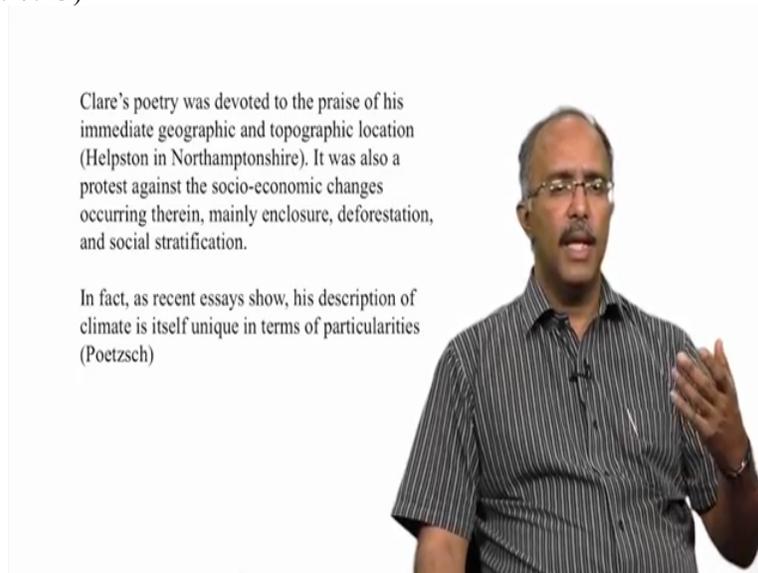


**English Literature of the Romantic Period, 1798-1832**  
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**Romantic Poetry 4: Politics John Clare**

Hello everybody. As we continue our exploration of the English Romantic writers 1798 to 1832, in this week's lessons we are focused on the politics of the English Romantic writers. We looked at abolitionist poetry, we are just emphasizing on the politics of gender and class and race and tyranny and empire. We have also looked at representations of liberty. In the final session for this week we shall look at the politics in the poetry of John Clare.

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John Clare's poetry was devoted to the praise of his immediate geographic and topographic location, Helpston in Northamptonshire. It was also a protest against the socioeconomic changes occurring in this particular, what were these? These were included what was happening in the rest of England as well. So it is not unique to Northamptonshire, enclosure acts, deforestation, social stratification, some amount of technological intrusion.

As recent essays have shown his description of climate is itself unique in terms of particularities. They focus on very specific issues of concern that have to do with climate in that particular region.

(Refer Slide Time: 1:23)

Dear native spot which length of time endears  
The sweet retreat of twenty lingering years  
And oh those years of infancy the scene  
The dear delights where once they all have been ...  
In those past days for then I lov'd the shade  
How oft I've sighed at alterations made  
To see the woodmans cruel axe employ'd  
A tree beheaded or a bush destroy'd  
Nay e'en a post old standard or a stone  
Moss'd o'er by age and branded as her own  
Would in my mind a strong attachment gain  
A fond desire that there they might remain ...  
(‘Helpstone’)



Here is a small excerpt from Clare's Helpston which he refers to as dear native spot and he speaks about the description of the woodmen, the acts which has destroyed a tree as he calls it tree beheaded or a bush destroyed.

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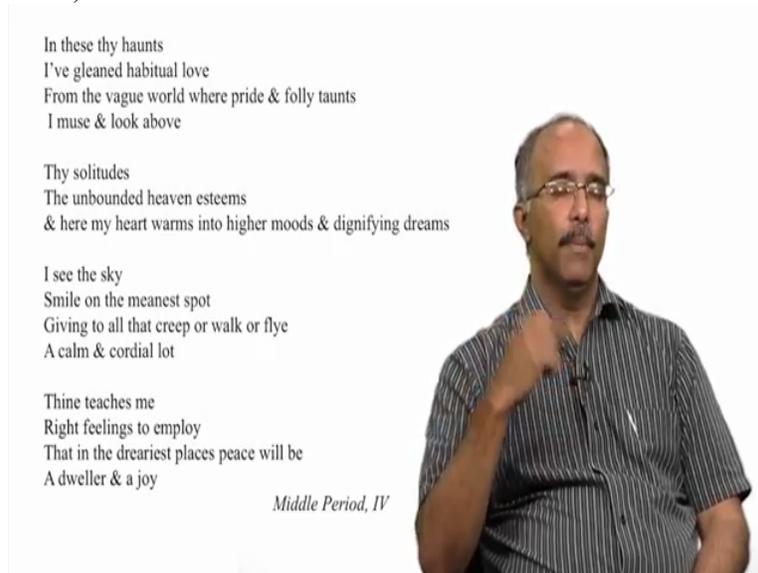
Like Wordsworth, Clare also saw the divine in Nature.  
As seen in this poem..



Like Wordsworth, Clare also saw the divine in Nature. You will recall as we spoke about Wordsworth's environmentalism, his obsessive interest in portraying nature as cause a divine or divine itself. There is an environmental strand in all these, environmental stance in all this. But it is also something that has been disputed and debated that whether that is the right way to go about environmentalism.

We do not want to get into that but Clare is actually following in the footsteps of William Wordsworth. Here is an instance of Clare's divinization of nature as we can call it coming up on your screen.

(Refer Slide Time: 2:12)



In these thy haunts  
I've gleaned habitual love  
From the vague world where pride & folly taunts  
I muse & look above

Thy solitudes  
The unbounded heaven esteems  
& here my heart warms into higher moods & dignifying dreams

I see the sky  
Smile on the meanest spot  
Giving to all that creep or walk or flye  
A calm & cordial lot

Thine teaches me  
Right feelings to employ  
That in the dreariest places peace will be  
A dweller & a joy

*Middle Period, IV*

The image shows a man with glasses and a mustache, wearing a striped shirt, speaking. To his left is a white box containing the text of a poem by William Clare. The poem is titled 'Middle Period, IV' and discusses the speaker's relationship with nature and solitude.

This is from middle period, part IV: In these thy haunts I have gleaned habitual love. From the vague world where pride and folly taunts I muse and look above. Thy solitudes, the unbounded heaven esteems and here my heart warms into higher moods and dignifying dreams. I see the sky, smile on the meanest spots giving to all that creep or walk or fly a calm and cordial lot. Thine teaches me right feelings to employ, that in the dreariest places peace will be a dweller and a joy.

Clare rejected the transformation of nature into objects entirely evaluated in terms of the human value. What does that mean? What he is saying is you cannot see nature via an instrumentalist perspective. What can nature do for the humans? This instrumentalist, instrumental perspective is what many environmentalist say, causes our damaging of nature. We see nature as a resource to be exploited, to take from nature whatever we need for our home, for our industry, for our cities, for our civilization in general. The instrumental view of nature means nature is subordinated to human nature, to human needs and human requirements.

(Refer Slide Time: 3:29)

Clare rejected the transformation of Nature into objects entirely evaluated in terms of their human value. He saw this as refusing to accept that Nature has any intrinsic value.

Clare traced the destruction of Nature, as a result of the above shift in thinking about its 'human value' to the landlords and their 'Enclosures'. He emphatically absolved the poorer farmers and the labourers from this ethos of destruction.

He is the principal poet of the anti-Enclosure sentiment



For Clare there is a problem as there is a problem for other environmentalist as well. We do not see nature as having any intrinsic value. We see nature as having value only for us. And Clare trace the destruction of nature as a result of this instrumentalization or instrumental view. Due to the landlords and their enclosures, he emphatically absolved the poorer farmers and the laborers from this ethos of destruction. And he is the principal poet of the anti-enclosure sentiment. Here is a description that best captures I think the question of the landlord's role.

(Refer Slide Time: 4:05)

'But sweating slaves I do not blame  
Those slaves by wealth decreed  
No I should hurt their harmless name  
To brand 'em wi' the deed  
Altho their aching hands did wield  
The axe that gave the blow  
Yet 't'was not them that own'd the field  
Nor plan'd its overthrow



But sweating slaves I do not blame. Those slaves by wealth decreed, no I should hurt their harmless name to brand them with the deed. Although their aching hands did wield the axe that

gave the blow, yet it was not them that owned the field nor planned its overthrow. Look at what he is saying. The slave who wields the axe, who chops up the trees or levels the land is not to blame. Because the slave does not own the land, Clare is linking two things, the instrumental view of nature and the question of property, that people who own nature as property are not seeing it except as something that exist to serve them. So as he says it was not them that own the field, nor was it the slave that planned its overthrow.

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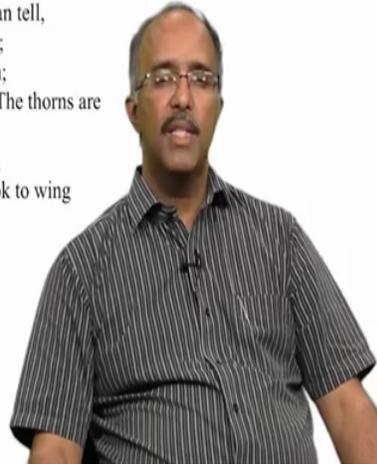
Clare saw human actions such as the  
Enclosure Acts as creating deserts.  
The peasant-poet here is Clare's persona:



Clare saw human actions such as the enclosure acts as creating deserts, and the peasant-poet here in the next slide is actually Clare's persona. Here it is:

(Refer Slide Time: 5:07)

There once were days, the woodsman knows it well,  
When shades e'en echoed with the singing thrush;  
There once were hours, the ploughman's tale can tell,  
Where morning's beauty wore its earliest blush;  
How woodlarks carol'd from each stumpy bush;  
Lubin himself has mark'd them soar and sing: The thorns are  
gone, the woodlark's song is hush,  
Spring more resembles winter now than spring,  
The shades are banish'd all—the birds have took to wing



There once were days, the woodsman knows it well. When shades echoed with the singing thrush, there once were hours, the ploughman's tale can tell, where morning's beauty wore its earliest blush. How woodlarks caroled from each stumpy bush, Lubin himself has marked them soar and sing: The thorns are gone, the woodlark's song is hush. Spring more resembles winter now than spring, the shades are banished all—the birds have took to wing.

(Refer Slide Time: 5:39)

By Langley bush I roam but the bush hath left its hill  
On cowper green I stray tis a desert strange & chill  
& spreading lea close oak ere decay had penned its will  
To the axe of the spoiler & self interest fell a prey  
& cross berry way & old round oaks narrow lane  
With its hollow trees like pulpits I shall never see again  
Inclosure like a Buonaparte let not a thing remain  
It levelled every bush & tree & levelled every hill  
& hung the moles for traitors—though the brook is running  
still It runs a naker brook cold & chill

'Remembrances'



By Langley bush I roam but the bush hath left its hill. On cowper green I stray tis a desert strange and chill and spreading lea close oak ere decay had penned its will to the axe of the

spoiler and self-interest fell a prey. Note the description: To the axe of the spoiler and self-interest, he is speaking about humans of course, whose self-interest trumps everything else and so on. And then he will say I shall never again see, never see again enclosure like a Buonaparte let not a thing remain. It leveled every bush and tree and leveled every hill and hung the moles for traitors. Or though the brook is running still, it runs a naker brook cold and chill.

(Refer Slide Time: 6:29)

On paths to freedom & to childhood dear  
A board sticks up to notice 'no road here'  
& on the tree with ivy over hung  
The hated sign by vulgar taste is hung  
As tho the very birds should learn to know  
When they go there they must no further go  
Thus with the poor scared freedom bade good bye &  
much the[y] feel it in the smothered sigh  
& birds & trees & flowers without a name  
All sighed when lawless laws enclosure came  
'The Mores'



Continuing another poem, The Mores: On paths to freedom and to childhood dear a board sticks up to notice 'no road here'. Or let us spend a couple of seconds on this. What is Clare doing? Clare is saying: On paths to freedom and to childhood dear a board sticks up to notice which says 'no road here'. What he is saying is it used to be a common land, it used to be a common pathways and common roads. Suddenly there is a notice which says there is no longer a road here. It is literally the privatization of land that, and I am sure if you are reading the newspapers across India. You will see these descriptions of what used to be a common road has been taken away by a cantonment, an organization it has been privatized.

In fact if you think carefully what Clare is talking about here, is what you see in urban cities now. The mall for example is the street taken in as urban studies scholars of shopping such as Sharon Zukin have argued. The mall takes in the street, so previously you used to walk down a street to shop, now you enter a building to shop because the street has gone inside. That is what Clare is saying: no road here. Suddenly everything has changed. And if you look at the

conclusion of those lines, he says and birds and trees and flowers without a name all sighed when lawless laws enclosure came.

(Refer Slide Time: 7:53)

Clare likens enclosure to Napoleon here.  
There is nostalgia for the land lost to human greed.  
As in 'The Mores'...



Clare if you notice, likens enclosure to Napoleon. This is greed, this is conquest and there is nostalgia for the land lost to human greed.

(Refer Slide Time: 8:02)

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 & tree  
Spread its faint shadow of immensity  
& 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 & wild as summer flowers  
Is faded all—

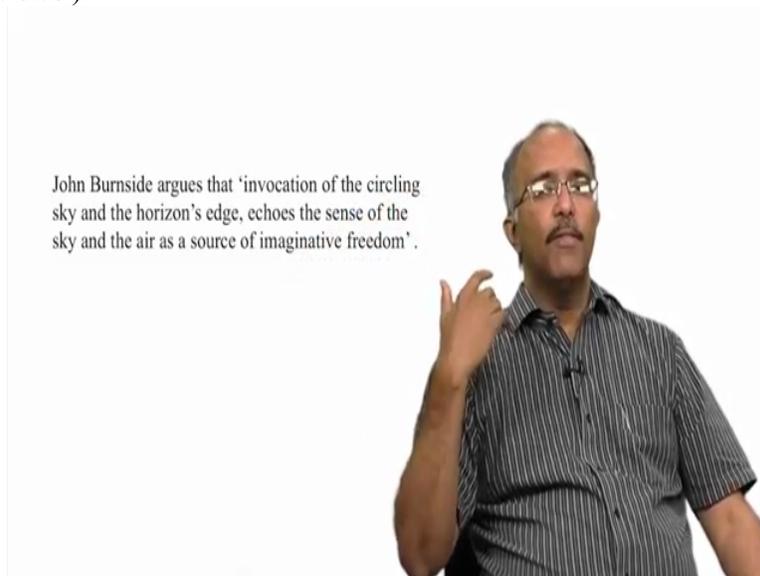


He says in The Mores, Unbounded freedom ruled the wandering scene. Unbounded freedom, boundary is not about freedom alone, boundary is actually in Clare's account the boundaries or fences around fields. Unbounded freedom ruled the wandering scene. Again you could wander without restriction and I would urge you to recall here a connection, the description in Blake's

London of chartered streets and chartered river Thames. Chartered meaning they have been sanctioned of as private property, you require an order to be allowed to go through it. They have been organized in different ways.

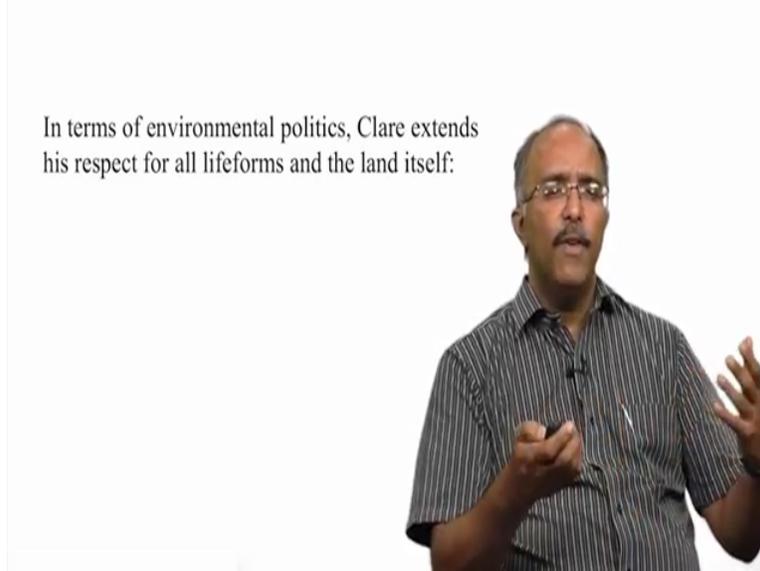
Look at what he is saying: Unbounded freedom ruled the wandering scene nor fence of ownership crept in between. To hide the prospect of the following eye, the land flows. It is only boundage was the circling sky, there is nothing else. It is unbounded, your vision and your mobility are both endless.

(Refer Slide Time: 8:59)



John Burnside argues that the invocation of the circling sky and the horizon's edge, echoes the sense of the sky and air as a source of imaginative freedom. It is an innovative reading. So what Burnside is arguing is the description of vast seas and horizon actually is about imaginative freedom itself.

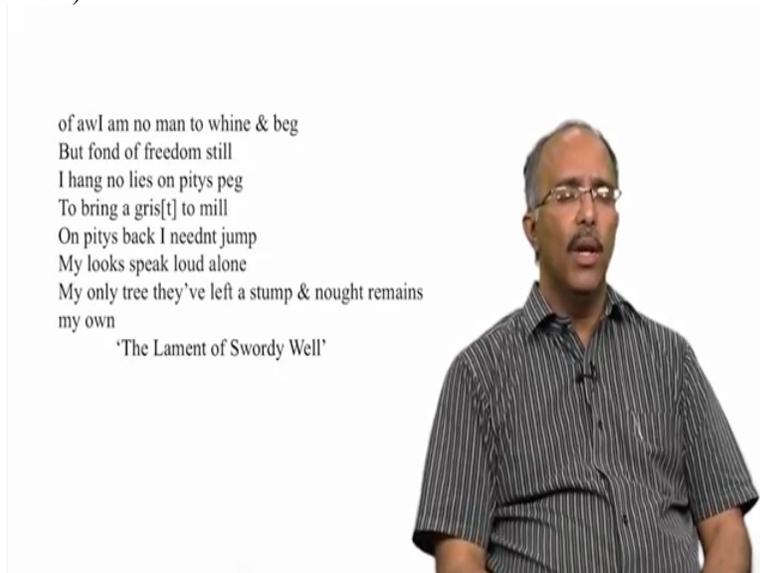
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In terms of environmental politics, Clare extends his respect for all lifeforms and the land itself:

In terms of environmental politics, Clare extends his respect for all life forms and the land itself. He is very visionary in that sense. For example, here is the famous poem, The Lament of Swordy Well, and he says he is looking at different forms of life itself.

(Refer Slide Time: 9:34)



of awl am no man to whine & beg  
But fond of freedom still  
I hang no lies on pitys peg  
To bring a gris[t] to mill  
On pitys back I neednt jump  
My looks speak loud alone  
My only tree they've left a stump & nought remains  
my own  
'The Lament of Swordy Well'

Please look at the excerpt on your screen, where he is speaking about different forms of life and he says at the end, my only tree they have left a stump, that is all that he says, being chopped and chopped and chopped and not remains my own, nothing remains my own. And there is nothing which is my own tress as such.

(Refer Slide Time: 9:53)

Clare is seen as a proto-Marxist for his political views on community and land  
John Burnside also marks him as a forerunner of some of today's dissidents, including  
Those in the Occupy movement due to poems such 'The Tramp':



Clare is seen as a proto-Marxist for his political views on community and land. John Burnside has also marked him as the forerunner of some of today's dissidents including those in the Occupy movement due to poems such as The Tramp.

(Refer Slide Time: 10:10)

He eats a moments stoppage to his song  
The stolen turnip as he goes along  
& hops along & heeds with careless eye  
The passing crowded stage coach reeling bye  
He talks to none but wends his silent way  
& finds a hovel at the close of day  
Or under any hedge his house is made  
He has no calling & he owns no trade  
An old smoaked blanket arches oer his head  
A whisp of straw or stubble makes his bed  
He knows a lawless clan that claim no kin  
But meet & plunder on & feel no sin  
No matter where they go or where they dwell  
They dally with the winds & laugh at hell



In this poem which is now up on your slide, he is talking about people who are quote unquote illegitimate occupants of a particular area, that they are not supposed to be there but they are there. So Burnside's innovative reading says that the some of you may recall the Occupy movement, Occupy wall street is what he is referring to, the students and those protesting against globalization or capitalism, when they occupy those places which were associated with high

finance which the world of, with the world of high capitalism and Burnside argues that poems like *The Tramp* are actually anticipating the arrival of the occupied protests where *The Tramp* is where he ought not to be. He stops where he should not stop.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:01)

Additional/Recommended Reading:

Fulford, Tim. *Landscape, Liberty and Authority: Poetry, Criticism and Politics from Thomson to Wordsworth*. Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Fulford, Tim, and Peter Kitson. Eds. *Romanticism and Colonialism: Writing and Empire, 1780–1830*. Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Connell, Philip. 'Wordsworth's "Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty" and the British Revolutionary Past', *ELH* 85.3 (2018): 747-774.

Burnside, John. 'John Clare and the new varieties of enclosure: a polemic', in Simon Kovesi and Scott McEathron (eds) *New Essays on John Clare: Poetry, Culture and Community*. Cambridge University Press, 2015. 79-96.

Folker, Brian. 'Wordsworth's Visionary Imagination: Democracy and War', *ELH* 69.1 (2002): 167-197.

Poetzsch, Markus. '[John Clare's Particular Particularity and the Language of Climate](#)', *John Clare Society Journal* 37 (2018): 27-40.

Vardy, Alan. *John Clare, Politics and Poetry*. Macmillan, 2004.



John Clare is not a very anthologist writer for some peculiar reason. But there is a lot in John Clare that teaches us about several things such as environmentalism for one and the politics of community, enclosures and the social hierarchies that determine our use of the land itself. So reading Clare means we understand environment, social hierarchy and proto-capitalist situations in England itself, the link between the arrival of the industrialist attitude towards the land and what happens to environmental in itself. Thank you.