This brilliantly conceived, exhilarating, and wide-ranging collection of essays is essential reading for all those interested in taking the long view of the historical, literary, and philosophical times of British Romanticism.

Pamela Clemitt, Queen Mary, University of London

Romanticism and Time is a remarkable affirmation of border-crossings and international exchanges in many ways. This major collection of essays represents the work of eminent scholars from France, Germany, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, as they in turn represent the Romanticisms that emerged not only from the “four nations” of England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland but also from Continental Europe and America. With their commitment to diversity, to change, and to exchange, and because of their awareness of the romanticism of periodization itself, the authors in this volume produce, as Wordsworth might say, a “timely utterance.”

Kevis Goodman, University of California, Berkeley

This volume considers Romantic poetry as embedded in and reflecting on the march of time, regarding it not merely as a reaction to the course of events between the late-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, but also as a form of creative engagement with history in the making. Revising current thinking about periodisation, these essays survey the Romantic canon’s evolution over time and approach Romanticism as a phenomenon unfolding across national borders.

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6. Contracting Time: John Clare’s 
The Shepherd’s Calendar

Lily Dessau

This chapter considers the work of time in the extended work of poetry The Shepherd’s Calendar by Northamptonshire poet of labour, John Clare. Divided into twelve months, each of which assumes a different verse-form in the style of Edmund Spenser, Clare’s Calendar is a real-time engagement with the uneasy tension between natural-and man-made time, simultaneously tracked across the seasons and the working day. Drawing on E. P. Thompson’s study of time- and class-consciousness, this chapter considers the active role of the church clock in ‘May’ to antagonise the agricultural workers, both human and non-human. It also addresses how the speaker’s adoption of the simple present shapes the verse into anti-memorial and builds on existing criticism of pre- and post-enclosure time in Clare’s earlier work. This focus of this chapter is on how these tensions play out in the manuscript version of ‘May’ but does conclude with a turn to the question of how time is contracted and compressed through the editorial interventions of Clare’s editors John Taylor and James Hessey in preparation for publication of The Shepherd’s Calendar in 1827.

Calendars, Almanacs, and Clocks

Any poem might be the meeting point of multiple temporalities, but it is difficult to avoid thinking about time in a work called The Shepherd’s Calendar, a book of twelve poems that simultaneously laments and resists the passage of time. Moreover, John Clare’s The Shepherd’s Calendar is a sequence of twelve poems that engages with the acceleration of time in the form of new technologies. The invocation of the church clock
is asserted in the opening of ‘May’, and the poem tracks a tension between this and other modes of temporality, between the symbolic command of the clock and the syntactical resistance to linear time. Clare’s poetic engagement with the spatial and temporal organisation of space around the clock tower destabilises a reading of clock-time as either an authentic measure, or a legitimate force in the poem, and as such performs a resistance to the antagonism of the clock that I argue is figured in the sequence. Perhaps, for Clare, this instability is a more authentic rendering of time, closer to that of nature than the alienating time of industry that is structured and informed by the clock.¹

There is an emphasis on time in Clare’s formal arrangement of *The Shepherd’s Calendar* (published in 1827), following Edmund Spenser’s *Shepheardes Calendar* (1579). Organising the poems according to the twelve months, throughout the sequence Clare adopts different scales, tenses and measures, allowing them to overlap and intermingle in one richly time-conscious piece of work. Carefully shaped into twelve formally distinct parts, *The Shepherd’s Calendar* is attentive to the measured time of verse-form and metre, and to the function of cadence and rhythm in moving the reader onwards, in place of narrative or succession.² He portions his poem into months, his months into days, and often his days stand as a record of the day from morn to eve, even though little happens. The action of the poem is built out of comings and goings with little space marked out for labour, or we instead trace the space and time *in-between*. Nevertheless, labour is the framing device, regulated by the clock. Clare looks back through time, mourning

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¹ This instability speaks to John Goodridge’s reading of the openness of Clare’s verse form in the ‘enclosure elegies’, which he describes as ‘more uncertain [than Oliver Goldsmith], but also more involving and exploratory.’ In *John Clare and Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 110, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139047197

² Clare appeals to the long literary heritage from Virgil through to Spenser of poetic forms, and with John Taylor’s editorial support he self-consciously engages with this literary tradition, though not without complication. *The Shepherd’s Calendar* is a child of the eclogue as well as the georgic—the former through Spenser’s work of the same name, and the latter through James Thomson’s *Seasons* and Clare’s inheritance of the pastoral tradition. In addition to Thomson’s formative influence on Clare, combined with Taylor’s encouragement to write in the tradition of Spenser, we might also include John Gay’s *Shepherd’s Week* as another important text in informing the structure of Clare’s *Calendar*. Clare’s interest in Spenser is evident elsewhere; notably the epigraph in Clare’s second publication *The Village Minstrel* (1821) comes from Spenser’s ‘June’ eclogue.
lost customs in ‘May’, and celebrating harvest days and holidays in ‘September’ and ‘December’. We cannot set aside how Clare’s own time has been divided by industry and capital, and how *The Shepherd’s Calendar*, along with some of his other verse, performs the sense of a pre- and post-enclosure time as well as space. On the subject of Clare’s representation of rural leisure in ‘The Village Minstrel’ Theresa Adams argues that there is an almost lapsarian effect of enclosure on Clare and his poetics, marking that ‘after enclosure, popular culture is no longer a lived experience, but something to be remembered’. In reading a shift in the end of ‘The Village Minstrel’ into ‘an elegiac meditation on time and memory’, which is coupled with a break from the georgic model of cyclical nature, Adams maintains that ‘Clare’s nostalgia [is] itself a form of protest’.3

In *The Shepherd’s Calendar*, and in particular the month of ‘May’ that is the focus of this chapter, there is a pull away from the past worked into Clare’s temporal structure of ‘May’ (in manuscript), which I argue is a self-conscious exploitation through inversion of the elegiac form as a mode of resistance. With an almost pedantic use of the present tense, Clare withholds from his speaker, and readers, the space or time to lament. As I will expand on in the conclusion, in the manuscript version of ‘May’ Clare turns from the simple present continuous to the construction of a ‘now’ that is ‘no more’ (l. 435), that works to resist the elegiac mode, and the temporality of nostalgia in its etymological root of returning home. It is in response to the effects of enclosure that I read Clare’s grammatical and syntactical resistance to succession or a progression through time in the manuscript version of *The Shepherd’s Calendar*. Instead, Clare’s parataxis stands in deliberate opposition to industrial ‘progress’ that is demarcated and measured out in ‘clock-time’ (an opposition that I will show as cruelly erased in the 1827 published version of the text).

The *Calendar* opens with a scene in which one labourer is reading an almanac. Hardly have we opened a collection of poems titled *The Shepherd’s Calendar*, turning to the first poem ‘January’, before we are being drawn into an entirely different system for measuring time. Clare’s quiet revolt against the mechanical operation of time imposed

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by both the clock and the calendar, a revolt against the mechanisms of industry and capital, is apparent from the start. The almanac stands as an invocation of natural time given its historical usage in agrarian practices, but is also significant within the period given its revival in France, as the Republicans make a revolutionary return to this more ecologically-driven form of time-keeping.\(^4\) The almanac is afforded such significance in \textit{The Shepherd’s Calendar} as Clare sneaks it onto the same line, and in the same breath, as the Bible in this first, ‘January’, scene: ‘All wonders are with faith supplyd/Bible at once & weather guide’.\(^5\) Here, Clare exposes an ecological tension between natural and industrial, or man-made, time and opens a dialogue between the two by invoking and then returning to the almanac throughout ‘January’. John Goodridge similarly considers the ‘competing narrative forms’ of Bible and almanac, in reading their close quarters in another \textit{Middle Period} poem, ‘The Sorrows of Love Or the Broken Heart A Tale’, wherein ‘the Bible “lay wi penny storys rustling near/ & almanacks prese[r]vd for many a year”’.\(^6\) This return to the almanac, placed in the opening of the \textit{Calendar}, marks Clare’s time as ecological, offering an alternative to the

\(^4\) The Roman etymology of ‘calendar’ marks it as driven by religion and capital (listen out for the ‘cal’ ‘ends’), ‘almanac’ comes from the Middle French and post-classical Latin for an astronomical calendar. Interestingly, there is speculation that ‘almanac’ also derives from the classical Arabic \textit{munāḵ}. This is the verbal noun of ‘\textit{anāḵa} to make (a camel) kneel; it functions as a noun of action (i.e. ‘halt at the end of a day’s travel’) and a noun of place (i.e. ‘stopping place’). The assumed semantic development from the classical Arabic senses of the verbal noun to the sense ‘calendar’ has a parallel in the semantic development of \textit{climate} in Arabic; in fact, \textit{munāḵ}, or \textit{manāḵ} is the standard Modern Arabic word for ‘climate’ (OED). See also Matthew Shaw, \textit{Time and the French Revolution} (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2011) for a robust study into the origins and consequences of the intervention into the measurement of \textit{time} during the Revolution. French coins of the period naturally used this calendar, with many showing the year in Arabic numbers, although Roman numerals were used in some cases. I read the use of Arabic as an aligning with the semantic roots of almanac that link place, time and climate. Furthermore, the replacement of saints for aspects of nature, each day as ‘Germinal’ and celebrating a new natural thing, along with the names of the months returning to correspond with the seasons, all build towards this sensical reading of a ‘tool’ driven by natural time.

\(^5\) John Clare, ‘January’ (MS), \textit{The Shepherd’s Calendar}, ed. by Tim Chilcott (Manchester: Carcanet, 2006), lines 21–22. Of note to the temporality of \textit{The Shepherd’s Calendar}, this ‘&’ becomes ‘or’ in the printed edition. I turn to the shifts from the manuscript version to the printed edition in the final section of this chapter.

\(^6\) Goodridge, \textit{John Clare and Community}, p. 183.
mechanical arrangement of time as measured by the calendar or, as it is invoked in the poem ‘May’, by the clock.

‘Jealous Eyes’ and Nostalgic Ears

Clare’s ‘May’ is perhaps the most fraught of all the month poems in confronting the industrial-agrarian capitalist division of time between labour and leisure through the invocation of the May Day holiday. This explicit tension between past and present, and the loss of customs through the enclosure of the commons, plays out in what I figure as real-time, or perhaps the antagonistic ‘now-time’ of the clock, to borrow anachronistically from Walter Benjamin.\(^7\) The clock figures its presence through sight—first spied through the eyes of the village children ‘Viewing with jealous eyes the clock’ (l. 22; MS)—and sound—echoing through the ‘now’ of ‘Each morning now the weeders meet’ (l. 147; MS), antagonising the workers as it instructs and drives them on. But in sounding the present, it also serves to drown out the sounds of the past, and with it the customs of May Day. The ‘no’ and ‘no more’ rings out to mark the lost rituals in the final passage of this poem as it appears in manuscript, across lines such as:

No flowers are pluckt to hail the[e] now
Nor cotter seeks a single bough
The maids no more on thy sweet morn
Awake their thresholds to adorn
Wi dewey flowers —\(^8\)


\(^8\) John Clare, ‘May’ (MS), in *The Shepherd’s Calendar*, ed. by Tim Chilcott (Manchester: Carcanet, 2006), lines 433–37.
The echoes of ‘no’, ‘nor’ and ‘no more’ chime as a funeral toll, marking the loss of such customs. One might consider this drowning out with reference to nostalgia, the sirens, and the ‘call’ to return home that I have mentioned above. Thinking on the work of the ‘swathy bees’ with which we begin in the ‘May’ poem, perhaps in reading the clock as both an imposition and as a monument to nostalgia, one might recall in Homer’s Odyssey the application of beeswax to the ears, to counter the song of the sirens.9 Elsewhere, bees perform an undersong, ‘humming’ through Clare’s verse, but they are at the same time the source of the material that drowns out the sound of the sirens. The poem begins with ‘humming joys’ (l. 11; MS), underpinning an ecological poetics of sound and time that are then challenged by the ‘church clocks hum’ (l. 97; MS); Clare plays with sound to reproduce the antagonistic, but all the while interrelated relationship between industry and nature, under the rule of time as it is organised according to labour.

To foreground the importance of the Church Clock, and its bells, in ‘May’, I want to step outside the time of the poem and draw on a more recent reading of time that marks the power of the Clock. Displacement and dispossession continue to have an antagonistic, and profound, relationship to mechanical time and synchronicity well into our own contemporary moment, which is explored through a process of return in W.G. Sebald’s Austerlitz (2011). There are many reasons to draw together Clare and Sebald; for one, both are writers grounded—or perhaps more accurately, ungrounded—in their own significant historical moment of upheaval and displacement, and as such both have literary projects that afford both space and time to itinerancy. In Austerlitz, Sebald offers an explicit confrontation to the colonial ministry of the clock, having a hand in coercing persons and things between places; I draw on this text as a point of comparison with Clare’s own rendering of the Church spire and Clock as an earlier iteration of the antagonistic subject-object relation between time and persons. The figure of the Clock is central to the political and economic subjectivity of both Sebald’s protagonist and Clare’s villagers. When Sebald recounts his protagonist’s suspicion of time, from inside Antwerp Station, we overhear:

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time, said Austerlitz, represented by the hands and dial of the clock, *reigns supreme* among these emblems. The clock is placed some twenty metres *above* the only baroque element in the entire ensemble [... as the governor of a new omnipotence [... The movement of all travellers could be *surveyed* from the central position occupied by the clock in Antwerp Station, and conversely all travellers had to *look up* at the clock and were *obliged to adjust* their activities to its *demands*. 10

‘Time, said Austerlitz’, recounts the narrator Sebald, ‘represented by the hands and dial of the clock, *reigns supreme*’ (my emphasis). Here the mechanism for measuring time, placed high above all other emblems of power, shifts from that which represents, to that which now governs. I draw on this passage from a much later text for how it exposes the tension that is captured in thinking of time as active, or passive, or both simultaneously, but also for how time is governed spatially, as it emphasises this height from which the clock oversees. From its vantage point, time has become an active, shaping force over its domain, forcing its subjects to ‘adjust’. But nonetheless, in the face of the clock, time still exists as number, measured and guaranteed, against which the movements of the subjects are recorded, especially when it comes to labour.

Tracing the history of how time is announced by the bells, from a solemn ringer, through to the mechanical intervention of time constituted and regulated by the clock, by the 1900s we can be confident that the Church Clock, and implicitly its bells, do offer a regulated measure of time. 11 By the time we are in Antwerp station, the synchronisation of the clocks across Europe has faded into memory, and timepieces are widely and privately owned; time, as for Austerlitz, reigns supreme. Moreover, this reign of time is articulated spatially, from above. Even when we return to Clare, prior to this synchronisation, we understand time


11 Compared with earlier invocations of time ringing out hourly—but perhaps not technically hours apart. As is described by clock-maker to the King, B.L. Vulliamy, in a short pamphlet *Some Considerations on the Subject of Public Clocks Particularly Church Clocks: with Hints for their Improvement* (London: McMillan, Bow Street, 1828), p. 2: ‘I select that of St Paul’s as a standard, not on account of the accuracy with which it measures time, but from its local situation’ (my emphasis).
through space. In ‘May’, this spatial rendering of time is parochial. It is shaped by the sound of bells, which conform to the clock-time that is shown at the base of the Church’s prominent spire. The real spire, that of St Benedict’s Church, Glinton, transforms the space of Clare’s poetics into place, but it also situates this place in time through the permeating sound of the bells.

Critics have emphasised the significance of Glinton spire in Clare’s autobiographical and poetical writings. The spire does not lose its religious function in ‘May’. It stands as ‘a mark to urge him [the schoolboy we began with] right’ (l. 49; MS and ‘guide’ l. 43; print). But perhaps the tension that the looming presence of the clock tower invokes—in its dual role both as religious symbol and marker of time—plays out in this transition from the verb ‘urg[ing]’ in the manuscript to ‘guid[ing]’ in the printed edition; the antagonism that can be read in the manuscript is diluted in print, as is the sense of time’s control. There is an oft-quoted passage from Clare’s Autobiographical Fragments, commonly used to foreground or underline Clare’s acute sensitivity to place, in which he recalls how:

I had imagin’d that the worlds end was at the edge of the orison and that a days journey was able to find it [...] I eagerly wander’d on and rambled

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12 Borrowing in part from Henri Bergson on Church bells in Time and Free Will, trans. by F. L. Pogson (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2001), p. 87: ‘Perhaps [when] some people count the successive strokes of a distant bell [...] their imagination pictures the bell coming and going; this spatial sort of image is sufficient for the first two units, and the others follow naturally’; Vulliamy (above) also theorises the bell in relation to space, given that the function of the bell is to inform a particular, ‘local’, place. That both Vulliamy and Bergson present a spatial imagining of time through the successive rings of a bell, draws me towards such a reading in Clare’s poetic response to time, as it relates to his own parochialism, too.

13 I am recalling, here, the less scholarly and more anecdotal significance of Clare’s attention to the spire. In 2004, Clare’s poem ‘Glinton Spire’ was said to be instrumental in defending the village against the building of a telephone mast by British Telecom. See Ian Herbert, ‘Poetic justice: villagers defeat phone mast threat by quoting their local bard’, Independent, 14 December 2004, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/poetic-justice-villagers-defeat-phone-mast-threat-by-quotting-their-local-bard-688497.html

14 I expand on the issue of reading the manuscript and printed edition in parallel, given that we cannot identify the changes as Taylor’s or Clare’s definitively, but in tracing the temporal patterns in the text—and how it is arrested throughout in the manuscript before unfolding as a series of events in the printed edition—I want to hazard that the latter ordering of time, and the structuring of succession or narrative to speak in literary terms, is the work of Taylor in preparing the text for publication.
among the furze the whole day till I got out of my knowledge [...] I was finding new wonders every minute and was walking in a new world often wondering to my self that I had not found the end of the old one [...].

Describing his return to the bounds of Helpston(e), ‘everything seemd so different the church peeping over the woods coud hardly reconcile me’. Much has been made of Glinton spire in marking the bounds of place, and as a shaping force in Clare’s poetic identity, but of equal importance to understanding Clare’s spatial imaginary is the lesser emphasised moment from just earlier in this same fragment, where Clare foregrounds the importance of the church spire in demarcating the bounds of his ‘knowledge’:

we heard the bells chime but the fields was our church and we seemd to feel a religious feeling in our haunts on the sabbath while some old shepherd sat on a mole hill reading aloud some favour[i]te chapter from an old fragment of a Bible which he carried in his pocket for the day a family relic which possesd on its covers and title pages in rude scrawls geneoligys of the third and fourth Generations when aunts uncles and grandmothers dyd and when cousins etc were marri[e]d and brothers and sisters born occupying all the blank leaves in the book and the title pages bhoverds which leaves were prese [r]ved with a sacred veneration tho half the contents had been sufferd to drop out and be lost [...]

For Clare, in this fragment, the bells do not ‘urge’ him as they do the characters in ‘May’. The function of the bells, in reading Clare, is highly dependent on context, both spatial and temporal. To the labourers, the bells might well mark time, but in recounting his own memories of childhood in leisure time, Clare acknowledges and formulates a poetic response to how they demarcate the parameters of the common and the Parish as a whole, and in particular his own place of worship in the fields.

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15 John Clare, By Himself, ed. by Eric Robinson and David Powell (Manchester: Carcanet, 2002), p. 87. My emphasis.
16 Ibid., p. 88.
17 Ibid., p. 86. My emphasis.
18 My reading of the church spire (and its bells) as at the topographical centre of the poem echoes Franco Moretti’s reading of space in Clare, which in turn leans heavily on John Barrell, who writes, ‘for those of its inhabitants [...] the parish itself was so to speak at the centre of the landscape’. In this chapter I am pushing this reading further, to argue that for The Shepherd’s Calendar, it is time at the centre, structuring
Arresting Development, or the Lyric Present

The tension playing out across ‘May’, between past and present, tradition and innovation, best materialises in the face of the clock. Clock-time and the looming threat of productivity as measured through time, establishes itself from the first few lines.¹⁹ In ‘May’, the speaker gives us a scene teeming with the sounds of natural activity, the noisy insects and animals joined together by the metronomically sounding ‘and’ of the ampersand.²⁰ But quickly there is an interruption to this abundant description, a foreign sound to those of nature: that of a regulated, mechanical time (that is, the present tense ‘now-time’ of the clock). Measured and inscribed, the repetition of ‘every’ in this line draws out the repetitive nature of time measured in ticks and tocks, but perhaps of more importance is how it conjures the reflexive mode of time that is kept. This ‘every’ invokes the pernicious notion that someone is watching the clock, quantifying or recording the ‘every’ time. In the poem we find:

& swathy bees about the grass

That stops with every bloom they pass

& every minute every hour

Keep teazing weeds that wear a flower (lines 7–10; MS)

The work of the bees is reduced to an elliptical, almost mechanical, measure, that of quantifiable time. Clare’s syntax exaggerates this effect, as ‘every’ carries over from space (the flowerbed) into time (minutes, min.,...)}
hours). Here, too, the ampersand flattens the temporal scale, as we, with the bees are ‘ke[pt]’ in the perpetual present. But while the movement of the bees repeats from flower to flower, we are – thanks to the Clare’s temporally-resistant poetics—afforded the time to linger over and elongate the repeated sound /i:/ in ‘Keep teasing weeds’.

Time crops up again as provocateur soon after the bees clock in their hours. Turning to the ‘village children’, the speaker describes ‘In school times leisure ever short’ (l. 14; MS), the ambiguous pluralising of ‘times’ opening the possibility that here time might be both at once under the dictate of ‘school’ and itself the agent of ‘leisure’. Merely gestured to, the Church spire casts a shadow over this opening scene, towering above all that surrounds it, ready to distribute time across ‘May’. Franco Moretti draws out of John Barrell’s study of Clare’s idiosyncratic approach to space in verse, an ‘omnipresent, half-submerged culture of daily routines—positions of the fields, local paths, perceptions of distances, horizon—which historians tend to call mentalité, and which is often entwined with the performance of material labour’. Whether ‘half-submerged’ or casting a shadow, the sense of the spire as looming is also felt through the antagonism with which the children are:

Oft racing round the nookey church

Or calling ecchos in the porch

& jelting oer the weather cock

Viewing wi jealous eyes the clock

Oft leaping grave stones leaning hights

Uncheckt wi melancholy sights (lines 19–24; MS; my emphasis)

This imperative ‘viewing’ is from ambiguous and undefined standpoints scattered throughout the churchyard; the clock is set above eye-level, but beneath the weathercock (in verse and in life) as a single unifying point in the scene. This is an active ‘viewing’, continuous and ever-renewed

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21 The pun is anachronistic; Thompson cites 1885 as the first instance of a mechanical time-stamping system being used in industry, although non-mechanical, human timekeepers were employed well before this date. In Thompson, *Customs in Common*, p. 186.

22 Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, p. 42.
by each pair of eyes that are ‘fired’ much like Walter Benjamin’s armed revolutionaries fire at the Clock, simultaneously and independently.\(^\text{23}\)

But, in the churchyard, the speaker then reflects ‘That time shall come when they shall lye’ (l. 28; MS), unflinchingly looking towards a time when these young children shall be ‘As lonely & as still as they’ (l. 29; MS). Despite the nod towards death, the time to lament lapses, as this picture is one of renewal: ‘other boys’ quickly step in to repeat the scene. This speaker keeps to the present, the active verb on each line working like an unstoppable refrain (‘calling’, ‘jelting’, ‘viewing’, ‘leaping’), governing an uncanny sense of almost timeless continuity, as the urgent reconstruction of the present takes place in the poem.

Later in ‘May’, the Church Clock announces itself again, as it overlooks one schoolboy’s truancy, here:

\[
\text{He often ventures thro the day} \\
\text{At truant now & then to play} \\
\text{Rambling about the field & plain} \\
\text{Seeking larks nests in the grain} \\
\text{& picking flowers & boughs of may} \\
\text{To hurd awhile & throw away} \\
\text{Lurking neath bushes from the sight} \\
\text{Of tell tale eyes till schools noon night} \\
\text{Listening each hour for church clocks hum} \\
\text{To know the hour to wander home} \\
\text{That parents may not think him long} \\
\text{Nor dream of his rude doing wrong (lines 89–100; MS; my emphasis)}
\]

I am fascinated by the rhyme between ‘hum’ and ‘home’.\(^\text{24}\) A ‘hum’ for Clare is often implicitly vocal, whether that of a human- or non-human


\(^{24}\) Clare’s patterning of rhyme both in this poem ‘May’, and other of his poems both in the sequence, and elsewhere, is fascinating yet perplexing to trace. There is not a decisive picture as to what the given pronunciation is—the question of pronunciation and rhyme in relation to both poetic tradition and dialect continue
animal. As the speaker describes in ‘April’, ‘all Nature finds a voice, / And hums a waking song.’ (lines 115–16; MS). And this personified—almost judgemental—character of the Church Clock, watching over and ‘humming’ disapprovingly at the boy stealing school time, tells of the uneasy tension experienced by the villagers under time’s watch throughout ‘May’. This diegetic sound of the clock interrupts the speaker’s control over the metre and rhyme scheme with a warning to the schoolboy. The (potential) half rhyme with ‘home’ is striking, as it draws us back into the sound of the previous line, but this time through the boy’s ear. Though the clock may ‘hum’ disapprovingly, to the ear of the labourers the sounds of Church bells chime with ‘home’.

I want to labour on this point of subjective hearing, in how the sounds of the Church Clock are reproduced in the poem, and how they translate as heard by the figures in the text. I think it is important to underline this, both because this is part of a larger question I am asking of the production and reception of sounds in Clare’s poetics, but also because I think it lends itself to a critique of the clock as such. What I am trying to emphasise is that the sounds that the church bells produce in this poem do regulate and oppress, but that through the act of listening performed in the poem, the sounds are redeemed as a comforting call for home, echoing the month’s own ‘welcome call’ (l. 425; MS). I stress the particulars of the time, place, and lyric conditions under which the bells are sounded, because they operate entirely differently in Clare’s later poem ‘The Chiming Bells’.25 Without diverting too much from my reading of ‘May’, this is nevertheless a good point of comparison to read the significance of context in how the bells sound, as the speaker moves through describing ‘How peaceful sound the chiming bells’ (l. 1), as ‘Calmly they reach the Shepherd’s ear’ (l. 5), but crucially through this poem, the sounds always ‘chime’ with the day, ‘sabbath chimes’

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and ‘Sabbath bells’ for a Sunday in Summer.\textsuperscript{26} Similarly, in the sonnet ‘Glinton Spire’ we find little tension between the dominating spire and the speaker; no ‘jealous eyes’ are cast upon it here.\textsuperscript{27} Instead there is a pure reverence, but nevertheless we still find the dominion of the ‘taper spire’:

\[
[\ldots]\text{making common things}
\]
\[
\text{Around it glow with beautys not their own}
\]
\[
\text{Thus all around—the earth superior springs}
\]
\[
\text{Those strangling trees though lonely seem not lone}
\]
\[
\text{But in thy presence wear superior power (lines 6–10)}
\]

Clare’s verses often find themselves acting out a negotiation or tracing a resistance; as poet of the peripheries (read: hedgerows), his speaker cannot sit comfortably in any one spot. Even in a scene of comfort and security, there must be a self-conscious reconsideration of the scene; here in ‘Glinton Spire’, ‘almost’ and ‘seem’ draw out the anxiety often found in Clare’s verse on the limitations of the imagination.

But back in ‘May’, Clare’s grammar and syntax resist the regulation and onward thrust, albeit towards ‘home’, that come with the sound of time passing. Anne-Lise François initiates a turn to the poem in our present moment of ecological crisis, to ‘consider anew the problem of lyric time’, an invitation I want to take up here.\textsuperscript{28} François describes lyric as a ‘technique of presencing, intensification, and condensation […] of linguistic utterance into a single verbal image on the page’.\textsuperscript{29} The lyric time is rendered visible by grammatical measures rather than narrative sequence. I depart from François’s productive reading of time and the

\textsuperscript{26} See further: How beautiful from yon old tower The chimes their story tells Theres little in the summer hour So sweet as chiming bells (lines 21–24)


\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., p. 248.
lyric in the shadow of the Anthropocene and deep time, because (as is habit with Clare) I want to take a microscopic look at how time operates in the sequence, and here stress the mechanical form of time that imposes itself upon the scene, through the ringing out of the Church bells in ‘May’. These grammatical and syntactical measures destabilise time, working against the clock. Clare’s engagement with time is inextricable from his engagement with labour. I read the characters in ‘May’, given by names that are dictated by their labour, in light of Marx’s note on the clock, in which ‘Time is everything, man is nothing; he is, at the most, time’s carcase’:

Does not this reduction of days of compound labour to days of simple labour suppose that simple labour is itself taken as a measure of value? If the mere quantity of labour functions as a measure of value regardless of quality, it presupposes that simple labour has become the pivot of industry. It presupposes that labour has been equalised by the subordination of man to the machine or by the extreme division of labour; that men are effaced by their labour; that the pendulum of the clock has become as accurate a measure of the relative activity of two workers as it is of the speed of two locomotives. Therefore, we should not say that one man’s hour is worth another man’s hour, but rather that one man during an hour is worth just as much as another man during an hour. Time is everything, man is nothing; he is, at the most, time’s carcase. Quality no longer matters. Quantity alone decides everything; hour for hour, day for day.

Capturing this shift towards measuring value through ‘simple labour’, Marx situates man in time. By emphasising duration (see: ‘during’), the relationship between man and time has been inverted; what once might have been man’s possession, becomes that which possesses him. The hour remains the same, only the man changes. Clare’s ‘every minute every hour’ chimes with Marx’s similar utterance: ‘hour for hour, day for day’. Clare’s resistance to succession, through the paratactical joinder of the ampersand and the repetitive use of the simple present creating a lively simultaneity, work to protect his figures from being dragged along

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30 I hope it is understood, and goes without saying, that this chapter is strongly influenced by E. P. Thompson’s robust history of the clock, and time, in relation to labour and class-consciousness in the period, ‘Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism’ published in *Past & Present*, 38.1 (December 1967), 56–97, and reprinted in *Customs in Common* in 1991.

the current of time; instead they remain in the perpetual present tense of the lyric.

‘&’, ‘Now’, and ‘No More’

Clare’s paratactical stitching together of lines traces through ‘May’ an a-temporal—almost universal—present through the deictic ‘now’. The refusal of coordination between lines stands as a resistance to narrative and temporal succession: that time of the clock, industry, and progress. Jonathan Culler describes this a-temporal, maybe universal, present as the ‘lyric present’, and notes how the ballad ‘orchestrates’ between the past and present tense, using the latter to ‘enrich their ritualistic dimension, pulling themselves out of a narrated past and into a present of enunciation’. But crucially this is not what happens in ‘May’. Instead, Clare keeps us perpetually trapped in the present, denying access to the narrated past of custom and tradition; instead the May pole is reduced to a mere ‘stump of old time’ (l. 420, MS). Moreover, Clare’s present is complicated by its encoded absence. The temporal paradox of a ‘no more’ serves to clear a space for the trace of a past in the present. This is a trace of both a former presence, and of the poetic past, because to me ‘no more’ has to be from Milton’s ‘Lycidas’: ‘Weep no more, woful Shepherds, weep no more [...] Now, Lycidas the Shepherds weep no more;’.

That said, it might also be drawn from Gray’s ‘Elegy’ in which ‘no more’ marks the departure of figures from the scene, through a

33 Echoes of this in the invocation of an inaccessible ‘past’ appear in the long poem ‘Childhood’ (c. 1830), where ‘The treasures most preferred/Have left the honours of their place/Locked in that silent word’ (lines 22–24). In ‘Childhood’, in Poems of the Middle Period, ed. by Eric Robinson, David Powell and P.M.S Dawson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), III, pp. 229–52.
34 See also in the repetition of ‘no more’ in ‘May’.
35 We know Clare owned at least one copy of Paradise Lost by the 1820s (there are two listed in the record of his library collection at Northamptonshire), and given his reverence for Milton, it might not be unreasonable to hear the closing lines of ‘Lycidas’ in the invocation ‘no more’ (‘May’, l. 435, MS). John Milton, ‘Lycidas’, in Complete Shorter Poems, ed. by Stella P. Revard (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 74–80.
lapse in time.\textsuperscript{36} Whereas Milton’s speaker cries for his fellow shepherds to recover from their loss, Clare’s ‘no more’ is closer to Gray’s, no longer marking the departed figures in the scene. Moreover, through Clare’s ‘no more’ ring the ‘syllabled sounds’ of mourn(ing), intensifying this inversion of a redemptive ‘no more’ (Milton’s) to one that marks out a space for absence by negating the entire May Day that it anticipates.\textsuperscript{37}

The active role of the ampersand in shaping (and suspending) time in the poem informs my reading of a quiet resistance against successive, or progressive, clock-time. The time of the poem is ‘filled up’, as Clare’s editor John Taylor suggested he do, but not only through the ampersand. I want to draw you to another discrepancy between the manuscript and the published version of the poem to labour this reading of time, and to the resistance of the accumulative work heroic couplets do to perform a sense of progress in the poem. Going back to ‘January’, we find:

The schoolboy still in dithering joys

Pastime in leisure hours employs (lines 101–02; MS)

The schoolboy still, with dithering joys,

In pastime leisure hours employs (lines 29–30)

Similar to ‘In school times leisure ever short’ in ‘May’ (l. 14; MS), the verb ‘employs’ demarcates leisure time apart from, but still implicit in, the working day. This tension between time and labour, strained by the new means to measure one against the other in the shift from what I like to figure as ‘loom-time’ demarcated by the rotation and rhythm of the loom, or the worker’s ownership of their own time, towards this ‘working day’ in which the time of work is defined by the employer, is invoked just before this moment, when the speaker recounts a ‘soddling boy’

\textsuperscript{36} John Goodridge weaves together the important influence of both John Milton and Thomas Gray on Clare’s own ‘pastoral [elegies]’, making particular note of a ‘Miltonic scales of time and space’ in the opening movement of one middle-period enclosure elegy, ‘The Mores’, in \textit{John Clare and Community}, p. 125.

who ‘stealing time he often stands’ (l. 99; MS). But here, comparing the schoolboy ‘still in’ of the manuscript to the later ‘still, with’ ‘dithering joys’, it is the repetition of ‘in’ from the first part of the couplet to the second that performs this stasis in time. Nothing happens. But in the printed edition, this stand against onward motion is edited out, and it is the accumulation of the dithering joys that moves the schoolboy to ‘employ’ these leisure hours in passing the time. Picturing the boy in the manuscript we see him embedded in concentric circles: the first circle being joy, and the second being time. Although the edited version does sustain the sense of being ‘in’ time, the picture is one of linear, onward movement through which the boy first acquires this ‘joy’ before being ‘in pastime’. I wonder, too, if the sense of simultaneity makes itself all the more present here by its absence. Placing these two quotations side by side produces one more striking difference: what does happen in the 70-odd lines that have been taken out of the manuscript? For the sake of onward movement, nothing. But for the sake of Clare’s teeming network of human and non-human beings, a lot. It just happens all at once, and supposedly we lose nothing by contracting the sequence of events.

Contracting Time: An Afterword on John Taylor’s Interventions

Eric Robinson, in his introduction to the Oxford edition of The Shepherd’s Calendar (1964 and 2014) cites the 1 August 1823 letter from John Taylor to the poet as this point from which we can chart the development of the poem as it came to be in its 1827 iteration. But we might also look back to the earlier communications between Clare, Taylor, and Taylor’s publishing partner James Hessey, for its origins. In the 21 January 1820


39 Tim Chilcott (to whom I give special thanks in the preparation of this chapter), in his introduction to the 2006 edition that places in parallel the manuscript and published version, gestures to the earlier invocation of a poem of this sort. See ‘Introduction’, in The Shepherd’s Calendar, ed. by Tim Chilcott (Manchester: Carcanet,
letter from Taylor to Clare we see the productive role that the editor plays in shaping this poem cycle. Here we see his resistance to intervening prematurely, along with the sharp eye he casts across much of Clare’s work, and the care he takes to tease out the poet’s more substantial (perhaps marketable) ideas. Taylor encourages Clare to expand on a manuscript fragment, the ‘Week in a Village’, offering:

\[\text{[...]} \text{that you should divide the Week’s Employment into the 7 Days, selecting such for each as might more particularly apply to that Day, which is the Case with some of the Occupations;—that the remaining time which might be pursued on any Day should be allotted so as to fill up the Time;—that the Sports, & Amusements should in like manner be apportioned out into the 7 Days;—and that one little appropriate Story should be involved in each Day’s Description.—A different Metre might sometimes be introduced; for instance in the Tale, if it were supposed to be related by one of the Characters of the Piece;\text{or, otherwise the various Days might be marked by a varied Measure:} \text{but this would be as you thought best & found most agreeable to you.—I mentioned it then, & now again, because I thought it would allow of that part of your ‘Peasant Boy’, which you had written, being incorporated with the rest of the Plan, under the Head of ‘Sunday’; as well as because I think that a varied Structure of Verse in a long Poem suits your Genius best.}\text{[...]}\]

Even before considering the specific market conditions for publishing in the years leading up to the 1827 publication of *The Shepherd’s Calendar*, we can infer the significance of any work’s title to its publisher. Here it is shown by how productive the title of a manuscript fragment, this ‘Week in a Village’, proved to Taylor’s editorial guidance. The overall form of *The Shepherd’s Calendar* is evidently on Taylor’s advice, which in turn informs a reading of the poem in dialogue with its georgic and

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40 Given that this is the follow-up letter to Clare having received Chaucer’s *Tales* alongside his personal copies of *Poems Descriptive*, is it out of the question to consider the form of the *Tales* as another source for Clare’s eventual long poem, perhaps as an invitation to read the role of the lyric subject in each month.

but bucolic predecessors.\textsuperscript{42} Clare’s debt to the georgic is noted by critics, but Taylor’s invocation of Edmund Spenser is clear in the use of an overall temporally defined structure, portioned into poems of ‘varied Measure’, even before the 1 August letter urging him to adopt the same title.\textsuperscript{43}

But the scene of the truanting schoolboy in ‘May’ does not appear in the published version. Of course, given the difficulty in defining who is responsible for each editorial decision made for Clare’s manuscript, I cannot say for sure this is Taylor, as much as I might be inclined. But as the speaker simultaneously invokes, and resists the fulfilment of, a lament for the post-enclosure loss of the customs bound up in the May-day holiday, Clare’s post-enclosure persona can be heard loud and clear in the fuller manuscript version. Indeed, it echoes the protesting voice of the ‘enclosure elegies’. John Goodridge, on one such poem ‘The Mores’, reads Clare as ‘clashing the past discordantly against the present, as it were, in order to emphasise the change that has occurred’.\textsuperscript{44} And yet, it is difficult to give such a reading of \textit{The Shepherd’s Calendar} as it appears in its ‘final’ form. For it is during this period that interventions are made into the content of his verse, and the language through which it is shaped; such changes have been traced by, among others, Goodridge.\textsuperscript{45} With \textit{The Shepherd’s Calendar}, Taylor abandons the glossary that accompanied his two earlier volumes, \textit{Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery} (1820) and \textit{The Village Minstrel} (1821), and instead approaches Clare’s manuscripts with an eye to eliminate the need for a gloss from within. Tim Chilcott in

\textsuperscript{42} Spenser’s \textit{Calendar} (1579); but perhaps also Virgil, or Theocritus. In the aforementioned epigraph from Spenser, and its allusion to Mount Parnassus, Mina Gorji infers an ‘ambitious genealogy, which Clare recognised’, in \textit{John Clare and the Place of Poetry} (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), p. 77.

\textsuperscript{43} The Catalogue of the John Clare Collection in the Northampton Public Library (County Borough of Northampton: Public Libraries Museums and Art Galleries Committee, 1964) shows that Clare owned an 1819 edition of Spenser’s \textit{The Faery Queene}, but I am inclined to think this is taken from the 1819 edition \textit{The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser}, published by Suttaby et. al., in which case he might also have had access to \textit{The Shepheards Calender} (1579).

\textsuperscript{44} ‘Enclosure elegies’ stems from Johanne Clare in \textit{John Clare and the Bounds of Circumstance} (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1987). Goodridge is but one scholar who continues to use this collective name for Clare’s major poems on enclosure. Goodridge, \textit{John Clare and Community}, p. 127.

\textsuperscript{45} We find in the communication from Taylor of the interventions made by Lord Milton, a patron of Clare, that in the editing of ‘Helpstone’ there was an attempt to dilute or even elide the political commentary. See Goodridge, \textit{John Clare and Community}, pp. 105–33.
his introduction to the Carcanet edition outlines the editorial approach to Clare’s dialect, and does complicate the simple argument that it was Taylor who simply edited it out. But then, it is evident in reading Clare and Taylor’s correspondence that Clare’s frustration lead, in some degree, to him relinquishing his control over the language and grammar of his verse. The crucial May Day scene quite literally is ‘no more’ in the 1827 published version. As I mentioned, the final ‘May’ contains half the number of lines of Clare’s original, and is devoid of this resistance of or reaction to the dominating sight and sound of the Church Clock (save for those schoolboys jumping over gravestones at the beginning). The tensions between Clare and his editors, as well as his patrons, have been illuminated elsewhere, so to consider Clare’s response to how this work was contracted, elided and transformed in print, I offer this from Child Harold, a poem from the later period, as a means to read the silencing of the bells in the published ‘May’:

No single hour can stand for nought
No moment hand can move
But calendars an aching thought
Of my first lonely love
[…]
I hide it in the silent shades
Till silence finds a tongue
I make its grave where time invades
Till time becomes a song[.]  

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46 In a letter from 1822 in which he likens ‘grammer’ (sic) to ‘Tyranny’ Clare also defers to Taylor to ‘do your best or let it pass’, in The Letters of John Clare, p. 231.
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