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## ***Poster***

### **“The Big Seven”: The Romantic “Peasant Poet”**

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#### **Abstract**

It would be reasonable to suggest that John Clare has perhaps not attained rightful pride of place alongside his predecessors and contemporaries on the pantheon of Romantic poetry, despite being described as the English equivalent to Robert Burns, and by his biographer Jonathan Bate as the greatest labouring-class poet that the country has ever produced. This academic poster is a complement to the paper ‘A case for the ‘Big Seven’? The “intrinsic merit” of John Clare’s “showing and telling” in Poems Descriptive of a Rural Life and Scenery’. The paper itself is a critical re-introduction to Clare’s first published collection of poetry. Through highlighting specific examples from this first anthology, which was published in 1820 by John Taylor, it explores the inherent literary value of Clare’s verse, notwithstanding the Helpstone-born poet’s extraordinary background and remarkable life story. Moreover, it emphasises the symbolic significance and enduring relevance of Clare’s work for a modern readership and in a contemporary global context. This poster, meanwhile, summarises why it is that John Clare matters in a world which, unfortunately, remains blighted by crippling poverty, a precarious environmental situation, widespread language endangerment through dialect levelling and marginalisation of minority cultures, alongside multiple mental health crises.

**Keywords: romanticism, ecocriticism, environment, environmental writing, poetry**

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## “THE BIG SEVEN”: THE ROMANTIC “PEASANT POET”

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### POEMS DESCRIPTIVE OF RURAL LIFE AND SCENERY – CLARE’S FIRST PUBLICATION:

- Clare’s **first collection of poetry**; published by **John Taylor**, the publisher of **John Keats**
- In the preface, Taylor describes the collection as “**genius**”, as well as “**an extraordinary exertion of his (Clare’s) native powers**”

### JOHN CLARE’S PASTORAL POETRY:

- He revels in the **natural world**, and celebrates **the countryside**
- He laments the **significant changes to the landscape**, which were often caused by **increasing industrialisation**, during



this time (from “Helpstone”: *The vanish'd green to mourn, the spot to see / Where flourish'd many a bush and many a tree? / Where once the brook, for now the brook is gone*)

### CLARE’S MODERN-DAY IMPORTANCE:

- **Environmental writing**: there are **differing ecocritical perspectives** on Clare’s poetry from scholars (Jonathan Bate, and Simon Kövesi)
- **Lexicography and dialectology**: his poetry is **preserving, documenting, and celebrating** words from the **Northamptonshire dialect** of the English language (“beetling”, “bevering”, “crumping”, “drowking”, and “cumbergrounds”)
- **“Intrinsic merit”**: a **quintessential Romantic** who experienced **crippling poverty** throughout his life, Clare writes **powerfully and movingly** about **pain, desolation, and (unrequited) love** (“What is Life?”, “My Mary”, and “True Love”)

### BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN CLARE:

Born in the village of **Helpstone**, near **Peterborough**, on **13th July 1793**, to **Ann Stimson Clare** and **Parker Clare**

**Published four collections of poetry during his lifetime**: *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (1820), *The Village Minstrel* (1821), *The Shepherd’s Calendar* (1827), *The Rural Muse* (1835)

**Some of his most famous poems are**: “I Am”, “The Badger”, “The Secret”, “I Hid My Love”, “First Love”, “Summer”, and “All Nature Has a Feeling”

Died in **Northampton, Northamptonshire**, on **20th May 1864**