

# FARWELL DELIGHTFUL SPOT FARWELL

John Clare's Nature Poetry and Our Place in  
the World – Lisa Katharina Guthardt

"Clare's intense engagement with the natural world, his respect for the local environment as an autonomous realm, and his projection of his experience in a mode of presentation that elides chronological differences, enables his deep insight into the interdependence of all living things, an insight that is virtually unprecedented in the English-speaking world and constitutes the core of his originality as an ecological writer" (McKusick 2010: 82).

What does it mean to be in an environment as a human being, how are we and how do we live? These questions – without a doubt of great importance – cannot be answered easily, if they can be answered at all. Surely, we are no isolated lifeforms in a sterile environment. We are surrounded by other beings, human and non-human, and the space we live in, this planet and our atmosphere, exposes us to different challenges every day. We have to find a way of living in this world. In the course of my studies, the challenge of trying to find appropriate answers occurred to me as a constant search, a permanent struggle and a seemingly endless engagement with this broad topic. What has also been striking repeatedly was the importance of literature in this journey.

The preceding passage is part of my master's thesis' introduction on ecology in Milton and Clare and fits the topic of this essay. On the following pages additional elements of this thesis are developed further and served as thought-provoking impulses for me. Due to limitations, I now want to focus on one of John Clare's poems, 'Helpston Green'. John Clare's importance, especially in comparison with his Romantic contemporaries, has been neglected for a long time. Luckily, more and more critics value his life and work, so that the interest in Clare is still growing (cp. White 2017: 3). Yet, I would argue that he is still one of the less famous agents in the context of Romanticism and nature poetry. Clare's poetry can give us impulses to reflect and think about our place in the world, about awareness, thoughts on being human in an environment and relations between different living creatures in an ecological context. Due to his outstanding background, he enables new perspectives and mindsets:

“Even though he was not educated at public schools nor attended a university, and even though his mother was illiterate and his father could barely read, romantic era writer John Clare never doubted his own artistic vision as a poet of nature. His vision was based on an understanding of local ecosystems but also strong feelings of affection towards the plants and animals he saw in the fields where he worked” (Ziegenhagen 2009: 179).

This attitude becomes evident in his way of writing. Stephanie Kuduk Weiner utters the following when referring to the power of Clare’s poetry: “[H]is poems demonstrate how poetic language and form mediate between the real world of observation, actual and imagined experiences of that world, and the reader’s multilayered sensuous enjoyment of the poem” (Kuduk Weiner 2014: 24).

‘Helpston Green’ is a poem belonging to the period of Helpston poems composed between 1812 and 1831.<sup>1</sup> I would like to explore different notions that can be read into the verses. Instead of proclaiming an exclusive truth, I will try to compare different perspectives and draw possible parallels to our current situation. The following questions receive special emphasis: How does the poem’s subject perceive nature? Which problems and fears become evident and in how far can the issues presented be related to our current situation? Why is his poetry still relevant?

Clare’s poems might have been a way to gather his thoughts, and this function is still important today. By reading we start thinking. We can draw parallels, we can find contradictions, we can broaden our horizon and we evaluate – this is what makes them especially important. His poetry leaves enough space for different approaches, thus trains our perception and receptivity for ecological issues. Particularly in these days, it becomes evident that his poems mirror existential crises, problems of enclosure, of our relation to the environment and questions of identity. Yet, they do not necessarily need to be understood as a call back to nature or a proclamation of utter harmony and peace with ourselves and our environment, as will be elaborated. To be often means to be in doubt, to live in uncertainty and to cope with existential fears – all of this can be read into Clare’s work, as well. Instead of mourning states that no longer exist or only condemning mankind’s behaviour, we can take these poems as thought-provoking impulses. We can become more aware of our surroundings and of ourselves. Before starting to analyse, the chosen poem should be pre-pended without additional context:

"Ye injur'd fields ere while so gay  
When natures hand display'd  
Long waving rows of Willows gray  
And clumps of Hawthorn shade  
But now alas your awthorn bowers  
All desolate we see  
The tyrants hand their shade devours  
And cuts down every tree

Not tree's alone have felt their force  
Whole Woods beneath them bow'd  
They stopt the winding runlets course  
And flowery pastures plough'd  
To shrub nor tree throughout thy fields  
They no compasion show  
The uplifted ax no mercy yields  
But strikes a fatal blow

When ere I muse along the plain  
And mark where once they grew  
Remembrance wakes her busy train  
And brings past scenes to view  
The well known brook the favorite tree  
In fancys eye appear  
And next that pleasant green I see  
That green for ever dear

Oer its green hill's I've often stray'd  
In Childhoods happy hour  
Oft sought the nest along the shade  
And gather'd many a flower  
With fellow play mates often joind  
In fresher sports to plan  
But now encreasing years have coind  
This play mate into man

The greens gone too ah lovely scene  
No more the king cup gay  
Shall shine in yellow oer the green  
And add a golden ray  
Nor more the herdsman's early call  
Shall bring the cows to feed  
Nor more the milk maids awkward brawl  
Bright echo in the mead

Both milkmaids shouts and herdsman's call  
 Have vanish'd with the green  
 The king kups yellow shades and all  
 Shall never more be seen  
 For all the cropping that does grow  
 Will so efface the scene  
 That after times will hardly know  
 It ever was a green

Farwell delightful spot farwell  
 Since every efforts vain  
 All I can do is still to tell  
 Of thy delightful plain  
 But that proves short – increasing years  
 That did my youth presage  
 When every new years day appears  
 Will mellow into age

When age resumes the faltering tongue  
 Alas there's nought can save  
 Take one more step then all along  
 We drop into the grave  
 Reflection pierces deadly keen  
 While I the mortal scan  
 As are the changes of the green  
 So is the life of man"  
 (Clare 2004: 62–64)

I would like to start with the analysis of what exactly Clare's poem does and which effects the reading of it has. In the first two stanzas mankind's behaviour seems to be condemned. Used images strongly convey differences between a natural and a human sphere, as well as past and present conditions, as perceived by the speaker. He<sup>2</sup> is confronted with the drastic altering of nature in his hometown and vividly shares his experiences and thoughts with the reader. There used to be gay fields, willows and hawthorn bushes. Now, the speaker only observes cut down fields, the bushes are gone, everything is bleak, and the shade of the bowers is forcefully taken away. The destructive force is strongly perceivable. What is also striking is that the speaker directly addresses nature and its entities and finds himself in immediate conversation with them. Right at the beginning of the poem he mournfully speaks to nature: "ye injur'd fields" (l. 1) and "now alas your

2 Due to the close connection between Clare himself and the voice in his poems, I will refer to the speaker as masculine.

awthorn bowers" (l. 5). The speaker's surroundings that used to be beautiful, in their natural state and independent from human influence are altered more and more. Readers can get the impression that the speaker is in a special union with nature and that he feels deep sorrow for what is happening. The destruction by mankind is presented in strong images, which underlines how forceful and drastic the situation seems to be. Human beings are referred to as tyrants, and they are responsible for what is happening to the natural environment. The speaker seems powerless and unable to cope with the unnecessary destruction of trees, fields and plants. This tone intensifies in the second stanza, where mankind is described as a force that shows no compassion for its environment. Ruthlessly, they cut down not only trees but whole forests. The relentlessness, inevitability and also the greed of human beings is made apparent, especially by the last line of each of the first stanzas ("And cuts down every tree", l. 8; "But strikes a fatal blow", l. 16). At first glance, a hierarchy between mankind and nature can be read into the poem: trees and forests "bow" (l. 10) and manmade axe "strikes a fatal blow" (l. 16). Human agents seem to be the one in control. They are more powerful and mercilessly destroy their environment. The fact that the speaker in the poem directly addresses his surroundings and the usage of the first-person perspective create a familiar atmosphere. The reader could have the impression of talking to a friend (cp. Kuduk Weiner 2014: 26) or to listen to a conversation between two intimate people.

The tone of the poem at this point is mainly negative and burdensome. Critical thinking about how to treat our environment is initiated. Destruction and adjustment of nature for human purposes is expressed. On a meta level, it could be said that the poem is one human way of coping with those ongoing changes. Kate Rigby also mentions the importance of literature in the process of dealing with these aspects:

"Created in the context of a whole new phase in the human domination of the earth through the domestication of plants and animals, the cultivation of the soil, and the construction of cities set apart from the surrounding countryside, writing also came to bear witness, however obliquely, to the environmentally destructive potential of the civilization that brought it into being" (Rigby 2015: 361).

We can say that changes of our environment were strongly perceived by human beings, already about 200 years ago. If we compare what is described by Clare to our current situation, changes seem to be far more drastic. Nowadays, there is an ongoing trend towards progress, perfection and profit. We can even refer to our era as a movement of

transhumanism, where technology supports and replaces our environment and human beings themselves.<sup>3</sup> The OED defines transhumanism as a “belief that the human race can evolve beyond its current limitations, esp. by the use of science and technology” (Oxford English Dictionary). Even though we can ameliorate our living standards and benefit from progress, there are most certainly challenges and difficulties connected to this idea. Among others, we have to answer the question of when to stop. As Fred Baumann puts it: “But it is nearly impossible to stop short when every further step promises convenience, pleasure, and greater physical well-being” (Baumann 2010: 74).

Going back to Clare, we see that changes did not pass without a trace and had effects on observers like him. When talking about his poems, it is essential to compare the poet and the speaker. When taking Clare’s background into account, parallels between himself and the voice in his poems become apparent, which justifies treating them as one. In his essay ‘John Clare and the Ghosts of Natures Past’ Alan Bewell illuminates Clare’s life and personal colouring that is evident in his works. Clare passionately wrote his poems, he argued for the permanence of nature and he was strongly connected to the place in which he grew up. In the first quarter of his life, he remarked that he had only stayed within a small radius around his home (cp. Bewell 2011: 550). Bewell also states that “Clare’s commitment to the stationary and to thinking about nature in traditional terms, as something that is local, immediately at-hand, and unchanging sets him apart from most of his contemporaries” (ibid.: 550). Clare’s poems can therefore be understood as a way of trying to capture nature and certain memories connected to it.

This aspect of permanence and the contrast between past and present, between childhood and adulthood, is graspable in the third stanza of ‘Helpston Green’. Bewell writes: “Growing up, he certainly believed that the nature that he knew as a child would never change, and throughout his poetry Clare identifies his childhood relationship with nature with permanence and joy” (ibid.: 551).

What should be noted, however, is the existence of change and childhood memories, or memories in general, as a dominant feature of the poem. In the third stanza, the speaker is reminiscent about how places used to be, thinking about “past scenes” (l. 20) or “[t]he well known brook the favorite tree” (l. 21). In the fourth stanza, there is even a direct reference to childhood and the connection to joyful experiences, as addressed by Bewell. Past experiences and images vividly come to the speaker’s mind. He remembers wandering over hills and through nature, searching for birds’ nests, picking flowers and playing with friends (ll. 25–29). These memories and the feeling of

growing older and changing with "encreasing years" (l. 31) will most likely seem familiar to many readers. Adam White also elaborates on the peculiarity of childhood for Clare:

"Clare sees childhood as a state of unmitigated joy, rapture, and pleasure, and adulthood as a form of disruption of this exalted condition, despite those memories of childhood retaining some comforting and solacing function from the present moment" (White 2017: 206).

It can therefore already be assumed that Clare connects former states of nature to an untroubled youth. He seeks refugial, thinks of past joys experienced in the natural frame and must admit that he is exposed to constant change. This reminiscence about past childhood experiences connected to nature is presumably still relatable for many of us. Often too early, we have to adapt and cope with changes, also in relation to our environment. An example for this is the movement 'Fridays for Future', which started in 2018 and is constantly growing. In this case, we see that even young people become active and involved in environmental issues. Timothy Clark mentions the stable frame of nature for human beings in general:

"In the past, nature may have seemed to offer a stable frame to give basic structure to human life, as with the immediate cultural overtones of the seasons in the temperate zone (love as spring-like; winter as a time of unhappiness, source of images of cruelty; summer as passion, luxury, and excess; autumn as fruition and decline). A sense of entrapment, unpredictability, and fragility becomes dominant now" (Clark 2013: 84).

This quote captures the problem of change in an adequate way. We may be able to find peace in nature, it can serve as a stable frame, but we cannot necessarily perpetuate this relation.

At this point, a short visit of Timothy Morton's approach to Clare's poems can be helpful when trying to grasp the use of a darker ecology. In his essay, Morton takes the poem 'I Am' as an example for his understanding of the ecological experience in Clare. Timothy Morton formulates it adequately: "Here they are, right here, on the earth, feeling like shit (hence melancholia). Why did we think that the deepest ecological experience would be full of love and light?" (Morton 2008: 190). We may be surrounded by beautiful pictures, images, impressions of nature and our environment, but our identities are in constant struggle. This struggle and uncertainty manifest in Clare's poems. Morton phrases it as follows:



“The doubt in the poem is so very corrosive, that [...] we have a ghostly, ambient version of an environment formed from the narrator’s scooped-out insides [...]. The narrator is painfully aware that the Otherness that surrounds him does not truly exist; it is a ‘nothingness of scorn and noise’” (Morton 2008: 190).

It must also be noted that Clare’s depression poems should not be treated separately from or with less ecological value than his earlier poems (cp. *ibid.*: 190). Instead, all poems can be seen as an interwoven whole, a critical engagement with the self and its environment. The motif of dislocation and displacement is very essential, even in the nature poems, where the speaker seems to be in perfect harmony with his environment. Clare was aware of displacement and of doubt, and he knew about their importance (cp. *ibid.*: 191). ‘I Am’ can be taken as a perfect example of a person who has lost the way, lost the self. The uncertainties of a troubled mind can be read into the verses. This is yet a crucial element that makes Clare’s works so important when dealing with ecological issues and when trying to find answers to questions of being. Morton should be quoted again in this case: “[T]his not knowing is also a hard won moment of actual subjectivity, in which, if we are to take Clare as an ecopoet seriously, we have lost nature, but gained ecology” (*ibid.*: 192).<sup>4</sup> Morton also stresses the importance of questioning when dealing with environmental issues, which mirrors the importance of reading literature from a critical perspective: “In sum, environment is theory – theory not as answer to questions, or as an instruction manual [...] but as question, and question-mark, as in question, questioning-ness” (Morton 2008: 186).

This state of doubting is also the binding element between the different passages. According to Morton, Clare’s poetry is helpful, mainly because it makes us aware of less beautiful and positive notions: “Far from giving us a liturgy for how to get out of our guilty minds, how to stick our heads in nature and lose them, Clare actually helps us to stay right here, in the poisoned mud. Which is exactly where we need to be, right now” (*ibid.*: 193).

Morton’s approach, only shortly presented here, shows us that it is possible to benefit from a more depressing point of view. It might be a starting point for change, accepting where we are right now. Clare was also struggling with questions of how and where to be and what to make of his situation. It is helpful to take further notions of critics who see past Clare’s greenness and analyse different sides of his life to establish a concise overview of his motivations and the perception of his poems. These aspects become apparent in the second part of ‘Helpston Green’, as well. John Goodridge for example draws interesting parallels between Clare’s critical engagement with



enclosure in his poems and his own frustration and explains that "one would venture that his hostility to enclosure and the 'money'd men' behind it is linked to frustration at his own poverty, and his exclusion from the literary world, which he no doubt felt was the result of it" (Goodridge 2013: 111).

Goodridge even argues that the brutal destruction of nature, as portrayed in Clare's poems, and the acceleration of the process of enclosure, thus the division of land, is a conflict of class, a division between rich and poor. Needs of the poor are neglected in favour for rich people's interests (cp. *ibid.*: 126). Adam White and Simon Kövesi are also concerned with this view. White remarks that the engagement in Clare's poems "perhaps represents Clare's own desire to leave behind the mundane existence offered by labouring-class life" (White 2017: 90). Kövesi mentions that "[p]lace is never straightforward in Clare, primarily because of issues of class" (Kövesi 2017: 28). He explains that aspects of class or social circumstances are sometimes left out in favour for current environmental issues (cp. *ibid.*: 28). Due to the close connection between poet and speaker, however, these aspects are of great importance for possible interpretations of the poem. Issues of class and class differences are highly relevant today. Not much has changed in the assumption that interests of few rich people and the economy are placed above the needs of poorer individuals. Exploitation of the poor, especially in favour for profit, can always be witnessed. Increased child labour or the exploitation of poorer employees who must work under miserable conditions in German slaughterhouses are only two examples for different hierarchies.<sup>5</sup> Even or maybe especially within the context of the current global pandemic profit is often still of top priority. Those issues show the existence of human problems that can be put in relation to environmental issues but also go beyond them.

This relation is also shown in Clare's poem. A more anthropocentric aspect of the poem and a stronger focus between past and present develop from stanza four onwards. The speaker is reminiscent about former states ("greens gone too ah lovely scene", l. 33), and we notice that human beings did make use of nature even before the seemingly drastic destruction of it, as farmers for example:

"Nor more the herdsman's early call  
 Shall bring the cows to feed  
 Nor more the milk maids awkward brawl  
 Bright echo in the mead" (ll. 37–40)

Again, we can detect how the speaker mourns change and compares present with past, as he remarks that “milkmaids shouts and herds-mans call/Have vanish’d with the green” (ll. 41f.).

These passages show that a mere green reading of the poem can be problematic since there is much more to cover. Critics like Simon Kövesi also mention that in spite of Clare’s engagement with ecological and environmental issues, they cannot be perceived as his only concerns, as he “cannot be constructed as the ecological fantasy of a sin-free green messiah, but – by his own account – is instead a messy, complex, paradoxical, anxious, changeable and context-dependant person” (Kövesi 2017: 17). He goes on: “Clare’s responses to his own places [...] are never straightforward, and his concerns about them are never only sympathetic or sentimental” (ibid.: 41).

It could be said that the speaker in fact misses the exact former state of nature and at the same time remembers his untroubled youth, where he was an innocent mind with lesser problems and doubts. The focus shifts more and more to human problems, combining nature with human identity. When the speaker mourns “Farwell delightful spot farwell” (l. 49), he seems to be troubled with himself and the challenges he has to face in life as well as with the alternation of nature and change in general. However, these two aspects are by no means binary. On the contrary, one could also conclude that the disappearing and demolition of nature in fact enhances critical thinking about oneself and the human species. To question and to think about current conditions might not lead to a satisfying answer, yet we can find out about what we know and not know. In this case, states of nature and former states of being can certainly be related to each other.

In the essay “An Undiscovered Song’: John Clare’s ‘Birds Poems’” Sehjae Chun refers to a general remark about Clare’s poetry by David Simpson, who “disparagingly criticizes Clare’s particular understanding of the local environment as only the reflection of his nostalgic longing for the past” (Chun 2005: 47f.). Yet, Clare is not only longing for the past, but he is also well aware of the present, and his poems emphasise exactly this engagement with present, self and environment. He is an observer, an explorer, but he is not stuck in the past, always at least trying to move on. The moving mind is represented by the speaker in his poems, which is often wandering, observing the surroundings and the ongoing changes. He is always (more or less successfully) trying to fit it and feel at home. However, feelings of being dislocated, of not living at ease with yourself and the uncertainty of belonging are important factors for a reading of his works as well.

The last two stanzas of ‘Helpston Green’, as already hinted at, take a more and more anthropocentric turn, while they illuminate the

connectedness and similarity of all beings at the same time. The speaker bids childhood memories and pleasant places farewell. Even though he clarifies that he will keep the memories alive by thinking about and telling of them (which has worked, retrospectively), he seems to be aware of his limited lifetime. This part of the poem clearly takes human thoughts and fears as a central point, and readers are confronted with thoughts on the caducity of life. There is one last remark on nature, but in this case, it is set in relation to the death of human beings. This remark could be seen as a final certainty that decay and fugacity connect all elements in our environment. Still, there is always the potential for renewal and rehabilitation, destruction is not one-sided, and change is possible. We can see that the speaker tries to cope with the overwhelming feeling of life and the destruction around him. The changes of nature are directly connected to the life of a human being in this world, which enhances the impression that the struggle of life, or the struggle of living, is the greater concern of this poem. We are exposed to constant changes, even in our environment. Nothing lasts forever, and images that were once familiar do not always persist, dissolving save for the memory in your mind. It is the struggle of life that lies in the core of this poem. The speaker has to accept the fact that he does not have full control – neither over his surroundings nor over the end of his life. Eventually, every being loses its power and simply “drop[s] into the grave” (l. 60). This is an aspect that binds every being since nobody can escape or prevent death. Nevertheless, the destruction of nature by human hand is a topic processed via poetry. This aspect must not be left aside but should be taken into the context of the human living sphere, as well, since we can relate to our world as a place of interconnectedness. The poem strikingly visualises the poet’s engagement with his environment. The adjective *green* is not only present in the title but occurs eight times in the poem. Green thoughts thus pervade the verses and are especially significant in the last lines, when there is a final and explicit connection between the changes of nature and human life.

‘Helpston Green’ is just one of various examples for what can be called enclosure elegies. John Goodridge also engages with motifs like connectedness to nature, the valuing and remembering of states, trees and places and the function of Clare’s poetry in relation to them. He describes a sympathy between Clare and nature, even an active response of nature (cp. Goodridge 2013: 112). The example of Langley Bush, a familiar tree of great emotional value that Clare mentions in his poetry, shows the other than monetary values of elements in nature (cp. *ibid.*: 113). Despite the fact that it is just an old tree, Clare seems to have a special connection to it. Goodridge explains that his

"poetry has a redemptive function, to keep 'Langley Bush' (or 'Swordy Well', or 'Round Oak Waters', or 'Cowper Green', and so on) alive, if only as a name. And this is another key theme of the enclosure elegies: to be, in themselves, mementoes or, as Clare might have said, *remembrances*, of the lost landscape" (ibid.: 114).

Aside from the question whether Clare felt homeless or homeless at home or whether he was attached and felt like belonging to one place (cp. Guyer 2015: 79), we know that he felt something. He was very engaged with his environment, which is something we can discover when reading his poetry. What sets him apart from other contemporaries is the fact that he was a peasant poet, a man who worked in the country and who thus had a different connection to the world around him (cp. Irvine/Gorji 2013: 120). Some of his poems "document the most visible forms of land expropriation" (Castellano 2017: 157). He dealt with changes affecting the poor and had a special sense of freedom. He also valued nature and was aware that "work of commoning is not undertaken by humans alone, but also by cooperating with the 'silent work' of non-human animals, plants, and natural processes" (ibid.: 158).

Nature surely has special functions, and it is much more than a mere resonance room. It enables life, it is living space and especially in our current situation a place of retreat. Contact reduction, closing of bars, restaurants or cultural institutions and limited possibilities in times of a pandemic most likely led to a new appreciation of calm walks through nature. A special engagement with the natural world can certainly also be applied to Clare's poetry and his fear of change, his doubts and uncertainty. We have opportunities of engaging with our environment on various levels. We do not necessarily have to answer all our questions – this might not even be possible – but we can think about our place in the world and of how we engage with nature when reading poetry. It is okay to not know, to discover and to be uncertain, as experience or thoughts alone can be fruitful. Similar to this, Kuduk Weiner describes how engaging with poetry also helped Clare himself in the process of understanding or not understanding the world around him (cp. Kuduk Weiner 2014: 25). The poet has often been at unease and he brought his thoughts to life in the form of poetry. In doing so, he did not only preserve former states of nature and his surroundings but also his way of thinking and dealing with life, now providing space for us to think and reflect it. It has become evident that Clare's poetry still matters and is suitable when dealing with current ecological or even existential issues.

Finally, I would like to emphasise Clare's position, his way of composing poetry and his engagement with his surroundings, especially with regard to his Romantic contemporaries and in relation to our current situation. Doubt, shock, loss and experiencing change are

vivid topics processed via poetry. His motivations and approaches were in a way different from those of other Romantic poets like Wordsworth or Keats, not alone because of his different social status (cp. Helsinger 1997: 141f.). He had a special connection to the land surrounding him; it was his work, refuge and living space. Clare was referred to as a poet of the labouring-class and he was able to transmit his "experience of rural life" (Irvine/Gorji 2013: 120). Sara Guyer writes that "Clare's intense and thoroughly detailed knowledge of his surroundings made him sensitive to changes that others might never know, and hence figured [...] an experience of loss for which there is little measure outside of Clare's work" (Guyer 2015: 81).

These features are not only perceptible in 'Helpston Green' but in his work in general. His engagement with and depiction of the world around him sets him apart from others as he "cuts through the conventions, symbolisms and associations [...] and draws entirely on his own experience and close observation" (Duddy 2011: 63). Clare's perception and his approaches facilitate critical engagement not only with nature but also and especially with human problems and challenges. He was well aware of exploitation and inequities and dared to express them:

"If the nessesitys of the poor are always to be left to the mercey of anothers prosperity – their oppressions in a general way will always be permant and their benefits ever precarious thousands of poor will be left as destitute of comfort under the high prices of the Farmers interests as thousands of the poor are now" (Clare 2004: 447).

About 200 years later, we can still draw parallels and identify with the struggles depicted in Clare's poems. Yet, we do not have to surrender and tolerate injustice and catastrophes. Our future is clearly uncertain, and we might not find answers to all of our questions, but we have to engage with our surroundings and possible consequences of our actions. Instead of feeling overwhelmed by depressing incidents and dark views of the future, we can alter it and actively take part in the shaping of our world. Clare's works can thereby provide great impulses and create open space for reflection and critical discussion.

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hat Anglistik und Antike Kultur im Bachelor studiert und danach ein Masterstudium im Literaturübersetzen Englisch/Deutsch abgeschlossen. Sie ist als wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin am Institut für Arbeits-, Sozial- und Umweltmedizin an der Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf tätig. Dort widmet sie sich neben Lektorats- und Übersetzungstätigkeiten der qualitativen Forschung. Sie ist im Kompetenznetz Public Health COVID-19 aktiv und zurzeit an verschiedenen Projekten zu Belastungen von Studierenden und Arbeitsbedingungen von Krankenhauspersonal während der Coronapandemie beteiligt.

Abgesehen davon widmet sie sich folgenden Forschungsschwerpunkten: alt- und mittelenglische Literatur, englische Literatur des 17.–19. Jahrhunderts, Ökologie und Ökokritik sowie Lyrik. Ihre Masterarbeit verfasste sie zum Thema ‚Ecology in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and John Clare’s Poetry‘. Aktuell bereitet sie ihre Promotion im Bereich der englischen Literaturwissenschaft vor.

## WEITERLESEN:

- ↳ Wozu noch lesen? – S.203
- ↳ Katzen würden Greenpeace wählen – S.63
- ↳ Wenn wir überleben wollen – S.97

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