materials down  
 & hair... (lines 78 – 81, The  
 Midsummer Cushion)

The speaker's description of the nest, reflective of Clare's own relationship with Nature, is one of pure observation, offering an illustration that focuses upon the materiality of the scene; as readers, we can nearly grab at the "little scraps of grass" ourselves. The poem makes no allusions to Philomela, and the speaker seems amazed at the simplicity of the nightingale's being, that a bird so "famed" (line 20) would live in a nest of "dead oaken leaves" and "little scraps of grass", or "should have no better dress than russet brown" (line 21). Clare's nightingale avoids interaction with humans, whose "presence doth retard / Her joys" (lines 65 – 66) and her cheerful song. We should notice that this varies significantly from other poets whose depictions of the nightingale hinge on direct interaction between man and creature, and subsequently place more emphasis upon Nature's benefits to humanity than upon the bird itself. For example, though Coleridge's speaker in his conversational poem "The Nightingale" acknowledges how desolate men have ascribed the bird its "melancholy" nature unjustifiably, the speaker himself ironically ascribes instructive qualities to the bird, who reminds him of the light that love creates. For Clare, though, the realness of the nightingale is the focal point, and even if she shies from distinction, his poem celebrates her natural state. Thus, Clare's verse separates itself from other Romantics by paying close attention the materiality of the natural world and avoiding "self-reflexive" (Economides 89) musings. Further, such poetic notions gain even more distinction and are elaborated more fully when they are viewed alongside the relationship between humans and living

creatures of the natural world as conceived in Parliament during the 19th century.

Occurring in the aftermath of the French Revolution, early British animal rights legislation was heavily influenced by the fervent political strife of the period. In June of 1802, an article appeared in the *British Sporting Magazine* reporting upon a bill that rose on May the twenty-fourth of that year in the House of Commons attempting to disallow “Bull-Baiting and Bull Running”. Such were two brutal sports in which a bull -- purposefully vexed prior to the games’ initiation, often by having its tongue ripped from its mouth -- was tied to a post and set on with dogs. Onlookers then placed wagers as to the length of the bull’s life (“Bull-Baiting Debate” 180). Yet despite the violence of the events described, discussions in the House of Commons often strayed from the actual behavior and manner of the sports themselves, tending rather to focus upon the social, human issues brought to the surface through the proposed legislation.

Opponents of the bill in the House, predominantly a Mr. Windham, objected on the basis of it carrying frightening political purposes (“Bull-Baiting Debate”). Mr. Windham saw the calls for reform as remaining strands of Jacobinism. The Jacobins were an extremist party that held power for a five-year period in France during the Revolution. The party’s rise ushered in the rise of the Reign of Terror, a morbidly tumultuous period towards the end of the conflict that included mass legal and illegal executions taking approximately 40,000 lives (Tilley). Windham’s words illustrate the remaining tension and anxiety that existed three years after such abject horrors had occurred. The said Member of Parliament’s contention was based upon two major premises. First, he claimed that the primary objective of each reformer who took aim at cruel sport was to “berest” the poor of their “means” to “jollity and amusement”, rendering them more susceptible to political arousal for the dying Jacobinist cause (“Bull-Baiting Debate” 187). A downtrodden lower order, removed of their primary source

of recreational entertainment, would likely grow acrimonious towards the British government, causing the threat of major political uprisings to loom large. Further, he believed such a call to be filled with “hypocrisy” and ignorant “cant” (187). Rustic sport involving the injury of wildlife had existed throughout the span of human history and across the economic classes. If they were to abolish bull-baiting, they most certainly would be obligated to equally do away with “hunting, shooting, and all the cruel amusements of the higher order” (188). In this way, Windham’s opposition appears based upon adamant conservatism, stressing the importance of avoiding a variety of horrific violence that had occurred so recently in France, and that the sport, less cruel than others, maintained a loyalty within the lower order that would otherwise be lost.

Through his defense of bull-baiting, Windham’s notions implicate the speciesism that beset animal rights proceedings at the turn of the century. This term is taken from Peter Singer, and first appeared in his book *Animal Liberation*. “Speciesism” is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as the “... discrimination against or exploitation of certain animal species by human beings, based on an assumption of mankind’s superiority” (*Oxford English Dictionary* online). In the context of animal rights legislation, such a notion would insinuate that human ends outweigh those of animals, and that animal suffering is acceptable if it improves or maintains the quality of human life. Windham’s accusations of Jacobinist intents by the bill’s backers disregarded any possibility that the proposals implied actual sympathy for the animals in question. It was not even necessary for Windham to explicitly refute such possibilities, and his speech largely ignores feelings of sympathy. In one shorthanded response to those who refer to the sports as excessively “cruel”, Windham again asserts the hypocrisy of such cries, and questions the reformists’ definition of the term “cruelty”; the hobbies of shooting, hunting, and horse-racing, so essential to the lives of the

higher order and the reformists introducing the bill, were equally, if not more, cruel than the sports debated (“Bull-Baiting Debate” 188). More importantly, though, the initiative could ultimately lead to atrocities seen only within the past decade in France. If they were to enter such a discussion, he would mark that such were the “greatest cruelties” ever “committed” (“Bull-Baiting Debate” 188), greater certainly than the mangling of a bull. Here, Windham’s speciesism is clear. In the aftermath of the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror, events that influenced modern definitions of “terrorism” and crimes against humanity (Tilley 10), he believed that maintaining the wellbeing of the state and its citizens to be of ultimate importance to the House, and worth the trouble of hurting lesser creatures.

Interestingly, others who spoke within the House upon the issue of animal rights reasoned in a manner that similarly placed more concern with human beings than with animals, even those who rose in defense of the Bull-Baiting bill. A Mr. Sheridan expressed strong concern that the cruel sport was detrimental to the morality of those partaking, and to those who witnessed such events as onlookers. Farmers usually brought their families to the games, and after selling their animal for sport, the family watched their bull, a “harmless creature” so useful and essential through the years, tied to a post and set on by dogs (“Bull-Baiting Bill” 190). Others brought forward their “favourite” dog to fight, who, upon her successful performance, was cut open to prove her worth, and thus better sell her pups (190). In its immediate context, we should notice Sheridan’s rather justified questioning of the morals surrounding such practices, especially emphasizing that children often viewed the horrifying scenes.

Yet while his cries were warranted, like Windham’s, Sheridan’s notion places more concern with the well-being of humanity than the suffering bull, thus undermining the plight of the animals involved. In his major premise, Sheridan focuses upon the effects cruel

sport has upon the human race, insinuating that the moral judgment of a young child who watches his father act so atrociously is jeopardized, and that to attend the cruel sports at a malleable age would be to compromise one’s moral development. Concerns of a human nature thus overshadow actual sympathetic sentiments towards the bull or dogs; though the animals are treated cruelly, what remains most horrifying is the idea that children might incorporate barbarous values into their moral perspective. Where Windham proclaimed the necessity of maintaining equality among the sport of the Higher and Lower Orders, thus positing the state of humanity above any concern for animals, Sheridan’s invocation is for human morality.

The shocking depictions Sheridan used to convey his argument foreshadow a rhetorical strategy that is abundant in animal rights legislation of the period, especially later in the century, which involved portraying starkly gruesome scenes to impart feelings of disgust in listeners. Sheridan’s descriptions in particular, though, project a conception of cruelty that is rooted in the involvement of beloved, domesticated animals. As we’ve previously mentioned, Sheridan stresses the importance of the bulls to each farmer and family, who had “learned to look on with affection” (“Bull-Baiting Debate” 190) upon the creatures. The animals that were thrust into the sport were not viewed with indifference or disregard. Each game motivated farmers to choose their most vitally stout bull or dog, and thus the animals with the highest likelihood of survival and monetary value. Farmers were charged to bring forward their “favourites” (190), and Sheridan suggests that such a coincidence exacerbated the cruelty of the sport. Yet through his emphasis upon the “cherished” (190) usefulness of the bulls and dogs, we realize that Sheridan’s protests are fixed in concern for human beings, not animals; the cruelty arose only because the creatures were of significant importance to the humans torturing them. Thus, the actual cruelty was faced by the farmers, who jeopardized their livelihood by bringing forth

animals for the blood sport.

As the century progressed, notions presented through legislation became more deeply rooted in Christian virtues, especially of universalism. Lord Erskine rose in April of 1809 to promote a bill whose focus was broader, with a more generalized title: "Cruelty to Animals". Erskine sought to rework laws that applied solely to humans, apparently realizing the speciesism that existed. His proclamation to the House notes that abusers of animals could only be charged if their intent was "injurious" to the animal's "propriety"; the animals themselves, Erskine adamantly declared, "have no rights!" ("Cruelty to Animals Bill" 553). In essence, his proposition sought to reiterate that animals are equal to humans in the sense that God creates both. While Erskine granted that animals exist in a subservient relationship with man, he described such a circumstance as a "trust" (555). He ascribed to animals the same senses, feelings, and emotions as are found in humans, for "God is the... impartial author of all that he has created". Thus, a distempered dog is as passionate as its crossed owner, and the baited bull feels suffering equal to that of a tortured soldier.

Erskine's conception of a "trust" between humans and animals hinges upon the idea that human rationality carries the importance of human morality. Humans, though inseparable from animals in certain characteristics intrinsic to living creatures, differ most obviously in their capacity to reason. Consciousness allows us to recognize the impartiality of God's creation, and the pain and pleasure that our practices may create in "the lower world" ("Cruelty to Animals Bill" 555). Thus, excessively cruel behavior to creatures that we realize can feel as we do, and live in accordance with our well-being, undermines the "trust" that God has placed in humanity. We can reason and differentiate, and thus choose to act cruelly, but similarly choose to act caringly, and as the "lower world" exists to serve our purposes, their well-being is subsequently at our disposal. Such "trust" establishes a "benevolent system" in which

animals supplement and serve humanity, and are therefore shown gratitude and gentle kindness (555). Further, by asserting that rationality necessitates morality, Erskine implicates rationality and morality as universal qualities, as all humans are conscious, perceptive beings. Although Erskine's argument was still implicitly focused upon the betterment of humanity through the just treatment of subservient animals, his words do push for an equality of humans and animals under law. Further, his notion of a "benevolent system", aimed at gracious reciprocity, and his equality of humans and animals as creatures of God, illustrate a maneuvering in ideology away from the speciesism reflected in previous legislation.

According to David Perkins, the movement that took place during the early stages of the 19th century was partly due to England's urbanization following the commencement of the industrial age. As life began moving away from the farm and closer to city streets, Perkins holds that Britain became more and more engrossed in romantic ideals, primarily rooted in "nostalgic" yearnings and "sentiments" for former rural life (2). Particularly, households once so close and involved with the pastoral caretaking of animals longed for a companionship they had taken for granted. Thus, the advent of pet-keeping was born.

For Perkins, to adopt an animal into one's house is to view them as "quasi-human" (5); we treat pets as we would a younger child, sibling, or friend, lavishing them with love, presents, identification, and when needed, discipline (for which we often feel guilt). Viewing animals in human terms is essential for a strong attachment to develop between man and pet, for these are the only terms to which we can subscribe; in Perkins' words, "we have no ready basis for understanding their inner lives other than our own" (5). Further, just as post-colonial readings of literature have shown us in recent years, the more a creature is viewed as human, "the more they have rights" (5). Thus, if the taking in of animals causes pet-owners to attach human qualities to their smaller companions,

it was no coincidence to Perkins that outcries for animal rights occurred simultaneously with the ascent of pet-keeping during the late 18th century. Such claims fit closely with Erskine's proposition that animals are equal to humans in various capacities, and most importantly for our purposes here, Perkins suggests that sentiments wrought through the assimilation of animals into the home were eventually applied to wildlife as well (5).

While it is hard to connect Perkins' observations of pet-holding explicitly with animal rights legislation, it is clear that as the 19th century progressed, the focus of those speaking for the discontinuation of cruelties to animals began focusing more of their attention upon the abuse of wildlife. In 1825, a bill came to debate in Parliament that sought to abolish the intrusive games of bear and badger-baiting, two native mammals of the English landscape. A Mr. Martin described the two sports before the House. Rather than a farmer bringing forth a bull for staking, to initiate the games involving wildlife, hunters must venture into the forest to lure the animals from their dens, and thus pit the creatures against dogs in matches to the death ("Bear-Baiting Prevention" 657). He and many citizens of the participating counties were concerned over the negative effects partaking in or viewing the gruesome games would have. Several magistrates indicated that the sports "led to gambling", taught the lower orders thievery, and "gradually trained them up for bloodshed and murder" (657).

We should recognize that Martin's opening notions are actually similar to those promulgated twenty-three years previous. By focusing upon the detriments that could be caused one's morality, Martin's initial premises softly echo the opinion of Mr. Sheridan, insinuating that "gambling" and thievery are immoral deeds. And further, if we look closely, we realize that if the cruel sports in fact "train" individuals "up" for murder, then the killing of a human being must clearly sit on a separate level from the killing of an animal. In this way, Martin's words softly echo Wyndham's, who asserted that the bloodshed

and loss of human life witnessed in the French Revolution constituted "the greatest of cruelties".

Moreover, the documents of 1825 reveal that class distinctions were unrelentingly influential upon early animal rights legislation. Opponents' accusations mirrored the concerns of Mr. Wyndham, particularly that the primary intent of the reformists was to rid the lower orders of amusement and continually disregard any objectionable behavior of the higher. Martin thus emphasized the role "several noblemen and gentlemen of the first distinction" played in arranging and funding the cruel features, and became indignant towards contentions that his protests were only aimed at the poor and the lower order ("Bear-Baiting Prevention" 657). Crimes that "opposed the dictates of humanity" could not be delimited, and he believed that every perpetrator, no matter their social standing, should be brought to justice. Further, he believed the "persons of rank and name" who funded such "cruel practices" were the most evil of those involved. Here Martin's conception of morality and its development differs strongly from Lord Erskine's. The aforementioned Lord emphasized that rationality necessitates morality, thus implicitly suggesting that rationality and morality transcend class separations; all humans have rationality, or a consciousness about their existence, which God has granted them. Thus, it's likely that Erskine believed morality an inherent, universal set of values for human existence.

Rather than an intrinsic, God-given sense of right or wrong, Martin conceptualized morality as something that is instilled within humanity through teaching and instruction. He asserted that the higher order should be held more stringently accountable for their actions because of "their education", which would have given them "feelings averse to cruelty and bloodshed" ("Bear-Baiting Protection" 658). Martin's words suggest that we are taught our notions of morality through education and the instruction of history, logic, and other various subjects. Further, he conveys that the actions of the "noble" men in

this case are even more deplorable when it's taken into account that their actions "propagate such feelings among their inferiors" (658). Martin's words reveal a rift between the classes and certainly imply an assumed superiority of the higher order. Left uneducated, it is assumed that humans will act violently with wanton cruelty; Martin implies a savageness that is inherent to humanity, or at least, to the lower order.

The period of Martin's legislation was the most active for our featured poet John Clare, and his works run against the grain of Parliament's assumptions. As we've already discussed, Clare's formal education was minimal, and it's clear that his personal development in the countryside, in direct contact with the natural world, was supremely influential. The differences between the Parliamentary legislation of the Romantic period and John Clare's materialist poetry are substantial. Clare's verse, not only uninterested in self-reflexive musings, rarely dwells upon the plight of humans as a species either, and at times even openly denounces the "free booters" and "poachers" who took part in sport (Wu, "To the Snipe", "The Badger"). Ultimately, Clare delineates an inherent separation between the natural and the human worlds in both level of consciousness and physical location, and emphasizes the terror that is caused when humans breach such a separation.

In his poem "The Badger" (1235 – 1236), Clare's "grunting" (line 1) animal is destined to a similar fate as his brethren named in the legislation brought forth by Mr. Martin. The poem's narrative depicts the events of badger-baiting throughout its entire course. Fittingly, the poem begins as the hunters enter the forest,

...The woodmen when the hunting  
comes about  
Go round at night to stop the foxes out  
And hurrying through the bushes ferns  
and brakes  
Nor sees the many holes the badger  
makes

And often through the bushes to the  
chin  
Breaks the old holes and tumbles  
headlong in... (lines 9 – 14)

Clare's opening presents a wooded world unfit for humans, and provides a stark contrast between the naturally-inclined badger and the aggressive hunters. The first few lines of the poem describe the badger in his own environment, traversing the forest floor. Through digging the turf, the badger creates a "great hugh burrow in the ferns and brakes" (line 4), and literally, Clare shows the badger building its sett, or underground abode. Such behavior is innate to the badger, and the animal is not acting beguiling in any way. Its home is simply within the ground.

The hunters, however, are noticeably away from their home. In the lines quoted above, hunters, or "woodmen", are shown to "often" fall into the steep holes the badger digs. In this way, Clare juxtaposes the natural actions of the badger with those of the human hunter; where the badger acts innately within the forest, building his home in his habitat and ecosystem, the hunter, in leaving his own home, must impose upon the woods, and subsequently falls into the badger's den, an obvious foreigner in the world he's entered. In this way, Clare depicts a natural separation or division between the physical environments of the badger and hunters. Further, the verse acknowledges that the breaching of such a separation is caused solely by the actions of man; the hunters intrude upon the natural environment of the forest, causing the "old fox" to "drop his goose", and the "old hare", despite being crippled with gunshot, to "buzz" away<sup>1</sup>. The badger himself, however, never willingly or naturally enters the path of humans, and he must be "clapt", "bore", and "bait(ed)" (lines 22-25) if he is to enter the town.

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<sup>1</sup> We might be obliged to believe Clare's characterization of the animals as "old", and thus learned enough to sense danger, to be a poke at the naïve hunters who fall into deep holes in the ground.

Once there, the badger fights away the dogs, and Clare seemingly personifies the creatures:

... The heavy mastiff savage in the fray  
Lies down and licks his feet and turns  
away  
The bull dog knows his match and  
waxes cold  
The badger grins and never leaves his  
hold... (lines 37 – 40)

The badger fights despite a clear size disadvantage, and he fights despite being grossly outnumbered; set on by every dog of the town and “kicked by boys and men”, “when badgers fight... every ones a foe” (lines 50-51, 31). Yet in the lines above, the dogs realize they are outmatched by the driving badger and begin to surrender; even the most imposing of the group, the “heavy mastiff savage”, “licks his feet” (lines 37-38) and retires. The “bull dog” too recognizes the imminence of his loss, “wax(ing) cold”, while the badger, “grinning”, appears delighted with his own prowess. Clare’s illustration conveys an understanding between the animals, a consciousness of one another. At present the animals are at least distinctly aware of the other’s deathly intentions. The poem’s final stanza, however, reveals that such awareness is limited to the natural world.

Through its discussion of the keeping of badgers for sport, the poem’s final stanza brings the human and the animal worlds into direct contact. The narrative having come full circle, the badger, once “grunting on his woodland track” (line 1), finds himself utterly away from his natural habitat, under the complete control of humans, and yet he seems unable to recognize the plight his keeper has caused. Clare illustrates that to a human’s touch, the badger is docile; he always “licks the patting hand”, and “never bites” nor “runs away” (lines 65 – 66). It’s possible that such a description of the “tame” (line 55) badger fits with Perkins’ contention that pet-keeping influenced society’s conception of wild-animals. Further, his depiction may seem to

resemble the notions of Lord Erskine, who emphasized the subservience of animals, and thus their deserved appreciation.

Ultimately though, Clare’s illustration of the affectionate badger reveals its inability to recognize, or to be aware of the danger his keepers have subjected him to. Unlike the understanding held between the badger and the dogs, in which the animals comprehend their deadly relationship to one another, Clare’s badger seems naïve to the cruel dealings of humanity. Thus, the badger’s behavior appears instinctual, reactive only to present circumstance; while he reacts with violent aggression towards the attacking dogs, purposely set into the fray by humans, when shown gentleness he accordingly reacts with affection. We should remember too that the initial interaction between man and animal occurred solely because man knowingly entered the forest and inadvertently fell into the badger’s sett; the badger himself did not act beguilingly or with the intent of injuring the human hunters. Clare appears to be illustrating an inherent separation between the natural and the human worlds, both in levels of consciousness by juxtaposing the animal’s “instinct” and humanity’s “intent”, in addition to the more explicit physical separation between the animal’s natural habitat of the forest and the streets of the human world.

Similarly, his poem “To the Snipe” depicts an environment distinctly apart from human contact, where neither “man nor boy... hath ventured near” (“To the Snipe”, line 35). Clare shows a habitat fit perfectly for the quaggy bird, who is told by the speaker that,

... here thy bill  
Suited by wisdom good  
Of rude unseemly length doth delve  
and drill  
The gelid mass for food...  
(lines 17– 20).

The snipe’s “unseemly” “bill” reveals the perfect circumstance of his situation. While such a bill may have been ill fit for another habitat, its length is a necessity in the marsh.

Similar to the badger's setts, this habitat, though well-suited for the snipe, is hazardous for humans, whose feet aren't supported by the boggy turf (line 6). To bait a badger, or to hunt a snipe, humans must leave their own haunts and venture into areas they are naturally separated from; away from the "boys" who "thread the woods", the bird is safe in the "stagnant floods" of the marsh. Clare's poetry reveals that the abuse of wildlife is a wanton cruelty, a crossing of boundaries that terrorizes harmless beings of the natural world. Thus, human presence causes a great deal of terror, fright, and unrest: the "trembling grass / Quakes from the human foot" ("To the Snipe", line 6), birds in the wild "dread mans sight" (line 46), and creatures scatter at the sound of the hunter's gunshot ("The Badger"). In his poem "Nutting", even the simple act of gathering nuts in a forest upsets Nature, who stares glaringly back, causing the speaker to inquire hauntingly, "where is pleasure gone" (line 14, *The Midsummer Cushion*). Thus, Clare's poetry is distinguished from Parliamentary legislation of the 19th century, which, while purporting sympathy for animals, was implicitly grounded in concern for human beings. Rather, Clare characterizes humans as intruders upon the natural world, whose presence is terrorizing. In this way, his verse firmly sympathizes with and values only the beings of the natural world that are so affected by our intrusions.

Yet Clare's verse also forebodingly reveals the inevitability of an interaction between the human and the natural worlds. In the closing lines of "The Badger", when the animal finally escapes the clutches of man and domestication, even the "hollow trees" he seeks for shelter are only so because they were "burnt by boys to get a swarm of bees" (lines 67 – 68, Wu 1236), and the youth of the perpetrators implies the continuance of humanity's imposition upon the natural world. Correspondingly, in "To the Snipe", the human speaker must warn the bird that danger is close, for "instinct knows / Not safety's bounds to shun" (lines 53 – 54), and thus, somewhat paradoxically, a human must

impose himself in order to protect the instinctual birds from other humans who use their "intent" for crueller purposes. In his poem "The Robin", the speaker implies an understanding that the slaying of some animals is necessary, reminding the reader that "distinction with (the farmer) is nothing at all; / Both wren, and the robin, with sparrow must fall." (lines 21 – 22, Tibble 23). The speaker appears familiar with the distinction between animal creatures, disgusted that the farmer disregards distinguishing between the "wren" and the "robin", animals who pose no threat to his crops, from the "sparrow", whose killing, while not necessarily justifiable, is understandable. Ultimately, to a man who realized that even the simple act of gathering nuts in a forest upsets the workings of Nature, the awareness that humans will unavoidably interact with life of the natural world may appear heartbreaking.

In his poem "Remembrances", Clare recounts his youth with nostalgia, yearning to return to childhood, recognizing a "pleasure past and a winter come at last..." (line 60, Clare 259). He looks upon his childhood settings in dismay, witnessing their destruction at the hands of humanity, while desolately conveying that with it, all "joy had left the paths of men" (line 77). However, as readers of Clare, we are reminded that joy does exist in the "haunts" of nature in which we may feel a "habitual love" ("To the Snipe", lines 73 – 74). Clare's verse illustrates a proper interaction with animals, one in which we acknowledge the distinct separation between worlds, and realize the frightful and often brutal harm our impositions may cause. Further, he brings us intimately close to Nature's creatures, focusing upon the tangible materiality of their being; through a green reading, Clare seems the epitome of an "eco-poet". In the words of Erica McAlpine, "Clare achieves what Wordsworth pursues" (81), and through his curious observation, sits within Nature without impeding upon it. Along these lines, he achieves a similar "quietism" to Gilbert White (*King* 533), valuing the natural world for itself, and successfully

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avoiding the self-conscious ruminations of other Romantic poets that project human, self-aggrandizing notions upon the natural world. Even through the simplicity of his written verse, uninterrupted by punctuation, Clare depicts natural scenes apart from the intrusions of humanity. Clare reveals the lines

drawn between man and nature, shows their frailty and the impossibility of maintaining an ideal separation between the two worlds. Ultimately, the “Pastoral Poet” reminds us that the best way to interact graciously with the natural world is to leave as little of an imprint upon its surface as we can.

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