

COMPETING SIGNS: THE CHORA AND THE STIGMA OF MENTAL
ILLNESS IN JOHN CLARE

by

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Thesis directed by Professor Jeffrey N. Cox

Though much has been made of the subject of *madness* in the long eighteenth century, little has been made of the resulting ostracism, stereotyping, and labeling that have always accompanied mental disorder - what contemporary mental health experts deem the *stigmatization* of mental illness. My thesis therefore aims to take an interdisciplinary approach in its consideration of the combined cultural, linguistic, and medical influences that coalesce into the social denigration of the mentally ill during the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. I focus on the experience of the Romantic poet, John Clare, who received psychiatric treatment for mental illness at a crucial time in the field of medicine, when the emerging practices of taxonomy and diagnosis began to professionalize the realm of psychiatry. As I examine contemporary popular and professional discourses of mental health, I consider how these combined and mutually informative discourses may have contributed to the codification of a stigmatized social status for the mentally ill. Finally, I juxtapose these stigmatizing influences with close readings of Clare's poetry, both before and during his confinement in mental institutions, to argue for its role in both grappling with and resisting these influences.

My thesis begins by examining the iconic work of the eighteenth-century engraver and satirist, William Hogarth, as I introduce the links between insanity, social dependency, and financial destitution that arose at a time when Christian charity was being eroded by individualistic market-oriented thinking. Then, I survey popular discourses of mental illness in eighteenth-century print culture in selections from *The*

Spectator in order to reveal the pervasiveness of these links between mental illness and social denigration within the realm of language. Moving forward, I examine the poetry of John Clare in the context of his medical treatment and subjection to diagnostic rhetoric. I then argue that through a return to the prosodic and generative space of Julia Kristeva's semiotic chora, Clare's poetry linguistically deploys the semiotic against the symbolic in order to grapple with both popular and professional discourses of mental illness that contribute to the stigmatization of the mentally ill. Thus, as both the chora and stigma are conceived of as "signs," I finally show that Clare's poetic resistance against stigmatization concerns a struggle over the site of producing significance, which allows Clare to meaningfully define himself.

For Jason and Deidre

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Introduction: Guilt by Association

In a *Washington Post* article published January 3 2013, James B. Gottstein, a lawyer in Anchorage and head of the Law Project for Psychiatric Rights, spoke about his firsthand experience of being forcibly drugged and stigmatized by psychiatric treatment in June of 1982:

One of the problems that can happen when you become a psychiatric patient is that everything that you do or say can be labeled as a psychiatric symptom. If the police knock down your door and haul you off and you get upset, you get labeled as “hostile” and “labile.” If you decide that you’re not going to react to these provocations, you get labeled as having “a flat affect.” If you think something is funny and you laugh to yourself, then they write down “responding to internal stimuli.” It’s not that people don’t want help, but the system basically forces things on them that they don’t want.¹

Without diminishing medicine’s crucial role in helping the mentally afflicted to live healthier lives, we may still read Gottstein’s account as provoking compelling questions about the relatively unique position of psychiatry within the larger field of medicine. Of these questions, the most pressing ones pertain to psychiatry’s propensity to parse and label. We might therefore ask, what is the relationship between psychiatric treatment and social perceptions of mental illness? Despite the extreme image that Gottstein creates for us (or, perhaps, because of it), we might follow with another question: how might a therapeutic regimen serve to codify the social status of those it seeks to treat? Or, more specifically, what is the relationship between the psychiatric diagnosis and the socially stigmatizing label?

¹ Brown, David. “Predicting violence is a work in progress.” *Washington Post* 3 Jan. 2013, online ed.: http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/predicting-violence-is-a-work-in-progress/2013/01/03/2e8955b8-5371-11e2-a613-ec8d394535c6_story_2.html

The implications these questions give rise to engage an area of emerging interest in the field of psychiatry on the stigmatization of mental illness. A 2007 study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control on attitudes toward mental illness in the United States demonstrated that “negative attitudes about mental illness often underlie stigma, which can cause affected persons to deny symptoms; delay treatment; be excluded from employment, housing, or relationships; and interfere with recovery,” and, further, that “understanding attitudes toward mental illness...could help target initiatives to reduce stigma.”² The World Health Organization similarly concluded in a report issued in 2004, “mental disorders are inextricably linked to human rights issues. The stigma, discrimination, and human rights violations that individuals and families affected by mental disorders suffer are intense and pervasive.”³ That this issue is finally receiving the attention it deserves should be applauded.

However, as medical experts continue to seek measurable outcomes for reducing the impact of stigma, the issue becomes increasingly complicated when it inevitably runs into the more abstract realm of culture. For example, while Gottstein’s quotation certainly invokes an extreme image, with police knocking down the door and hauling someone away, his report does not represent the experiences of most mental patients; it nevertheless elicits a popular image of the mentally ill as *dangerous*. This image

² United States. Center for Disease Control. “Attitudes Toward Mental Illness – 35 States, District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico, 2007.” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 59.20 (May 28, 2010): 7.

³ World Health Organization. “Prevention of Mental Disorders: Effective Interventions and Policy Options.” *Summary Report: A Report of the World Health Organization, Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse in collaboration with the Prevention Research Centre of the Universities of Nijmegen and Maastricht*. Geneva: WHO, 2004.

unmistakably resonates with contemporary cultural landmarks such as Heath Ledger's rendition of the Joker in Christopher Nolan's 2008 film, *The Dark Knight*, or in our current modes of discourse where we casually employ terms like "psycho" or "crazy" to refer to people or situations that behave in unexpected ways. Additionally, media coverage of extreme events, such as the 2012-2013 mass shootings by Jared Lee Loughner, James Holmes, and Adam Lanza, also serve to mutually inform and borrow from these cultural elements while simultaneously shaping and perpetuating our understandings of mental illness. Thus, in terms of how mental illness is socially understood, the realms of medicine and culture are rarely as separate as they often pretend to be. Consequently, any remedial attempts we might make in addressing the harm of stigma will require more comprehensive and interdisciplinary approaches.

My thesis therefore endeavors to make a meaningful, if necessarily limited, contribution to the interdisciplinary task of tracing the intersection points of culture, broadly defined, and medicine in the hopes of better understanding social stigmatization. To accomplish this, my argument primarily considers the experience of John Clare, a Romantic poet who received psychiatric treatment during the early nineteenth century, a critical time in the field of mental health. As his poetry engages with the emerging practices of taxonomy, psychiatric classifications, and diagnoses, Clare represents for my project an embodied intersection of cultural and medical discourses, and thus, an ideal case study. Ultimately, while showing how Clare's greater poetic project concerns post-Enlightenment capitalist forces at large, I argue that Clare's asylum poetry in particular figures as a form of semiotic resistance to the circumscriptive effects of diagnostic rhetoric and social labeling that result in social stigmatization.

Keeping in mind the prominent role that culture plays in the process of stigmatization, my argument begins by examining popular conceptions of mental illness and their representations in art roughly a century before Clare was writing in the asylum. Part I investigates the iconic work of William Hogarth's *A Rake's Progress* and the series' depiction of Tom Rakewell's descent into madness within London's most famous mental hospital, Bethlehem Hospital, or Bedlam Asylum. Utilizing Michel Foucault's discussion of the social construction of "madness" in *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, I reveal the interrelated hierarchies of moral and mercantile values in the narrative of Hogarth's work that structure the rake's demonization as a transgressor of Enlightenment middle class values of morality and reason. Specifically, the rake's transgression of an emerging middle class ethic results in his descent through debauchery, crime, poverty, and madness, that at once serves to condemn and associate mental illness with these other social blights. In analyzing these aspects of Hogarth's work, I hope to provide some context that illuminates nearly a century's worth of exchange between the cultural and medical spheres that contributed to the stigmatization of mental illness prior to and during Clare's confinement.

Part II proceeds to narrow the focus of my thesis, and links the time between Hogarth and Clare with a further consideration of eighteenth-century print culture by presenting a small survey of popular discourses of mental illness found selections from one popular British periodical, *The Spectator*. The purpose of this section is to show how the multiple associations between mental illness and social denigration found in Hogarth's work persisted in the realm of popular discourse through Clare's time as a mental patient. As a result, we come to understand the resilience of popular stereotypes

over time, their perpetuation in popular discourse, and the power of labels to socially disparage and confine individuals within a structure of stigmatizing associations.

The next section considers Clare just before his confinement in the asylum, and introduces his mode of resistance *within* language as a struggle between the Lacanian semiotic and the symbolic. Invoking Julia Kristeva's notion of the semiotic chora found in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984), I use several of Clare's nature poems, including "Decay A Ballad," to conceptualize his resistance as a linguistic movement of *return* to the natural, generative, and prosodic space of the semiotic against the symbolic. Before taking up diagnostic rhetoric, I show how Clare's poetic resistance is played out on the natural landscape of his hometown, Helpston, in the context of the implementation of the 1801 Enclosure Acts. Using Kristeva's conception of the symbolic, I propose that Clare's struggle against the circumscribing effects of the Enclosure Acts is contiguous with the ploughing, fencing, and parsing of his subjective sense of self that diagnostic rhetoric will finally have on him as a psychiatric patient. I then propose that if diagnosis and labeling, which precipitate the processes of stigmatization, are essentially semiotic acts – acts which engage in reading symptomatic signs and producing an interpretation that is then imposed upon a subject – it follows that Clare's mode of resistance against both the partitioning and stigmatizing effects of diagnostic rhetoric should engage with the semiotic itself.

Lastly, Part IV takes up Clare's confinement while receiving treatment in two mental health facilities toward the end of his life. After considering popular discourses of mental illness in Section II, this section examines the other aspect of stigmatization in terms of medical and professional discourses of mental illness. This professionalized

terminology, I argue, effectually codifies his degraded social status by *marking* him for deviance. Engaging with Michel de Certeau's notion of "medical politics," I explain how Clare's subjugation to taxonomic endeavors *inscribes* his person with a particular classificatory discourse. Like a bodily palimpsest, Clare's subjective sense of self has become doubly *marked*, bearing the inscriptions of both popular and medicalized discourses of madness, which, as the etymological root of the word would suggest, *stigma*-tize him. Accordingly, the asylum poetry that I read closely in this section reveals a preoccupation with the site of generating significance, or the semiotic, and a lamentation of the wresting of this site, or this ability, from him as a result of his treatment. This results in a fundamental alienation, both within language, and as a stigmatized mental patient. I conclude by relating my analyses of Hogarth, popular discourses in periodicals, and Clare to the more tangible, health-related consequences of stigmatization in terms of Primary and Secondary Labeling Theories, Expectancy Confirmation Process, and Automatic Stereotype Activation. In so doing, I propose that addressing the critical issue of stigmatization should involve understanding the interconnected epistemologies of scientific, medical, and popular knowledge and their representations in artistic contexts. Accordingly, there is a need for greater interdisciplinary collaboration.

Before my study begins, I should address the individual methodologies involved in each of the different sections of my thesis. As I'm sure is evident, this study incorporates several theorists with very different projects. Suffice it to say that I have employed the works of Foucault, Kristeva, and de Certeau strategically, with each of their approaches proving useful in a highly specific way within their respective sections. My

study begins by posing a two-pronged problem: stigmatization. As I have said, this problem involves both cultural and scientific influences. Consequently, Foucault's work helped me to trace the complex networks of eighteenth-century economic and social *milieus* that gave rise to the construct of "madness" and its transgressive connotations in Hogarth's iconic work, *A Rake's Progress*. In contrast, Michel de Certeau's particular section on "Medical Politics" in *The Practice of Everyday Life* proved effective in helping me conceive of how the other aspect of stigmatization, medical discourse, works by isolating, partitioning, and inscribing an epistemology on the subject. Thirdly, Julia Kristeva's work in *Revolution in Poetic Language* served my argument in a very precise way by helping to illuminate a mode of resistance, seen in Clare's poetry, that occurs within and through language, as a form of creative "eruption", of *jouissance*, that serves to disrupt the partitioning and enclosing influences of the symbolic. Together, these theorists can help us understand stigmatization and resistance to it.

Part I

Indelible Marks: Tracing the Stigmatization of Mental Illness through *A Rake's Progress*

“Suddenly, in a few years in the middle of the eighteenth century, a fear arose – a fear formulated in medical terms but animated, basically, by a moral myth...”

- Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*

I begin my study of John Clare and stigmatization by considering the economic and cultural influences that informed popular understandings of mental illness a century before Clare's confinement. In William Hogarth's, *A Rake's Progress*, Tom Rakewell's fall from financial and moral sensibility ultimately lands him in Bedlam: shackled, confined, and embodying the roles of both patient and prisoner. In *Madness and Civilization*, Michel Foucault expounds on this unique position of the mentally ill between medicine and morality that precipitates their “Great Confinement,” a confinement revealed in the haunting image of the rake in Plate VIII of Hogarth's series. As Foucault suggests, the confinement and *partage* of the mad “other” necessarily occurs in the eighteenth century, not yet as a result of medical classificatory labors, but instead under divisions associated with social, moral and economic spheres. The extent, severity, and depth of these associations would ultimately inscribe mental disorder to the extent that these affiliations last even today in the stigmatization of the mentally ill, as social, moral, or economic “failings” are medicalized. Foucault's archeology of madness can help reveal how Hogarth's *A Rake's Progress* participates in stigmatization of mental illness through its association with supposed moral or social or economic flaws, a stigmatization that would still be powerful when Clare wrote and beyond.

Current mental health experts suggest that the stigmatization of mental illness features prominently in one's experience with mental disorder that is owed, in large part, to both individual and socio-cultural systems of belief (Watson et al. 145). As Foucault discusses, the social construct of madness in the eighteenth century was shaped by social contexts, cultural milieus, medical and scientific knowledge, market forces, and systems of belief and bias that had far-reaching implications for the treatment of the mentally ill. When I use the term, "phenomenological," I refer to what Foucault describes in the first preface as a particular *experience* of madness among several that are historically constructed, as forms of culture. Moreover, these *experiences* articulate certain norms or principles (in particular moral and religious) of their time. In the context of the eighteenth-century rise of mercantilism and Enlightenment thought, the particular Foucaultian experience that I speak of is the a priori exclusion of madness from the process of rational thought, where the *in-sane* are characterized solely by what that they lack – their reason. Such is indicative of the parallel emergence of institutions of confinement and modern rationalism. By "structuralist," I refer to Foucault's analysis of structures (institutional, economic, political and moral) and practices that form interrelated mechanisms for "social control." William Hogarth's, *A Rake's Progress* exhibits elements of both the wider social values and belief systems that construct and seek to control "madness," and the phenomenological *partage*, or partition, of the mad in creating the alienated "other" in the figure of the mad. This *partage* will ultimately aid our understanding of how John Clare's experience of alienation is reified as a result of classificatory and singularizing practices of diagnosis. By analyzing the narrative and aesthetic aspects of Hogarth's work, which reveal a complex interplay of Foucaultian

elements in representing madness, I hope to provide some cultural and historical context for relating the *stigma* of mental illness to these intersecting phenomenological and structural components.

Ronald Paulson has proclaimed, “Bedlam, Hogarth suggests, is England” as of 1735 (Paulson and Hogarth 97). Paulson, in tandem with other Hogarth critics, posits that Hogarth’s work takes up contemporary social issues of the time pertaining to England: the social turbulence of eighteenth-century England provided a wealth of material for Hogarth to comment on, particularly in the context of the rise of mercantilist practices and changing notions of class and national identities (Colley 55-8). “Hogarth was a democratically minded man of the people,” who was principally concerned with celebrating the tragicomic value in the lives of the ordinary people of England, whose basic experiences and aspirations he shared: “the evils that commoners fall prey to or embraced, the religions they followed and the political system that cheated them” (Shesgreen and Hogarth xvi). *A Rake’s Progress* is therefore not explicitly concerned with the plight of the mentally ill, but instead serves as a more general commentary on the “madness” (or “unreason”) that afflicted the middle classes in aspiring to the decadence of the aristocracy. I concur that this interpretation is consistent with Hogarth’s consistently satiric, but not misanthropic, stance in his works (Ibid. xvi). While my Foucault-ian reading of *A Rake’s Progress* is not to re-appropriate Hogarth’s meaning or material, I do intend to reveal the de facto cultural associations between mercantilism, morality, and madness that intersect in an eighteenth-century British context, and which foster the stigmatization of mental illness that persists during Clare’s period of confinement.

Madness in the Augustan Age

Foucault's treatment of the eighteenth century's relationship to mental illness in *Madness and Civilization* relies in large part on trends that emerged in the mid-seventeenth century. With madness' conception in terms of "un-reason," the insane were no longer consigned to society's margins, but were instead separated and confined along with criminals, vagrants, and other social "undesirables" in institutions all over Europe. Driven by a social need for an extrajudicial mechanism, the *hôpital général* would regulate these undesirables, and simultaneously control unemployment and wages in which the cheap labor of workhouses applied downward pressure on the wages of free labor. As commerce and industry came to be increasingly associated with national and moral virtues, confinement made the condition of madness to be seen as one of *moral* failure. Having freely chosen the path of unreason, institutional confinement served as a punitive response designed to foster the reversal of that choice while also catering to socio-economic needs. By the end of the eighteenth century, medical doctors began to view madness as a natural object, worthy of study. Thus, the conceptual distinction between the mad and the reasonable resulted as a consequence of this physical separation. Before madness would be wholly claimed by the realm of medicine, eighteenth-century conceptions of unreason would find their relations to contemporary classist notions of wealth, morality, capital and labor. Thus, in accordance with Foucault's argument, the eighteenth-century *partage* of the other resulted from a complex series of transformations where the emergence of structures of social control engendered new forms of consciousness, which then engendered new structures of control.

Progress and the “Cult of Commerce”

A Rake's Progress was etched and then engraved from a series of eight paintings completed in 1734. While slightly less popular than *A Harlot's Progress*, *A Rake* elicited the same type of parallel attempts by the young to transcend their social classes or circumstances. The fatal consequences resulting from such attempts, while different in both works, nevertheless connote the same *moral* values embedded in notions of wealth and class (Shesgreen and Hogarth xiii). In his powerful use of western sequential art, Hogarth effectively used visual art to tell a story. For Hogarth, art was no longer to be simply viewed, but to be read. *A Rake's Progress* may then be understood as the cautionary narrative of Tom Rakewell, the spendthrift son and heir of a rich merchant who arrives in London, squanders his fortune on luxury, excess, gambling and prostitution, and is consequently confined in the Fleet Prison and finally, Bedlam. As a narrative, *A Rake* ultimately reveals a systemic structure of beliefs and values that defined the eighteenth-century British cultural milieu, linking commerce, morality, madness and unreason. As we will see, Tom Rakewell's *descending* trajectory over the course of the narrative into debt, into debauchery, and into madness, reveals the hierarchical structure of these moral values, in which madness and unreason are found at the very bottom. In reading Hogarth's narrative, one glimpses a host of cultural associations concerning mental illness during the eighteenth century that include poverty, violence, and moral depravity. Keeping in mind our future discussion of John Clare's experience as a mental patient, we should note the palpability of this structural hierarchy of moralistic values that persists, despite reforms, in its intersection with the medical field and its conceptualizations of mental illness.

At the start of the rake's journey, we see Rakewell depicted in Plate I having just come upon his miserly father's fortune. Our sense of who the senior Rakewell was in life comes from signs that are strewn about the room: a spectacle frame without glasses, a fur coat and hat in place of a fire, a disused spit and smoking jack stored in a cupboard high up on the wall, a cracked jug and bowl, a box of old boots, the save-all on the fire place, etc. Indeed, the senior Rakewell is depicted as so parsimonious that a mutilated bible is shown to have served as a shoe sole replacement. In the miser's escutcheon, the vice indicates the frugal "squeezing" of money, and also the moral sense of the word "vice" that is associated with his life's obsession for hoarding (Paulson and Hogarth 91-92).

The black decor of the room shows the mourning that should be taking place in the event of the senior Rakewell's passing. However, the painting's subjects all appear to have other pressing concerns. In affixing the black hangings, we see a servant that has uncovered a hidden cache of gold. Below is a chest into which a cat is inspecting, perhaps for food; one, however, sees only moneybags labeled "1000," "2000," and "3000." Piles of paper littered about the floor read: "Mortgages", "This Indenture", "Lease & Release", "Fines & Recoverys", and "Indian Bonds". A draper's bill is conspicuously attached to the roll of black cloth to the chair at the right, while money that appears to have been secreted in the ceiling is spilling down. Tom Rakewell, far from mourning his father's passing, is instead being fitted for new clothes. He is also rejecting the hand of his pregnant fiancée, Sarah Young. As she stands holding his ring while her mother is holding his love letters, we take that the rake had apparently promised to marry her. In the mean time, a lawyer handling the rake's affairs makes a grab at this newly acquired, poorly guarded, wealth on the table.

Linda Colley writes of the eighteenth century that “Especially in the first half century of Great Britain’s existence as a united kingdom, when both the Act of Union and the Hanoverian dynasty were still recent and controversial, [the] close and surprisingly harmonious relationship between a landed ruling class and a broad commercial community was a vital source of stability” (Colley 56). To the extent that such national stability depended on fostering strong cultural and economic relationships between the aristocracy and merchants, the “cult of commerce became an increasingly important part of being British” (Ibid. 56). The national importance of trade and commerce, in tandem with the lionization of the “Protestant work ethic” as a national virtue, serves to illustrate how the association between trade, commerce, the accumulation of wealth, and personal morality was made. Moreover, the changing class and social structure precipitated by this transformation into a market society ultimately showed that “Industrialization and technological change ... coupled with increasing urbanization brought decreasing tolerance for bizarre and disruptive behavior and less ability to contain deviant behavior within the existing social structure” (Mechanic 54).

The backdrop of the Enlightenment bolstered this interlocking system of values and the increasing intolerance of deviant behavior. Of particular note is the Enlightenment notion of “progress,” defined by measurable improvements in humanity’s standing as a function of their use of reason. Or, as Foucault discusses in *What is Enlightenment?* (1984): “Enlightenment is defined by a modification of the preexisting relation linking will, authority, and the use of reason” (305). In this instance, *will* (the new commercial impetus for the accrual of wealth), is linked with *authority* (the religious and political approbation of such practices), and finally *reason* (the classical notion that

one must make use of rational faculties in order to understand and make sense of the world). In Hogarth's work, the inversion, or transgression, of these three measures of will, authority, and reason are what finally serve to precipitate the rake's descent into the *immoral* state of unreason, or madness. In squandering his wealth, the rake defies the cultural and commercial commandment to accumulate capital, and thus defies will. In so doing, especially with debauched pursuits, he violates the value system that grants commercial, religious and political institutions their authority. And finally, by the eighth plate, Rakewell's very *reason* crumbles into madness as a consequence of his resisting the Enlightenment notions of *will* and *authority* – notions linked to contemporary ideas of “progress” and material gain.

In Plate II, the rake's transformation into a man of the town, surrounded by rapacious hangers-on, is complete. We find Tom at his morning levee in London, attended by musicians and other followers dressed in expensive clothing. The scroll on the floor and the roll under the poet's arm reveal the rake's name is “T. Rakewell,” an apt descriptor of one who so swiftly rakes in money as a result of fortuitous circumstances, and simultaneously, one who will finally rake in his own demise.⁴ Hogarth scholars have expounded at length on the numerous references to famous and influential artisans present in this scene (i.e., Charles Bridgeman, member of the Burlington group and gardener to George I and II; Joseph Mahoon, harpsichord maker to the king; George Frideric Handel, etc.). Sufficient for our purposes is to note the momentary ascent that the

⁴ It is interesting to note the degree of agency ascribed to the mentally ill in the eighteenth century secures their fate. The character's name, “Rakewell,” in conjunction with the narrative that takes place involving a series of choices, suggests that one may infer a level of determination in falling prey to madness. In opting to “rake” and to “rake well,” Tom Rakewell effectually casts his lot with the mad, as the end of the series suggests.

rake has achieved into the aristocratic realm of vice. In conjunction with this narrative development, we see the first evidence of the rake's *descent* into unreason, as he attempts to assume an identity and position inconsistent with his class. Tom Rakewell's first signs of *madness* thus begin to appear.

The Debauched Mad

The third plate shows the rake's partaking in a wild orgy at a brothel. The caption's last several lines are informative, as they admonish:

To enter in with covert Treason,
O'erthrow the drowsy Guard of Reason,
To ransack the abandon'd Place,
And revel there with wild Excess?

With the "Guard of Reason" being overthrown in this plate, Tom Rakewell's descent into moral degeneracy and madness is now underway. From the rim of the large platter being carried into the room ("John Bonvine at the Rose Tavern Drury Lane"), we learn that the brothel is intended to depict the Rose Tavern, the second house in Drury Lane north of Russell Street and a famous brothel in Covent Garden (Paulson and Hogarth 93). One sees Rakewell's watch being stolen by one of the prostitutes. The rake himself, clearly drunk, has the appearance of having recently engaged in a street brawl, as the nearby night watchman's staff and lantern would substantiate. In his state, the rake apparently missed his scabbard when trying to sheath his sword – a jab at the rake's sexual competence in this moment. Much of the furniture and wall decorations appear to be broken. On the walls, one sees a map of the world ("TOTUS MUNDUS") that a prostitute is setting fire to. Several of Titian's portraits of the Roman emperors, including Augustus, Nero, Titus, Otho, Vitellius, Vespasianus and Julius are among them. However,

the heads of all but the most nefarious of them, Nero, has been cut out. Julius lies at the rake's feet.

The relationship in this painting between the rake and the remaining portrait of Nero would suggest Rakewell's embodiment of one of the worst examples of aristocratic depravity. The depravity in this painting, however, is of a specific type: sexual misconduct. The world of connotations associated with this particular vice informs its association with mental disorder, and ultimately, the social stigmatization of the mentally ill. More specifically, the association of mental derangement with sexual depravity helps to construct the social conception of mental illness. The black spots noted on many of the whores are meant to represent syphilitic sores. Syphilis's longstanding association with madness is undoubtedly attributed to the disease's neurological effects on the brain. However, preceding neurobiology, Hogarth's painting links this highly socially charged illness with madness in its familiar mythological context.⁵ As a *venereal* disease, syphilis is imputed with divine origin, as a disease of *Venus*. And so, the rake's choice in sexual licentiousness results, just as Paris' choice of Venus in the *Judgment of Paris* over Minerva that resulted in the sack of Troy, in debauchery, destruction, and a further descent into moral depravity. That a fire is being set to the "Totus Mundus" suggests that, like Paris and like the inflammatory effects of syphilis, the rake will set fire to the world

⁵ As Paulson notes, "The brothel itself was clearly chosen in Plate 2 when he bought and hung on his wall a *Judgment of Paris*: Taking the role of Paris, he chose Venus over Minerva and Juno (Wisdom and Power) [associated with Enlightenment ideals of Reason and Progress]. Thus we find him in a House of Venus. Under the portrait of the emperor who sang the 'Sack of Ilium' while Rome burned, a blind harper plays while the world burns, set alight by one of the Daughters of Venus: but this group also alludes to Homer singing of the Fall of Troy that followed from Paris' disastrous choice of Venus." (94).

and himself. He will effectively be “burnt up” from the disease and the fiery passions that overturn his reason to madness by Plate VIII.

Foucault notes the close relationship that madness shared in the eighteenth century with the insensibility, overindulgence, and intoxication we see depicted in Hogarth’s third plate. On man’s detachment from reason, Foucault posits “it is sensibility itself: a sensibility that is no longer controlled by the movements of nature, but by all the habits, all the demands of social life ... This disorder of the senses continues ... where vain passions and the most fatal movements of the soul are aroused by artifice” and that which contributes to the life of the “libertine” with loose morals is said to contribute to madness.⁶ As I will discuss later, John Clare will find his own experience of mental illness colored by these moralizing associations, especially when his personal experiences with prostitutes are brought to under medical scrutiny.⁷

The fourth plate in Hogarth’s series continues to track the rake’s progress as we finally begin to see what Foucault argues is Enlightenment society’s primary reaction to unreason: confinement. In this scene, the rake barely escapes arrest for debt by Welsh bailiffs as he is on his way to a party at St. James’ Palace to celebrate Queen Caroline’s birthday on St. David’s Day. Having squandered all his inheritance, one may presume the

⁶ Here, Foucault speaks of the kind of madness that forms of “artifice” (i.e., the theater or the novel) can cause. However, the loss of sensibility itself, even via drunkenness was an attributable cause to madness at the time (Foucault *Madness* 214-218). The diagnosis of *delirium tremens* at the time for madness was said to be caused from excess drinking.

⁷ Interestingly, the “immoral” behaviors of immoderation perpetrated by the rake in Hogarth’s series, including drunkenness, are subsumed into the realm of medicine by Clare’s time in the asylum nearly a century later. As his diagnosis of *delirium tremens* would suggest, the nascent concept of “alcoholism” is invented between Hogarth and Clare. Thus do we see moralizing and cultural associations inform the realm of medicine.

rake's purpose in attending the celebration is to seek royal patronage to cover his losses. His intentions are affirmed in his dress as a beau, and his attempted concealment in a sedan chair. However, despite the half-drawn curtain, a bailiff surprises him with an "Arrest" notice accompanied, perhaps, by the rake's creditor. Of note in this scene is the fact that Rakewell is not rescued by his aristocratic companions (whose carriages and chairs sit outside White's gambling house in the background) but by Sarah Young, the plainly clothed girl from Oxford "who has preserved the middle-class values" (Shesgreen and Hogarth 28). In this painting, she rescues Rakewell by offering her earnings as a milliner to the bailiff. Indeed, in the midst of Rakewell's (momentary) salvation, oil is spilled on his head by a distracted lamp filler, as though conferring a benediction. Further evidence of Rakewell's "unreason" is evidenced by his choice to spurn this "divine" intervention on his behalf by a character that embodies the virtuous characteristics of the middle class.

As Shesgreen notes, "Sarah's characterization as a loyal, supportive female, a sentimental and implausible but important part of the series representing many of the middle-class virtues (work, thrift, loyalty, Christian benevolence) that correspond to the rake's aristocratic vices, serves as both a contrast to Tom and a positive embodiment of some aspects of the life, which Hogarth means to recommend to his viewer" (xxii). Such a stark contrast between Sarah and Rakewell's character demonstrates Hogarth's cognizance of the didactic function of art in the eighteenth century, and his commitment to his work as a moral-cultural force promoting ethical values. "In his presentation of these ideas, [Hogarth] was more intensely and consistently moralistic than any of his contemporaries. Violations of the middle-class ethic result ... in sanctions that are

absolute or fatalistic. Secular rather than religious in nature, these sanctions are imposed either by society or by nature” (Ibid. xxii). That Hogarth finally commits Rakewell to an asylum for violations of the “middle-class ethic” substantiates the notion that immorality and “un-reason” were inextricably linked. A retributive bolt of lightning flashes, as though from Heaven, over White’s gambling den in the background. With this detail, *divine* judgment has thus been passed over the establishment that caters to the excesses bound up in notions of class and unreason in the eighteenth century.

In keeping with Foucault’s binary opposition between Reason and Unreason in the Augustan Age’s construction of madness, Plates V and VI in Hogarth’s series serve to illustrate the rake’s further progression into the realm of unreason in his attempts to restore his life of excess and immoderation. In Plate V, we find Rakewell in St. Marylebone’s Old Church, marrying a haggard old woman for her fortune. The dilapidated setting of Marylebone is meant to convey the decrepit moral and physical foundations upon which this marriage is taking place. The location is also significant for the church’s reputation for handling hasty and secret marriages (Paulson and Hogarth 95). Figuring in the center of the painting, the central group consists of the rake’s wealthy, but hideous, bride, the bridesmaid, and the rake himself, whose attention is already turned toward the bridesmaid. The crucial thematic aspect of the fifth plate is Hogarth’s depiction of the marriage as *unnatural*, and therefore anathema to reason and morality. Rakewell’s stately appearance suggests this transaction is one of prostitution, as he offers up his youthful virility for money. The bride, a comically grotesque creature that leers seemingly at the clergyman would suggest that he, instead of the rake, is far more suitable for her in terms of age and looks. The physical situating of the bride gives her the

appearance of having a halo from the wall decorations, effectually casting her as a mock-saint for “rescuing” Rakewell from financial ruin. Figuring the unnaturalness of the marriage are the two courting dogs that offer a mirror to the human transaction: a large pugnacious dog and a one-eyed bitch. In the background, Sarah Young with the rake’s child, along with Sarah’s mother, have come to battle a churchwarden to prevent the marriage.

Emboldened by having gained a second fortune from a disreputable marriage, the sixth plate shows Rakewell drawn again into gambling. The repeated theme of gambling in Hogarth’s work suggests his view of this pastime as one of the more popular but fatal vices of Rakewell’s new social circle. Indeed, one notices an advertisement above the fireplace reading, “R Justian Card Marker to his Maj...Royal Family” that suggests even the king and queen indulge in this ruthless amusement (Shesgreen and Hogarth 33). Here, Rakewell has lost his second fortune. Alone, in the midst of his companions, Rakewell occupies the focus of the painting in a raving state – seeming to curse Heaven or fate. The mad dog at his side reflects, or perhaps portends, the descent into the frenzied, violent state that Rakewell will finally occupy at Bedlam once his divergence from reason is complete. The start of a fire goes unnoticed, as in the third plate, which threatens to consume all who are heedless of the destructive, immoral, nature of this social pastime. The caption beneath the sixth plate proves particularly informative of Hogarth’s system of moral and social values evident from the engraving:

Gold, Thou bright Son of Phoebus, Source
Of Universal Intercourse;
Of weeping Virtue Sweet Redress,
And blessing Those who live to bless;
Yet oft behold this Sacred Trust
The Fool of Avaritious Lust, ...

Sad Purchase, of a tortur'd Mind,
To an imprison'd Body join'd!

From the first line, “gold” is portrayed as both a currency and a source of light – its accumulation for the betterment of man is a product of both the “cult of commerce” and Enlightenment notions of reason and progress. Of course, once *unreasonable* greed takes hold, the man who pursues riches too fervently in opposition to Enlightenment ideas of reason and moderation becomes a “Fool,” a closely associated word to the French, “le fou,” meaning one who is insane. The caption’s final lines gesture toward Rakewell’s fate in the seventh plate and a topic that Foucault discusses at length. The “tortur’d Mind” that results from such unreason is ultimately fated “To an imprison’d Body join’d!”

Like the Harlot before him, the rake finally finds himself in prison for debt in the seventh plate. Hogarth’s scene is set in the Fleet debtors’ prison, a destitute setting for the rake’s destitute situation. Slouched lifelessly forward and beset by his fate, Rakewell gestures despondently with his hands and feet. His final desperate attempt to earn money by writing a play, seen on the floor, has failed him (‘S’ I have read your Play & find it will not doe yrs J.R. .h’).⁸ While his rancorous wife assaults him for having lost her fortune, Sarah Young faints at the sight of Rakewell’s plight, unable to help him this time. Despite the rake’s hopeless circumstances, the beer boy and jailer are both demanding money of him. The wings hanging on the wall in the upper corner would suggest the role of Icarus that Rakewell has played in this narrative as one who aspired to heights beyond his station, and now has tumbled to ruin. While the seventh plate represents another of

⁸ See Paulson and Hogarth on John Rich, manager of the Covent Garden Theater. (97).

Hogarth's richly detailed depictions, our Foucaultian reading of its thematic elements directs our focus toward the rake's two cellmates. Seeming to forecast the rake's impending fate, the first disheveled fellow is a projector: imprisoned for debt, he nonetheless has just invented a "Scheme for paying ye Debts of ye Nation." The second man, having the appearance of a mad alchemist, is absorbed by the furnace in a probable attempt to turn metal into gold. Both are, to some degree, mad (Shesgreen and Hogarth 34).

Confinement

Hogarth's conflation of the mad and the criminal in his work's seventh plate is ultimately consistent with Foucault's tracing of social responses to madness throughout history. For much of Europe in centuries past, the "predominant mode of "care" [for the mentally ill] consisted of banishment to the countryside or confinement in prisons, dungeons, or former monasteries. Special cages, boxes with iron gratings, or even towers located within city walls were used to confine lunatics in these settings," as they were similarly used for criminals (Hinshaw 67-8). Having shared the same confinement quarters for centuries, it stands to reason that the social standing of the mad and the criminal would be closely affiliated. Indeed, the degradation of reason that the early eighteenth century associated with madness amounted to camaraderie between madmen and convicts that both deserved punishment (Rothman 82-4). Foucault writes of the Great Confinement that began a century earlier and continued into the eighteenth century:

[I]n the history of unreason, it marked a decisive event: the moment when madness was perceived on the social horizon of poverty, of incapacity for work, of inability to integrate with the group; the moment when madness began to rank among the problems of the city. The new meanings assigned to poverty, the importance given to the obligation to work, and all the

ethical values that are linked to labor, ultimately determined the experience of madness and inflected its course (Foucault *Madness* 64).

Thus, given the backdrop of the Enlightenment and the rise of mercantilism and urbanization in eighteenth-century Britain, the confinement of the mad was also inextricably bound up with notions of ethical values tied to labor.⁹ The rake's financial insolvency, his status as one who does not labor for his income, and his status as one who has transgressed the bounds of class, necessitates his confinement as one who has ultimately transgressed the bounds of *reason*. In Plate VII, he is criminalized for this transgression. In Plate VIII, however, society will relegate his status below that of the criminal: to that of the *mad*. Foucault continues:

From the creation of the Hôpital Général, from the opening, in Germany and in England, of the first houses of correction, and until the end of the eighteenth century, the age of reason confined. It confined the debauched, spendthrift fathers, prodigal sons, blasphemers, men who "seek to undo themselves," libertines. And through these parallels, these strange complicities, the age sketched the profile of its own experience of unreason (Foucault *Madness* 65).

This "sketch" of the unreasonable, and finally of the mad, is that of the antagonist: to reason, to Enlightenment values, to commercial values, to class values¹⁰, and to moral values. It follows that throughout our tracing of the interconnected system of beliefs pertaining to Enlightenment, commerce, and morality present in Hogarth's *A Rake's*

⁹ Andrew Scull summarizes the notion of the "grand internment, a "great confinement" of the mad and of other social undesirables whose very existence constituted an affront to bourgeois sensibilities" (5).

¹⁰ Max Byrd further explicates the connotations between madness and class present in the eighteenth century when he writes, in *Visits to Bedlam* (1974), for example, that since the seventeenth century "enthusiasm is [viewed as] a lower-class phenomenon, not usually espoused by the sophisticated, affluent, or educated" (47).

Progress, this structure ultimately yields an *experience* of the mad as the antagonistic “other.” It is this *partage* that finally results in the stigmatization of the mentally ill.

By Plate VIII, Hogarth degrades Rakewell’s status from that of the mad criminal for having transgressed society’s moral and financial codes to that of the mad animal, completing his phenomenological transformation into the truly “other.” Indeed, the rake in this scene has ceased to be entirely human in this final scene of *A Rake’s Progress*. In the series’ last scene, we find Tom in Bethlehem Hospital, or Bedlam Asylum - London’s celebrated mental hospital - having suffered a mental breakdown from his losses. Insane and violent, the rake appears to embody the contemporary popular notions of madness. Only the weeping Sarah Young attends the rake as he appears unclothed, grinning and clawing at himself. A bandage or patch on the rake’s body suggests he may have tried to injure or kill himself. The rake’s clenched hand is raised in the engraving to scratch his head in a claw-like fashion. Two men attempt to restrain him; however, the one seems to be more interested in Sarah Young.

Bedlam as Zoo

Paulson expounds at length on the plethora of detail present in this engraving that authenticates the collective “madness” that Hogarth perceived Great Britain to be suffering from in general during his time.¹¹ However, it is Hogarth’s depiction of Rakewell that primarily concerns our Foucaultian reading into the work’s narrative and that prefigures several aspects of John Clare’s experience as a mental patient. Jonathan Andrews argues that the rake’s state of (un)dress is a repeated motif in the depiction of

¹¹ “The reverse of a half-penny with “BRITANNIA” and “1763” on it, and the figure of Britannia with her hair flying loose behind her head as if she too were mad [suggests that] Bedlam, Hogarth suggests, is England as of 1763” (Paulson and Hogarth 97).

the insane that delineates their “animality” and closeness to feral nature. It further denotes their status as poor - a financial state in opposition to the British Protestant work ethic and the “cult of commerce.”¹² Moreover, the reduction of the mad to “animals” governed by base instincts and passions places them in direct opposition to the value system of the Age of Reason. Foucault’s observations on the discourse surrounding madness during this time appear to substantiate Andrews’ views on the artistic representation of the mad. As Foucault notes, “It becomes evident that the animal belongs rather to an anti-nature, to a negativity that threatens order and by its frenzy endangers the positive wisdom of nature” (Foucault *Madness* 77). Therefore, in contrast to the model of man as the “rational animal” espoused by Enlightenment thinkers, Hogarth’s frenetic protagonist in Plate VIII embodies the “anti natural violence of animality.”

“It was this *animality of madness* which confinement glorified, at the same time it sought to avoid the scandal inherent in the *immorality of the unreasonable*,” Foucault writes (Ibid. 77). Denigration, in the form of spectacle, is clearly seen in Hogarth’s work as two young women standing between rooms 55 and 50 come to view the “scandal” of the mad. The popular pastime of Londoners in the mid-eighteenth century of touring Bedlam like a zoo would suggest that the mad and their “antics” held entertainment value

¹² As Andrews notes, “To a significant extent, clothing was held to distinguish mankind from animals, while varying degrees of nakedness often designated proximity to the base levels of beasts, uncivilized savages and the ignorant, unwashed poor. The mad were commonly perceived, like savages, as unappreciative, if not contemptuous of attire, or like animals, not fit to wear clothes, and were often represented tearing the very clothes from their backs. Like beasts, they tended to be portrayed as naked, but immune to the ravages of the temperature, driven by unbridled instincts and passions” (5-24).

tantamount to caged animals.¹³ One woman in Plate VIII holds up her fan to avoid seeing the man in 55 urinating, while the other woman gestures in that direction. This particular scene evokes the madhouse in “The Digression on Madness” found in Jonathan Swift’s *Tale of a Tub*, in which Swift invokes Hogarth in the description of the Irish Parliament as a madhouse in “The Legion Club” (1736) (Paulson and Hogarth 98). Similarly, Alexander Pope’s, *The Dunciad*, strongly resonates with the zoo motif in its evocation of “Bedlam’s straw,” the poverty, filth and “darken’d walls” that “invites and at the same time embodies a moral judgment against its inhabitants” (Ibid. 98). Hogarth’s image then depicts a popular conception of madhouses at the time: a putrescent place, whose inhabitants would accordingly rot in flesh and spirit as a result of chronic institutionalization. Medical historians corroborate that “rats infested many facilities, as did standing water and extremes of temperature. Yet because the plight of those with mental disorders was largely hidden from public view, ignorance bred further distancing and neglect.”¹⁴ In such an environment, and in Hogarth’s engraving, these “patients” appear to lose all vestiges of their former human appearance.¹⁵ In effect, confinement

¹³ “Here each form of madness finds its proper place, its distinguishing mark, and its tutelary divinity: frenzied and ranting madness, symbolized by a fool astride a chair, struggles beneath Minerva’s gaze; the somber melancholics that roam the countryside, solitary and avid wolves, have as their god Jupiter, patron of animal metamorphoses” (Foucault *Madness* 36).

¹⁴ See Hinshaw’s discussion in *The Mark of Shame* on the interesting relationship between the removal of asylums to rural spaces for therapeutic purposes, and the unintended consequences in the public’s perception of the mentally ill. p. 63.

¹⁵ “A pervasive view was that insane individuals had lost their reason, the cornerstone of the human soul. This perception fueled public views of those with mental disturbances as no more than beasts or children, with their lack of fundamental humanity serving to justify the degradation and humiliation they often experienced. Even at the level of physical sensation and pain, it was believed that beatings, inductions of fright, or

ultimately served to codify the mentally ill's social status as immoral "animals", more deserving of a punitive response than a therapeutic one. Even King George III of England, was not exempt from such "treatments" in his own experience with mental illness. For many years of his struggle with mental illness, he was encased in a mechanical device that restricted movement, subjected to beatings, near-starvation, and being chained to a stake. In the Augustan Age, the crime of animalistic unreason could not be tolerated.

Bedlam as Theater

When one considers the overall trajectory of Hogarth's narrative, one sees a general movement of *descent*. Rakewell's movement from rich to poor, from temperate to debauched, from social to isolated, from man to animal, and from sanity to madness lends weight to Max Byrd's argument that *A Rake's Progress* serves as an eighteenth-century morality play (Byrd 38). Hogarth's invocation of the early modern image of Bedlam as theater, of patients playing parts as actors in a play, is argued by Simon Cross to have been equally if not more culturally pervasive than the image of the hospital as a human zoo. "The contemporary tourist experience of seeing actors perform as Bedlamites is not too far from Bethlem's eighteenth-century reality. Bethlem's inmates knew well enough that to extract money and privileges from visitors they had to play to the gallery, performing to the stereotypical Bedlamite image" (Cross 23). The sheer horror of the rake's circumstances by the end of Hogarth's "play" then is meant to convey a stern warning against following his path of unreason and excess. Hogarth's mode of storytelling and didacticism is consistent with the primary axioms of both Realism and

subjugation to extremes of cold did not affect the mentally disordered in the same ways that they would affect normal people, given that mental illness thwarted fundamental mental capacities" (Hinshaw 64).

the Enlightenment: “do not proclaim a law as an imperative, but trust in the ability of the individual’s reason to find the law on its own, after detailed and objective observation of reality. Trust in the *capacity* of reason, is therefore, fundamental” (Gunther 240). As the “reader” of Hogarth’s art is intended to call upon his own faculties of reason to deduce the “moral” of the story, he or she inevitably makes that distinction between himself and Rakewell: the reader who uses his reason, and the rake who failed to. In essence, the rake becomes the narrative *villain* as one who opposed, if unwillingly or unknowingly, the values that Hogarth is extolling in the figure of Sarah Young. Her tears in Plate VIII for the rake are not meant to elicit our own, but to warn us of his plight. The partition, or separation, of the mad from the reader is thus fulfilled in the same way that the asylum functioned to separate the mad from society.

The Progression of Stigma

The *partage* of the mad, in conjunction with their dehumanized appearance and demonized role in Hogarth’s work, points to the social stigmatization of the mentally ill in eighteenth-century Britain. While Hogarth’s purpose is to provide a more general commentary on British society at the time, his work in *A Rake’s Progress* reveals a Foucaultian structural system of commercial, moral, social and medical beliefs that finally contributes to a phenomenological separation of the mad, creating a particular *experience* of alterity in establishing the “other.” This *partage* will ultimately come to figure as John Clare’s mental and social alienation as a result of his subjection to both cultural stereotypes and medicalized discourse.

Contemporary studies in psychiatry show the important role that cultural beliefs play in shaping societal responses to people with mental illnesses¹⁶ in addition to the experiences of the mentally ill, themselves. Their isolation and confinement in the eighteenth century, according to Foucault, served as a direct response to the Augustan Age's cultural ideas concerning the coinciding moralities of class, commerce and reason. Tom Rakewell's progression reveals these interconnected values and deep associations created between madness and immorality. Hogarth's material draws from a vast cultural repertoire of the depiction of the mad: artistic "depictions of people with mental illnesses as dangerous are consistent with the stigmatizing images of bestial insanity that are found, for example, in Greek mythology or the Bible" (Cross 21).¹⁷ Of course, Foucault locates madness' acquisition of negative connotations much later when he writes, "From the fifteenth century on, the face of madness has haunted the imagination of Western man" (Foucault *Madness* 14).

As a result of these deep-seated associations, perpetuated throughout Western cultural history, individuals suffering from mental illness in eighteenth-century Britain undoubtedly received, and continue to receive, harsh stigmatization in which their moral, and even *human*, standing in contemporary society's eyes became significantly diminished. Whether viewing the mentally ill as animals without reason, as criminals in violation of reason, or as children incapable of reason, *all* represent cultural conceptions

¹⁶ See Link's discussion on the relationship between culture and perceptions of mental illness. p.1328.

¹⁷ While Cross challenges the notion that depictions of madness throughout history share a seamless continuity, it stands to reason that, while undergoing culturally nuanced changes, stereotypes of madness share striking similarities over the course of Western history particularly involving violence and dangerousness.

of the mentally ill during the eighteenth century that stemmed from an overarching system of cultural beliefs and representations in art. These perceptions had profound social ramifications. For Foucault, this included their confinement in “extra-judiciary” institutions that amounted to imprisonment in the name of “treatment.” However, the ramifications of these beliefs, as reified in Hogarth’s work, extend beyond solely the mentally ill’s confinement. “The history of social psychiatry teaches us that cultural conceptions of mental illness have dramatic consequences for help seeking, stereotyping, and the kinds of treatment structures we create for people with mental illnesses ... the stigma of mental illness [is] a powerfully detrimental feature of the lives of people with such conditions” (Link et al. 1328). As we will see, Clare’s experience will prove no different in this respect.

Undoubtedly, Hogarth’s depiction of the rake and of Bedlam in Plate VIII draws more from cultural than medical sources. Nevertheless, this culturally prominent image exhibits far more than the fate of Tom Rakewell. As a widely recognized work of art, *A Rake’s Progress* reveals a complex, interconnected structure of beliefs and value systems connected to eighteenth-century British ideas about madness that amounts to an inherent stigmatization of the mentally ill. In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault’s genealogical method ultimately gravitates towards this structural analysis of the history of the social status of the mad. However, Hogarth’s narrative also reveals an instance of the phenomenological experience of the a priori separation of the mad as “other” from reason, rationality, and society. The rake’s social context within this larger structure of beliefs, in conjunction with his inherent relegation to the role of “other” as independent of this structure, contributes to his socially stigmatized and alienated status.

In the next section, I continue the examination of eighteenth-century print culture with a turn to periodicals, and specifically in *The Spectator*. By doing so, I show how the powerful cultural images presented in Hogarth's work, and the moralistic values they represent, resonate in popular discourses of the time spanning several decades. These essentially stigmatizing conceptions of mental illness are played out within language in a variety of contexts, and, as I argue, will ultimately inform Clare's experience as a mental patient when he is finally confined.

Part II

Popular Discourses of Mental Illness in Print during the Eighteenth Century

The ascendancy of print culture during the eighteenth century provided a greater forum for a public discourse to emerge concerning mental illness. Periodicals' preponderance in the time from Hogarth's completion of *A Rake's Progress* in 1734 and Clare's death in Northampton General Asylum in 1864 is suggestive of their status in particular as one of the most important sources for the dissemination of news and public information during this time (Snell 13). Moreover, by the time of Clare's confinement in 1837, Great Britain had over three hundred different newspapers.¹⁸ As the primary means of accessing news and public information about everything from poetry to politics including medicine and health, periodicals certainly influenced, and were influenced by, reader perceptions and attitudes toward mental health and illness when such stories were featured and, if not, when vernacular terms were used to invoke notions of insanity or madness for a particular story. Thus, one of the best ways to assess the contemporary cultural attitudes about issues pertaining to mental health is through the newspaper. A brief examination of selections from *The Spectator* will show that the composite textual nature of the periodical, whose representations of mental illness were embedded in a diverse array of stories and contexts, served to stigmatize the mentally ill within a web of denigrating associations including crime, scandal, poverty, violence, suicide, and social dissolution. I

¹⁸ See the discussion in Boyce et al., *Newspaper History from the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day* (1798). p. 99.

selected *The Spectator* for its combined breadth of readership and popularity at the time.¹⁹

Despite the dramatic new availability and ubiquity of newspapers since the start of the eighteenth century, it is crucial to note that religious works were produced at a much greater rate than all other kinds of texts. One only need look at the lists of published books issued at a service to their readers by such periodicals as the *Gentlemen's Magazine*, the *London Magazine*, or the *Scots Magazine* to see that religion formed the dominant category of the nature of printed works (Colley 41-2). The dominance of religious material, especially given eighteenth-century Britain's obsession with national values of Protestantism and industriousness, may help explain why one observes in the daily press particularly strong associations connecting mental deficiency to contemptibility and idleness. As this contributor in *The Spectator* remarks:

[Indolence is a] Rust of the Mind, which gives a Tincture of its Nature to every Action of one's Life. [...] And it is to no Purpose to have within one the Seeds of a thousand good Qualities, if we want the Vigour and Resolution necessary for the exerting them.²⁰

This excerpt is especially useful for exhibiting the express connections between eighteenth-century conceptions of mind, morality, and labor. Moreover, it reveals the level of agency that the writer perceives immanent to all persons regardless of circumstances. "Indolence," too, is revealed to be the sin, which nevertheless outweighs "a thousand [other] good qualities," such that this mental deficiency, or "Rust of the Mind," affects "every Action of one's Life." Such an understanding that connected indolence, mental deficiency, and morality was not unique:

¹⁹ See Martin.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, III, p. 149 (No. 316, 3 March 1712). Author unidentified.

...if I had less Leisure, I should have more; for I shou'd then find my Time distinguish'd into Portions, some for business, and others for the indulging of Pleasures: But now one Face of Indolence over-spreads the whole, and I have no Land-mark to direct myself by. Were one's Time a little strained by Business, like Water inclos'd in its Banks, it would have some determin'd Course; but unless it be put into some Channel it has no Current, but becomes a Deluge without either Use or Motion."²¹

For the author of this particular excerpt, indolence is commensurate with mental immobility and listlessness, or, what those in the eighteenth century might define as *melancholia*. As this writer suggests, the lack of engagement in productive labor as an a priori is what causes him or her to fall in such a state, implicating the suffering mind as *responsible* for its condition. Consequently, for those who subscribe to this view, any amount of social pity is wrong headed and offering welfare for those without work is unwarranted:

Of all Men living, we Merchants, who live by Buying and Selling, ought never to encourage beggars. The Goods which we export are indeed the Product of the Lands, but much the greatest Part of their Value is the Labour of the People: But how much of these People's Labour shall we export, whilst we hire them to sit still? The very Alms they receive from us, are the Wages of Idleness.²²

These examples from the pages of *The Spectator* are not simply the contributions of a few outlandish and opinionated persons. Even Joseph Addison adds that “as for those who are not obliged to Labour, by the Condition to which they are born, they are more miserable than the rest of Mankind [...]”²³ The tinge of moral condemnation coupled

²¹ *The Spectator*, edited with an introduction by Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), III, p. 148 (No. 316, 3 March 1712). The author of this *Spectator* is unidentified.

²² *Spectator*, II, pp. 402-403 (No. 232, 26 November 1711). The author of this particular *Spectator* is unidentified.

²³ Bond, *Spectator*, I, p. 472 (No. 115, 12 July 1711).

with the notion of mental anguish solidifies these associations. Moreover, if one considers the medicalization of these beliefs to the extent that productive labor was prescribed to suffering mental patients as a palliative in many mental institutions of the time, then one begins to understand just how deeply ingrained these associations truly were. In these passages, the emphasis is placed on cultural and symbolic factors in the employment of these terms, which is consistent with the contemporary periodical's aim to sensationalize stories and sell papers, rather than provide any objective account or rudimentary attempt at diagnosis.²⁴

Evidence in Clare's writing would suggest that this cultural stigmatization of mental illness had an impact on Clare's sense of himself after he was declared "mad." John Clare's cognizance of the socio-moral contemptibility of his position as an institutionalized mental patient can be found in his correspondence during this time. "My dear wife," Clare writes in a letter to Martha Clare from Northampton, dated July 19th 1848, "I have not written to you a long while but here I am in the Land of sodom where all the peoples brains are turned the wrong way... there never was a more disgraceful deception than this place It is a purgatoriall hell and French Bastille of English liberty."²⁵ In this passage, one glimpses the multiple associations Clare derives from his illness and confinement in terms of sin, deviance, criminality, and an inverted biological constitution. In addition to these derogatory terms and affiliations, it is also important to consider the

²⁴ Future studies might consider the readerships of each of the different periodicals listed and examine the differences in the usage of some terms along potential class or other social divides.

²⁵ See Clare, Robinson and Powell. *John Clare by Himself*. Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1996. p. 279.

social selectivity of reporting which supplied the contexts in which these terms were used in periodicals. My initial search, which included several periodicals, for terminology pertaining to mental states showed that the vast majority of stories that contained these terms fell into three main categories: murder/suicide, crime, and scandal. Not surprisingly, since these terms were employed with regularity in these contexts, it follows that both the extent to which the public associated mental illness with these societal ills and the potential for print culture to perpetuate these associations. Moreover, from my previous examination of *The Spectator*'s content, it further stands to reason that the stigma associated with dependence and marginality in a market economy ultimately *compounds* the stigma devolving from an association with poverty, social dissidence, criminality, and the potential for violence.

As Major and O'Brien write, "Based on their prior experiences as well as their exposure to the dominant culture, members of stigmatized groups develop shared understandings of the dominant view of their stigmatized status in society...virtually all members of a culture, including members of stigmatized groups, are aware of cultural stereotypes, even if they do not personally endorse them" (399). Thus, Clare's intriguing grouping of cultural associations in this letter to Martha serve as an expression of the connections he derives from a dominant culture ideology, as evidenced in contemporary periodicals, concerning mental illness and its popular associations with social transgression.

In light of my consideration of contemporary periodicals and how they employed terms pertaining to mental states, Clare's correspondence finally corroborates that "Members of a culture also are aware of the dominant ideologies, or shared explanations,

for why different groups occupy the status positions that they do. Collective representations influence how the stigmatized perceive and appraise stigma-relevant situations. Collective representations can affect the behavior of the stigmatized in the absence of obvious forms of discriminatory behavior on the part of others, and even when no other person is present in the immediate situation” (Ibid. 399). Thus, Clare’s internalization of these collective associations about madness is finally reflected in his feeling of isolation and his self-deprecating entreaties to his family to not visit him while confined. In several instances, Clare seems to willingly accept his isolation at the asylum and the decreasing frequency with which his family visited him. In a letter to Charles Clare, dated February 1848, Clare writes, “I readily excuse your Brothers John and William for not coming here and in fact beg them not to trouble them selves at all about it unless it would give them pleasure to do so.”²⁶ Or, when Clare writes that “Frederic and John had better not come,” such endorsements, however tepid, of his isolation reveals Clare’s sensitivity to his situation as a mental patient and its social, and thus personal, connotations with guilt or shame. What remains to be seen is how Clare comes to resist both the popular and scientific discursive projects concerning mental illness at the time with the prosody and power of poetry, which I will next explore.

As I have now considered the pervasiveness and vitality of stigmatizing conceptions of the mentally ill in eighteenth-century print culture, I finally turn to John Clare during the time just before his initial confinement within the asylum in 1837. As I hope to next illustrate, these stigmatizing associations and discourses that Clare will face – in addition to diagnostic labels – may be conceived of in terms of *enclosures* or

²⁶ See Clare, Robinson and Powell *John Clare by Himself*. p. 277.

impasses within epistemic and discursive realms. This follows from my previous discussion of the severe limitations that stigma poses for those suffering from mental illness according to current mental health experts. In a similar way, Clare struggled with partitioning forces prior to his confinement in witnessing the implementation of the 1801 Enclosure Acts on his hometown of Helpston. As the once open and natural spaces come to be divided, fenced, and ploughed, I wish to argue that what plays out on the physical landscape of Helpston comes to embody what is enacted on Clare's subjective sense of self by professionalized discourse and social labeling. These terminologies mark, categorize, and divide Clare's person in much the same way that labels and diagnoses do. I therefore seek to conceptually group both psychiatric labeling practices and land privatization collectively under the realm of the Lacanian symbolic. Consequently, the form of resistance that Clare negotiates when he poeticizes about the physical landscape concerns a return to natural and open spaces within language itself. Utilizing the work of Julia Kristeva on the semiotic chora, I will now begin to read Clare's nature poetry as a form of semiotic resistance against the order-producing, socializing realm of the symbolic.

Part III

Framing Resistance as a Return to the Semiotic *Chora*

Clare's resistance against partitioning discourses was grounded in experiences he had prior to his initial period of confinement in 1837. First, the passing of the Enclosure Acts in 1801 permanently altered the natural landscape of Helpston, destroying Clare's experience of a nature that:

Never felt the rage of blundering plough
...
Still meeting plains that stretched them far away
In uncheckt shadows of green brown and grey
Unbounded freedom ruled the wandering scene
Nor fence of ownership crept in between
To hide the prospect of the following eye[.]²⁷ ("The mores," lines 3-9)

Then, during the early 1830's, Clare found himself struggling to support his family on his annuity and sporadic income from gardening and fieldwork. As a result, in 1832 Lord Fitzwilliam, one of Clare's benefactors, provided Clare with a larger home in the town of Northborough to assist his family through their financial hardships.²⁸ However, the resulting departure from the countryside served to precipitate Clare's mental instability;

²⁷ "The mores," *John Clare: Poems of the Middle Period*. Eds. Eric Robinson, David Powell, and P. M. S. Dawson, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996-2003) II: 347; 3-9. All references to poems of the middle period are cited by volume and page, followed by line numbers. As Eric Miller adds, "Clare's moors represent... a porous world in which... nature can wander in and out of cultural subjugation" (Miller 645).

²⁸ See Bate's account of Clare's financial and subsequent mental decline (pp. 322-25, 338-40). Bate references an interesting epistolary entry made by Clare around this time. What is interesting to note here is the parallel, or perhaps contrast, between Clare's mention of a "land overflowing with obscurity" and the effects of the Enclosure Acts that very clearly outlined and demarcated private borders. The environment and Clare's writing are inextricably linked in this passage, and we are reminded of Kristeva's notion that the realm of the symbolic *obscures* the space between the thinking subject and his sense of meaning with its circumscribing and classificatory practices.

nature had been divided and he was now divorced from it. Making matters worse, Clare struggled to publish his writing after initially enjoying success from *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (1820) as he encountered frequent frustration at his publishers' insistence on "correcting" Clare's individual style and use of dialect to make his verse fit contemporary notions of poetic convention (Bate 340). The gamut of these obstacles, from his financial concerns to the move from the rural area of Helpston, from the Enclosure Acts to his publishers' editorial encroachment, all posed a series of impediments to Clare's verse that are contiguous with those synthetic delimiters that Clare will face in the asylum, and which stand in opposition to his naturalist tendencies. They are, in a word, *un-natural*, an imposition of what will be useful for us to conceive of in terms elucidated by Julia Kristeva in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984) as the socializing, order-producing realm of the (Patriarchal) Law, or the symbolic. This realm ultimately opposes and oppresses the organic and fertile space of nature and consequently Clare's nature poetry. For this reason, the difficulties Clare faced earlier in his life will ultimately come to appear as a prefiguration of his alienating experience in the asylum while subjected to medicalized discourse; we can also see the development over time of his mode of resistance within language.

Julia Kristeva's Semiotic Chora

In order to illustrate Clare's mode of resistance with Kristeva's theory, it will first be necessary to lay some theoretical groundwork concerning my discussion of her theory and how it relates to Clare's poetry. I use the term "semiotic" as Kristeva does to generally refer to the Lacanian pre-linguistic or pre-symbolic space within language, which is associated by psychoanalysts with the pre-oedipal phase when the infant child

cannot distinguish between its own body and its mother's body. The semiotic, consequently, is intrinsically connected with the maternal body, a body that furnishes the first source of movement, touch, sound and rhythm for the child. When the child enters language (according to Kristeva) the semiotic is repressed; it is shunted into the unconscious realm. For Kristeva, however, this repression is never complete - and this is where it gathers its political significance - for the semiotic is always capable of disrupting the symbolic. I similarly use "symbolic" to refer to the Lacanian realm of language, of social order and law. In psychoanalytic terms it is post-oedipal: that is, it refers to the time when the child becomes conscious of itself as an individuated subject and when it enters the realm of language, culture, and law, when it is able to follow rules. This is where the so-called Law of the Father prevails. (Lloyd 52)

Next, I use the semiotic chora as Kristeva introduces it in the course of her "descent" to the most "archaic" origins of language and the subject (Kristeva 83). Our discussion of the chora and its relation to Clare's poetry is significant in that Kristeva's main aim in *Revolution in Poetic Language* is to determine the extent to which the semiotic has been repressed in post-Enlightenment capitalist society, emphasizing those moments when it erupts in practices such as avant-garde art and poetry. Thus, when she poses her work's guiding question, "Under what conditions" do these eruptions "correspond to socio-economic change and, ultimately, even to revolution?" (Ibid. 16), we are led to consider Clare as a case study for the changes that take place in, first his socio-economic circumstances then his psychological circumstances, and the extent to which his poetry offers, if not a revolution, then a consequential "eruption" that resists

the circumscribing symbolic influences of such institutions as the Enclosure Acts and diagnostic rhetoric.

A consideration of the semiotic chora is also important with regards to Clare's experience as a mental patient undergoing novel psychiatric treatment. In *Revolution in Poetic Language's* foreword, Kristeva defines her theoretical project (first presented as a doctoral dissertation) against the modern, Hegelian understanding of science (11). She continues that this view of science is the product of "archivists, archaeologists, and necrophiliacs" who separate the thinking subject from its embodied presence in history and who purify *logos*, in terms of reason manifested as language, of its biological, material traces (13). She therefore proposes to offer a "theory of signification" that will account for the formation of the subject at the intersection of "corporeal, linguistic and social" forces (15). Here, the notion of the chora becomes critical. A term from Plato's *Timaeus*, the chora enables Kristeva to conceptualize this intersection both spatially (as the "in-between" produced by the ambiguous relationship between two pre-socialized bodies: the body of the not-yet-subject and that of its [m]other); and temporally (as the beginning before "the Beginning," the mobile origin "before" the imposition of "the Word"). This mobile, prediscursive origin is what I intend to show as Clare's Romantic conceptualization of a natural Edenic verbal space – to which he seeks a return. For, in the context of Clare's medical experience, the questions we must contend with concern the extent to which Clare, as a "thinking subject," is separated from an "embodied presence"; how he is subjected to a language of *logos* - purified of its *biological* (or organic) and material traces; and how he engages in a form of resistance against such practices.

One further point as to why Kristeva's work is relevant for my discussion of Clare concerns the central position of the chora as the site of the speaking subject's crisis in signification. Maria Margaroni argues for the semiotic chora's "continuous importance... (and what [she] calls its legacy) in the context of Kristeva's work... [and its] particular urgency in different fields of the humanities in the past thirty years" because of two primary and interrelated concerns: "the Western metaphysical concern with what Slavoj Žižek calls "The Beginning proper," that is, the "primordial act," which founds the order of the Word," (Margaroni 80) and the question of the Western metaphysical tradition's movement from "One" to the "Other", which "has been reduced to a violent act of rupture, a *coupure* that separates *logos* from its other/s and the speaking subject from his/her material experience of suffering or *jouissance*" (Ibid. 80-3). So, when Clare scribbles a draft letter in one of his notebooks prior to his confinement that reads, "I am but as an alien in a strange land," we begin to understand how Clare's sense of estrangement, or *coupure*, is conceived of in a multiple sense: from the land that had always been his to wander, from nature's inspirational properties that informed the creative wordplay in his poems, and from the sense of a meaningful link between subject and object.²⁹

During the same time as Clare's move from Helpston to Northborough, he composed "Decay A Ballad" which expresses both the "waning" of poesy and simultaneously the longing for a return to a natural, imaginative space, free of constrictions and delimiters, both discursive and physical alike. More than simply engaging with the popular Romantic motif of a return to an idealized nature, "Decay"

²⁹ As Bate notes, Clare is quoting Exodus 18:3, one of Clare's many biblical quotations (321).

effectually outlines Clare's greater poetic project of returning not to some external natural Eden but to the fecund, natural and generative space within language, its in-between space of prosody, of *jouissance*.³⁰ Though it is important to note the overall timbre of "Decay" is not triumph, but lament and loss, Clare nevertheless engages with a form of nomadic resistance, or *movement*, which crosses into and moves through linguistic boundaries in an attempt to return to this feminized, generative space. We will see this repeated in Clare's later asylum poetry as well. In both cases, Clare understands that limits are being imposed in the semiotic realm and thus they must be opposed there. For, if diagnosis and labeling, which precipitate the processes of stigmatization, are essentially semiotic acts – acts which engage in reading symptomatic signs and producing an interpretation that is then imposed upon a subject – it then follows that Clare's mode of resistance against both the partitioning and stigmatizing effects of diagnostic rhetoric should engage with the semiotic itself. Specifically, Clare's poetry captures the capacity of the semiotic to disrupt the symbolic in assuming a form of refractory *movement* toward Kristeva's conception of the semiotic *chora* – a prosodic and generative space within language in which artistic fecundity and primal utterances are informed by the drives of the subconscious.

Nature Poetry

Clare has a demonstrable relationship to what Kristeva calls the "semiotic," as can be seen across his poetry. In "The Impulses of Spring," Clare writes, "Spring is the poets

³⁰ While some may object that Clare's nature poetry is consistent with the popular Romantic motif of an idealization of nature, and with some sort of "unified" Romantic relationship to nature; I contend that Clare's "return to nature", though it invokes a desire to return to the natural and familiar spaces of Helpston, actually underscores a more fundamental return to the fertile and prosodic space within language itself that would restore life to Clare's poetry.

luscious prime... He revels in the noise / ...& all the gushing soul of sound[.]”³¹

Accounts of sounds and listening in Clare’s poems, as in Romantic verse generally, serve to invoke an aural aesthetic that raises a series of questions – about sensation and knowledge, reality and representation, words and things – analogous, and sometimes in opposition to, those raised by the discourse of vision and that sense’s primacy in modern, Enlightenment thought (Weiner 385). As a poet, Clare is keenly aware that his art directly appeals to readers’ sense of hearing, both with images mediated by language, and by the immediate sounds of language itself. The most basic primal units comprising spoken language are, as Kristeva posits, the pre-verbal vocal sounds, or “utterances,” that make up individual words. Therefore, it is this most naturalistic component, the utterance, which Clare continuously seeks an “archaic” return to in order to tap into its poetical generative potential. Take, for instance, his “Summer Moods” (1830):

While in the juicy corn the hidden quail
Cries ‘wet my foot’ & hid as thoughts unborn
The fairy like & seldom-seen land rail
Utters ‘craik craik’ like voices underground[.]³²

Combining the images of the hidden quail and “underground voices” with Clare’s remarkable eruption into bird sounds in this stanza illustrates the utterance’s subterranean, unseen potentiality to disrupt accepted linguistic norms, much in the same way that Kristeva recognizes Lacanian subconscious drives as the basis of the semiotic and its potential to disrupt the symbolic.³³ The interjection of natural sounds into his poem

³¹ “Impulses of Spring,” III: 186; 31-32, 35.

³² “Summer Moods,” IV: 146; 9-12.

³³ Kristeva writes that “Mallarme calls attention to the semiotic rhythm within language when he speaks of “The Mystery in Literature.” Indifferent to language,

effectually constitutes an organic disruption of the artificial confines of language itself – a resistive movement that attempts to assimilate bird song with language in an act of poetic *jouissance*. We see a similar move in Clare’s use of onomatopoeia in his poem, “The Progress of Rhyme” (1824-43), in which raw sounds assume substantive meaning in their capacity to generate new words for Clare:

“Chew-chew chew-chew” & higher still
“Cheer-cheer cheer-cheer” more loud and shrill
“Cheer-up cheer-up cheer-up” --& dropt
Low “Tweet tweet jug jug jug” & stopt
One moment just to drink the sound
Her music made & then a round
Of stranger witching notes was heard
As if it was a stranger bird
“Wew-ew wew-wew chur-chur chur-chur
Woo-it woo-it” –could this be her
“Tee-few tee-rew tee-rew tee-rew
Chew-fit chew-rit” --& ever new
“Will-will will-will grig-grig grig-grig”
...A minute—when a wilder strain
Made boys & woods to pause again[.] (243-60)

As both children and nature pause before the power of the organic generation of creative language in this poem, Clare’s nature poetry integrates onomatopoeic words into the poem’s rhymed iambic tetrameter couplets, conferring a musicality upon the poem whose organizing principles are aural and linguistic rather than semantic (Weiner 387). This patterning in sound reinforces the poetic whole that is more than simply a naturalist’s record of sounds by using repetition to integrate the couplets and variations to generate a

enigmatic and feminine, this space underlying the written is rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation, it is musical, anterior to judgment, but restrained by a single guarantee: syntax... [It is] air or song beneath the text” (Kristeva *Revolution* 29-30). Though Clare’s manuscripts often reveal a disregard for correct syntax, they nevertheless reveal an acute awareness of iambic rhythm. This demonstrates Kristeva’s assertion that the chora and the semiotic can only be experienced *within* the symbolic (Ibid. 68).

sense of free movement. It is then little wonder when, prior to Clare's confinement in 1837, yet after the Enclosure Acts begin to take effect around Helpston, Clare feels this freedom of movement is stifled when his cherished landscape is fenced off, and again after he is forced to move with his family to Northborough. Disconnected from nature in a palpable way, Clare understands that the natural consequence of this separation is his alienation within *language* from the prediscursive, generative, and natural space of the semiotic chora. Thus, the separation taking place in the physical landscape plays out in the linguistic space of Clare's poetry – illustrating Clare's conception of a distinctly Romantic Nature where the poetic Imagination is ideally bound to the natural world as the subject should be ideally bound to object. Nowhere is this separation more poignantly expressed than in Clare's poem, "Decay A Ballad."

"Decay"

The first stanza of "Decay" opens with the poem's most repeated line:

O poesy is on the wane
For fancys visions all unfitting
I hardly know her face again
Nature herself seems on the flitting[.]³⁴

It is initially unclear whether Clare is referring to his own poesy, or poesy in general, from this first stanza. However, given his contemporaneous struggle to publish after the initial success of *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery*, we can surmise that something about Clare's newfound circumstances is "unfitting" for producing "fancys visions." The stanza's final line suggests further that poesy is waning because "Nature herself seems on the flitting". The equation between poesy's wane and nature's "flitting" suggests a deeper, more inextricable link between the two. In essence, the waning of

³⁴ "Decay A Ballad," IV: 114; 1-4.

poetry is tied to the separation from a generative space, a space fertile with possibilities for creative expression in language. Clare continues,

The fields grow old & common things
The grass the sky the winds a blowing
& spots where still a beauty clings
Are sighing 'going all a going'
O poesy is on the wane
I hardly know her face again[.] (5-10)

Nature's transience is acutely evident, here, as fields grow old and "common." Clare's use of "common" here is to refer to the implementation of the Enclosure Acts, which effectively ended common lands in Britain. In an intriguing reversal, however, the fields' enclosure does not make them common in the sense of being shared, but in the sense of being typified as privatized commodities, or "things": we move from common as communal to common as ordinary, trivial. In this light, the fields' once unbounded and vivacious fertility ages ("grow[s] old") in light of its partition and segregation. As nature is no longer Nature, as such, but instead a series of private properties, it becomes for Clare fleeting and unrecognizable. More importantly, it is no longer available for Clare to freely draw upon for inspiration. The express connection made in this stanza between the commodification of natural spaces and Clare's verse shows a recognition of the opposition between the symbolic realm and the semiotic. The semiotic is here characterized as the feminine entity, "poesy." The ascription of femininity to poesy is contiguous with both Nature's and the chora's feminine principles in terms of fertility³⁵ and so serves to further link them in terms of their productive potentialities.

³⁵ In her essay, Maria Margaroni at one point discusses how the chora has been "reduced" to "a maternal paradise beyond language and the Law of the Father" while building off of Plato's original characterization of the chora as a "nourishing mother" (91).

The constant expression of movement we see in the first and second stanzas prefigures a resistive flow that will be prevalent throughout Clare's asylum poetry. It also serves to further characterize Clare's mode of resistance as a type of nomadism, or movement across territories and categories, toward the naturalized space of the chora. Grass, sky, and winds are all blowing, while "spots," an important term of temporality for Wordsworth, proceed "going all a going." Of additional significance is Clare's use of the word "wain" in the original MS instead of "wane", which denotes a wagon or cart (in other words, a vehicle for transport or movement, and significantly a rustic one).³⁶ These aspects of the poem gesture toward what Kristeva argues is necessary for poetical revolutionary or resistive movement: "We borrow the term *chora* from Plato's *Timaeus*, to denote an essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral states" (25). Grounded in Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, Kristeva's notion of the semiotic chora is inextricably linked with a similar ebb and flow of subconscious drives. She explains,

The de-structuring and a-signifying machine of the unconscious...is liberating. What "schizophrenic flow"...itself exists...through language, appropriating and displacing the signifier to practice *within it* the heterogeneous generating of the "desiring machine..." What we call *significance*, then, is precisely this unlimited and unbounded generating process, this unceasing operation of the drives toward, in, and through language; toward, in, and through the exchange system... a structuring and de-structuring *practice*, a passage to the outer *boundaries* of the subject and society. Then – and only then – can it be jouissance and revolution (16-17).

In our conceptualization of the "nature" in Clare's poetry *as* Kristeva's semiotic chora, it follows that Clare's mourning over the loss of an "unlimited" and "unbounded"

³⁶ See Clare and Robinson et al. *Poems of the Middle Period*. p.114 n.1: waine MS A37 versus wain MS B8.

space is, in fact, a mourning over the loss of the “generating process” of *significance* itself – an unceasing biological operation of natural drives and movements that produce meaning. Movement, or biological “flow,” is therefore important as a resistive force against the “Decay” of this space. Clare’s specific form of linguistic motility or “nomadism” is best characterized as a form of indirect opposition to the symbolic entity of the state, a “civilizing” and “territorializing” entity that precipitates the conversion of land to property that Clare experiences in the passing of the Enclosure Acts.³⁷ As a form of strategic maneuvering that can be deployed in the terrain of the present, nomadism involves a sort of lateral resistance to any assertion of hegemonic control through strategies of multiplicity and forms of deterritorialization that frustrate interpretation. Ultimately, it involves any activity (but in this case, poetic language) that transgresses contemporary social codes through the dissolution of cultural and territorial boundaries. In the case of Clare’s nature poetry, one observes a form of movement that *returns* to open spaces, discursive and territorial, a return to (previously) ungoverned, subjective, and creative space.

I will also note that as Kristeva has responded to criticism and further refined her notion of the chora, she has developed the particular direction of *return* or *regression* in

³⁷ See Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of this concept in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980). *A Thousand Plateaus* is more concerned with the relationship between systems of the imposition of economic roles and identities; thus, Deleuze and Guattari challenge their readers to find “points of non-culture and underdevelopment, the zones of . . . third worlds” in their own societies and knowledge systems (27). Still, their discourse is useful for the ways in which its prescribed modes of resistance relate to Kristeva’s characterization of linguistic and poetic “eruptions” against the grain of post-Enlightenment, capitalistic forces. While Deleuze and Guattari are working toward a different project than Kristeva is in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, it is helpful to consider their similar characterizations of these forces and modes of resistance against them for our discussion.

which this movement must take place. In the introduction of *Sens et non-sens de la revolte: Pouvoirs et limites de la psyanalyse* (1996), she proceeds to define revolution as the movement back to a “lost foundation,” which she associates with the “return of the archaic, in the sense of the repressed but also the timelessness of the drive” (Kristeva *Sense and non-sense* 12). *Revolution in Poetic Language* likewise concerns itself with the question of a primal “beginning before the Beginning,” which she discusses later as a *passage* or, as the “mobile origin “before” the imposition of the Word” (Margaroni 79). In either case, we are not talking about a movement of return to a “prediscursive force” or a “quasi-mystical realm” of “the eternal feminine” (Meaney 84), but of a return to the productive, fertile, and prosodic space within language. Alluding to the period in Clare’s life in which he was free to roam the open spaces of Helpston, prior to the Enclosure Acts, the poem’s next stanza in “Decay” describes:

The bank with brambles over spread
& little molehills round about it
Was more to me then laurel shades
With paths & gravel finely clouted
& streaking here & streaking there
Through shaven grass & many a border
With ruddy lanes had no compare
& heaths were in a richer order
But poesy is in its wane
I hardly know her face again[.] (11-20)

Again, Clare pines for a formerly lush and overflowing (or, an “unlimited” and “unbounded,” in Kristeva’s words) nature (a flowing bank with “brambles over spread / & little molehills round about”) that is expressly connected with the imaginative fertility of his poetry. As one begins to wane, so does the other. Equating this natural space of creative excess with something of immanent or inherent value, these aspects of nature outweigh and defy the ersatz accolade of “laurel shades” – or, the poetic fame that Clare,

though finding little of at this time, resented as being contingent upon conforming to popular poetic conventions that his publishers sought to impose.

This passage is also reminiscent of Kristeva's argument concerning the axiomatic form, or lack thereof, of the semiotic chora. As she notes,

All discourse moves with and against the chora in the sense that it simultaneously depends on and refuses it. Although the chora can be designated and regulated, it can never be definitively posited: as a result, one can situate the chora and, if necessary, lend it to a topology, but one can never give it axiomatic form... [It is] analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm (26).

As an aspect of language that cannot be coerced into the rigid structure of a particular "form", the chora behaves much in the same way that Clare posits nature, "streaking here & streaking there," as overflowing and exceeding boundaries. These descriptors of natural excess and overflow permeate Clare's poem. "Decay" continues,

I sat with love by pasture streams
Aye beautys self was sitting bye
Till fields did more then edens seem
Nor could I tell the reason why
I often drank when not a dry
To pledge her health in draughts divine
Smiles made it nectar from the sky
Love turned een water into wine
O poesy is on the wane
I cannot find her face again[.] (21-30)

Clare continues to bemoan the loss of poesy and its relationship to nature's evanescence. Tellingly, Clare reveals in this stanza that in times past, nature was, for him, a source of divine sustenance – a "nectar," or nourishment³⁸ – and the origin of perhaps both organic and verbal miracles "turning water into wine," that provide some sort of redemptive, if not mystical, function. Here, nature demonstrates its divine *poiesis* from

³⁸ See Margaroni's expatiation on this concept of the chora's "maternal" and "nourishing" aspects in terms of its sustaining linguistic creativity (91).

which his verse flows. Therefore, the Edenic associations present throughout the poem reveal Clare's conception of an originary point or space within language that generates his creative power. We see this association later in line 66 as well, "Where flowers from Adams open gardens" depicts a vital and sustaining "beginning before the Beginning" that effectually illustrates Clare's embedding of the biblical cosmogony and messianic mythology within the language of his poetry. The chora thus assumes religious qualities in Clare's verse as both a divine and immanent source of creation. This conceptualization is also part of Kristeva's characterization of the chora when she writes, "In the history of signifying systems and notably that of the arts, religion, and rites, there emerge, in retrospect, fragmentary phenomena which have been kept in the background or rapidly integrated into more communal signifying systems but point to the very process of significance. Magic, shamanism, esotericism, the carnival, and "incomprehensible" poetry all underscore the limits of socially useful discourse and attest to what it represses: the *process* that exceeds the subject and his communicative structures" (Kristeva *Revolution* 16). Indeed, these forces of mysticism and affectivity stand in direct opposition to the symbolic realm, which Kristeva associates with post-Enlightenment trends, including scientific positivism and capitalist economics. We will soon see that "Decay" makes these associations clearer by the end.

Clare's poem continues,

The sun those mornings used to find
When clouds were other-country-mountains
& heaven looked upon the mind
With groves & rocks & mottled fountains
These heavens are gone – the mountains grey
Turned mist – the sun a homeless ranger
Pursuing on a naked way
Unnoticed like a very stranger

O poesy is on its wane
Nor love nor joy is mine again[.] (31-40)

Nature continues to fade into dissolution as groves, rocks, clouds, and mountains dissolve into “mottled” and amorphous “mist” forms. Contrastingly, the sun pursues a “naked way”: homeless, displaced and wandering along a stark path. In this first instance of the mention of nudity, our attention is called to Clare’s preoccupation with the barrenness of nature and its relation to alienation (“Unnoticed like a very stranger”), language, and the waning of poesy. As the poem progresses, one notices how Clare’s once lush nature undergoes a process of decay, or ecological desertification, as streams dry up and vegetation withers. Consequently, Clare expresses the connected loss of imaginative power and a fading poetic “vision”:

The stream it is a naked stream
Where we on Sundays used to ramble
The sky hangs oer a broken dream
The brambles dwindled to a bramble
O poesy is on its wane
I cannot find her haunts again
Mere withered stalks & fading trees
& pastures spread with hills & rushes
Are all my fading vision sees
Gone is raptures flooding gushes
When mushrooms they were fairy bowers
Their marble pillars overswelling
& danger paused to pluck the flowers
That in their swarthy rings were dwelling
But poesys spells are on the wane
Nor joy nor fear is mine again[.] (45-60)

Of note in these lines is first Clare’s pun on “ramble” as both a form of ambulatory movement and a form of playful chatter or prattle. The natural source of fluid movement, or ambulation, that the stream once provided has dried up, and thus ceased to sustain Clare’s rapturous “flooding gushes” of poetic *jouissance*. The double-meaning of “fairy

bowers” is also revealing, for “bower” connotes a pleasant shady place in a garden or wood, a rural cottage, and simultaneously, a lady’s boudoir. Natural flora is thus made out to be both an organic source of inspiration and a site of sexual potentiality and fertility, “overswelling” with possibility. Yet, as Clare continues the repeated pattern of beginning each stanza with nature’s decay and ending each with poesy’s wane, these fecund excesses diminish in tandem until, as Clare finally declares toward the end of his poem, “Aye poesy hath passed away” in line 61.

Aye poesy hath passed away
& fancys visions undeceive us
The night hath taen the place of day
& why should passing shadows grieve us
I thought the flowers upon the hills
Where flowers from Adams open gardens
& I have had my summer thrills
& I have had my hearts rewardings
So poesy is on its wane
I hardly know her face again[.] (61-70)

The mention of flowers in several of the previous lines provides an interesting point for analysis. Especially in line 65, when both “thoughts” and “flowers” appear adjacently, we are reminded of Wordsworth’s association between the pansy and the *pensée*, or thoughts in “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood.”³⁹ Thus, when Wordsworth writes, “The Pansy at my feet / Doth the same tale repeat: / Whither is fled the visionary gleam? / Whither is it now, the glory and the dream?” (54-7), and “To me the meanest flower that blows can / give / Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears,” (206-9) we see similar expressions between Wordsworth and Clare, both nature poets, of the capacity for creative thought to spring forth from the self

³⁹ “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood,” *Wordsworth: Poetical Works*. Ed. Thomas Hutchinson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969.

as the flower springs from the earth in an organic, generating process of significance.⁴⁰ However, as the natural landscape loses its fertility in the course of “Decay,” we are left to wonder who or what the culprit of such an environmental and creative catastrophe is.

Cruel Undeceptions and Producing Significance

In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva makes the object of resistance explicit in terms of the realm of the symbolic, but what of Clare? What specifically does “Decay” strive to resist? At this point in Clare’s life he has not yet been confined to the asylum and so is not yet subjected to the expressly symbolic realm of diagnostic rhetoric. And while we know this time was difficult for Clare in terms of his financial and professional struggles, and that the contemporaneous passing of the Enclosure Acts was a significant source of dismay for Clare, “Decay” is subtle in its identification (or lack thereof) of a particular cause for the deterioration of the natural landscape. With a close reading, however, Clare’s poem reveals allusions to the symbolic realm of the Patriarchal Law that serve to circumscribe and deprive nature of its fertility, while simultaneously depriving Clare of its vital, creative sustenance. As Clare writes,

Loves sun went down without a frown
For very joy it used to grieve us
I often think that west is gone
Ah cruel time to undeceive us[.] (41-44)

The “cruel” un-deception that Clare is connecting to the setting of “Loves sun” is best articulated with Keats’s Negative Capability, where a traveler “is capable of being in

⁴⁰ See Frances P. Ferguson’s observations on Wordsworth’s aligning of thoughts and flowers with *pensées* in “The Immortality Ode and the Problem of Connections” in *Wordsworth: Language as Counter-Spirit*. Yale University Press, 1977. pp. 108-9.

uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason.”⁴¹

Cruelly undeceived by the simple facts of land privatization, the necessity of his move to Northborough, his financial circumstances, and the demands placed on him by his publishers, Clare feels as though the very landscape around him, once unbounded and overflowing with organicism, is now decaying before his eyes as a fenced, ploughed, and separated series of empty spaces. Losing the affiliation, or “friendship,” between himself, his verse, and nature, Clare concludes “Decay” with an elegiac expression on the loss of Negative Capability, and its potential to empower the individual to create his or her own meaning:

& friendship it hath burned away
Just like a very ember cooling
A make believe on april day
That sent the simple heart a fooling
Mere jesting in an earnest way
Deceiving on & still deceiving
& hope is but a fancy play
& joy the art of true believing
For poesy is on the wane
O could I feel her faith again[.] (71-80)

The series of aforementioned obstacles Clare faced at this particular time that this poem alludes to, can be collectively grouped under the realm of the Lacanian symbolic, Patriarchal Law. As Kristeva explicates: “We shall distinguish the semiotic (drives and their articulations) from the realm of signification, which is always that of a proposition or judgment, in other words, a realm of positions. This positionality...is structured as a break in the signifying process...” (Kristeva *Revolution* 43). This “break”, constituted in Lacanian theory as the realm of syntactic language, social order, and the law, when the

⁴¹ John Keats to George and Thomas Keats, December 1817, *Selected Poems and Letters*, Ed. Douglas Bush. Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1959. pp. 260-1, 261. Eric Miller associates Keats’ Negative Capability with Clare’s poem, “The mores” (Miller 648).

child becomes conscious of itself as an individuated subject, manifests in Clare's life on multiple levels, but summarily in his alienation from Helpston and his subsequent material preoccupations. He is consequently no longer able to engage with the imaginary powers of nature to generate meaning in "love" or "joy" or adequately express these forms of significance in poetic language. Ebullient and extra-linguistic eruptions into bird song are nowhere to be found in "Decay," as Clare seems to have lost touch with the primal space of creative generation. We see this idea confirmed earlier in the poem when Clare expresses, "Aye poesy hath passed away / & fancys visions undeceive us / The night hath taen the place of day" (61-3). Like Kristeva, Clare identifies the symbolic, a force of cruel undeception, as anathema to the natural processes of creative expression. As I hope to advance in the next section, Clare's struggle with the symbolic, as it occurs specifically within the realm of language, will become much more acute as he is confined, or *positioned*, within the asylum and within medical discourse. In the throes of mental illness, Clare is far removed from the concerns of Helpston, and instead is primarily occupied with the domain of diagnostics, which, in its own way, serves to plough, fence, and position Clare's subjective sense of self. The essence of Clare's struggle against professionalized discourse and scientific positivism, at the site of Kristeva's semiotic chora, is then ultimately over the site of *production*. As John Protevi suggests in Marxian terms, quoting Hardt and Negri,

The real revolutionary practice refers to the level of *production*. Truth will not make us free, but taking control of the production of truth will. Mobility and hybridity are not liberatory, but taking control of the production of mobility and stasis, purities and mixtures is (Proveti 197).⁴²

⁴² Margaroni initially quotes Proveti in her discussion on Kristeva's work and the salience of the semiotic chora (87).

Contending for the site of generating significance, we will see how Clare's work comes to grapple with the wresting of this site, or this ability, from him as a result of his treatment. Engaging Michel de Certeau's notion of "medical politics", we will also see how Clare's subjugation to taxonomic endeavors inscribes his person with a particular classificatory discourse, and how such a process results in a secondary inscription in the form of social stigmatization and labeling.

After elucidating Clare's mode of resistance as a return to the semiotic chora, in an effort to disrupt the circumscribing effects of the symbolic, found in labeling discourses, I now move to Clare's experiences as a mental patient in the confines of the asylum. Now subjected to professionalized discourses, Clare will ultimately demonstrate a poetical resistance of disruption and *jouissance* against the inscriptive endeavors of classification and taxonomy while treated under the new psychiatric approach of *traitement moral*.

Part IV

John Clare and the Medical Politics of Stigmatization

Northampton General Asylum July 19, 1848
My dear wife, I have not written to you a long while but here I am in the
Land of Sodom where all the peoples brains are turned the wrong way...
– John Clare

While John Clare, the Northamptonshire Peasant Poet, is known principally for his poetic depictions of the English countryside in its unbounded and natural beauty, his July 1837 confinement in High Beach Asylum proved a jarring reversal of circumstances for one so accustomed to freely wandering rustic landscapes. In this section, I explore Clare's experience as a mental patient through selected poetry and prose during a time of revolutionary developments in the field of mental health. First, I argue that sociocultural and scientific developments in psychiatry of the time signal the transition from "juridical politics" to "medical politics" described by Michel de Certeau. Then, I demonstrate how Clare's subjugation to the new therapeutics of *traitement moral*, taxonomic classification and the institutionalization of patients in rural settings, ultimately served to inscribe his individual flesh with the marks of contemporary medicine's scientific standards of diagnosis and the treatment of mental illness. These treatments medically marked Clare for social and medical distinction, effectually codifying his status as a social pariah. In bearing such "marks", Clare exhibits the *stigma* of mental illness; and the following selection of his poetry and prose that I examine demonstrates his response, and his resistance, to the several facets of social stigmatization.

In *Cure, Classification, and John Clare*, Michelle Faubert argues that during the era known as the "birth of psychiatry", the rise in taxonomic categorization of the many dimensions of behavior and personality associated with mental illness ultimately led to an

increasing professionalization of the field of mental health. In her view, John Clare's writing reflects his individual experience as a mental patient during this time and of being diagnosed as a component of "moral treatment." It is against such diagnostics that his writings are "enacting his protest."⁴³ Similarly, given the emphasis on the "objectification" of the self that moral treatment emphasized, "most of [Clare's] writings [from the asylum years] remained wholly attuned to what he called, in a remarkably modern phase, 'self-identity'" (Bate 415). Eric Miller similarly proposes that Clare's writings throughout his life demonstrate an opposition to contemporary scientific and enclosure practices that create artificial delimiters.⁴⁴ While relying on such premises, my argument relates these combined factors of classification and confinement to a prominent and relevant issue in contemporary medicine: the stigmatization of mental illness.

Thus, in order to achieve a more comprehensive, relevant, and interdisciplinary understanding of Clare's work, we need to shift the discussion of mental health in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries away from abstract Foucaultian binaries of "reason" and "unreason" outlined in *Madness and Civilization* to more useful categories for

⁴³ As Faubert writes, "with expert skill, [Clare] uses the conventions of English poetry and references to one of its most famous practitioners to enact his protest, to illustrate the inadequacies of language; and by extension, he illustrates some inadequacies of the language of moral management. Although his goal was personal – to undermine the power of those whom he saw as controlling his identity through language – Clare also indicates a deficiency of early psychiatry that others would point out after him: psychiatry's claims to scientific exactitude in its use of terminology are empty" (Ibid. 270).

⁴⁴ Miller notes, "Clare's ambivalent regard for contemporary scientific convention exposes the politics of natural history in the literary marketplace and in the landscape. His opinions of Robert Bloomfield, Lord Byron, John Keats, other literary figures help, in turn, to elucidate his stance toward scientific authorities such as Linnaeus, the arch-nomenclator" (636).

understanding Clare's experience as part of a marginalized, medical-ized group. What I propose is that the palpable and personal *enclosure* enacted upon Clare's person with diagnoses effectively created reductionist labels that deprived Clare of his agency in defining himself independently from professionalized terms. Moreover, Clare's institutionalized confinement in isolated rural settings ultimately reified his social status as a deviant. So, instead of Clare's writing serving as a response to any one of the individual components of his treatment (i.e., taxonomy, classification, enclosure, or confinement, seen for example, in the removal of asylums to rural settings such as High Beach and Northampton General Asylums), he rather responds to their combined effect of social stigmatization. Building from the arguments outlined in the previous section, I show that Clare's invokes his mode of resistance against stigmatization in a poetical return to the natural, generative space of Kristeva's semiotic chora.

Medical Politics and Inscription

However, it will first be necessary to explore how professionalized discourse operates differently from popular discourse in the context of stigmatization. To do this, we turn to the work of Michel de Certeau. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau posits that the law, which establishes the norms, rules, and hierarchical power structure of a society, is inscribed as a text onto bodies. This inscription is effectively accomplished by the use of the tools of juridical law's implementation: "From the police-man's billy-club to handcuffs and the box reserved for the accused in the courtroom. These tools compose a series of objects whose purpose is to inscribe the force of law on its subject, to tattoo him in order to make him demonstrate the rule, to produce a 'copy' that makes the norm legible" (Certeau 131). This "machinery" transforms individual bodies into a collective

body politic that produces the text of juridical law. It follows that bodies become bodies (as opposed to mere flesh) only by conforming to these [legal] codes. In so doing, they are thus written on by the law. However, sociocultural and scientific developments in medicine, particularly at the onset of the nineteenth century, began to shift the application of coercion away from the collective body politic, and closer to the body of the individual subject. The machinery that works on individual bodies, including surgical tools and medical diagnoses, is what will finally supplant the juridical tools of conformity and compliance, and is also what will feature most prominently John Clare's experience of stigmatization.

In the case of mental health and its developments in the nineteenth century, the three major components of Clare's experience as a patient constitute such machinery, including moral treatment. Consistent with the revolutionary times in which it took hold, moral treatment is conceived of in terms of a revolution for mental health. However, as Certeau notes, "Revolution itself, that "modern idea," represents the scriptural project at the level of an entire society seeking to constitute itself as a blank page with respect to the past, to write itself by itself (that is, to produce itself as its own system) and to produce a new history (*refaire l'histoire*) on the model of what it fabricates (and this will be "progress")" (Ibid. 135). The notion of "text" then becomes central in the reformative project of moral treatment, for in naming a class of disease, one establishes epistemic control over it. The taxonomy of mental illnesses, then, effectively locates and positions classes of disease by inscribing them, as diagnoses, on the individual subject. A *mastery* over the individual subject is therefore produced:

A whole tradition tells the story: the skin of the servant is the parchment on which the master's hand writes. Thus Dromio the slave

says to his master Antipholus of Ephesus in *The Comedy of Errors*: “If the skin were parchment and the blows you gave were ink ...” Shakespeare indicated in this way the first place of writing and the relationship of mastery (Ibid. 140).

Medical politics distinguishes itself from the juridical with those “Individualistic and medical classifications [that] delimit a “bodily” space of their own in which a combinative system of elements and the laws governing their exchanges can be analyzed” (Ibid. 142). Clare’s medical diagnoses of *mania* and *delirium tremens*, by way of example, therefore singled out his body from the collective according to contemporary medical knowledge and its rhetoric of deviance and disorder. His diagnosis served as an inscription of a classificatory discourse on his individual person. An effective *stigma*, the individual can never remove this inscription from his person unless, perhaps, the medical authorities in power pronounce him or her as “cured”. As it stands, even *this* delineation is yet another inscription of medicine’s classification system on the individual body. These treatments, like taxonomic classification and rural isolation, ultimately serve as the “apparatuses of *instrumentality*” which allow social knowledge to write new texts on the body in place of an old one as medical science and new social norms develop.

Stigmatization

The inscriptive nature of medical politics and its tools are intertwined with the process of stigmatization and Labeling Theory. The term “stigma” originates in ancient Greece, denoting a bodily mark or brand given to social outcasts (e.g., slaves, traitors) to convey a deep, shameful sign related to being a member of a group that is devalued by the societal mainstream (Hinshaw x-xi). Social devaluation occurs as a result of a socially perceived deviance in behavior and can often result in negative consequences for the labeled

individual.⁴⁵ Clare's deterioration leading up to his confinement shows Clare's sometimes incoherent and violent behavior toward his family.

The main reason for putting Clare in an asylum seems to have been that Patty could no longer be expected to go on coping with him. Family tradition corroborates Taylor's sense that she was struggling: in the 1920s one of Clare's grandchildren reported that sometimes the only way of calming him down was for one of the older children to take him aside and talk quietly of country things (Bate 407).

Clare's behavioral pattern, combined with the incident at a performance of *The Merchant of Venice*, ultimately led to Clare's placement in professional hands in which his behavior and mental state could then be classified and labeled. As Stephen P. Hinshaw discusses, this process of labeling has been argued to contribute to a stigmatizing process of mental illness. From the idea that identity is largely shaped by social processes, the concept of Labeling Theory explains that when those allotted a measure of social authority, such as professionals, assign labels to certain behaviors in order to begin to control or treat them, the individuals receiving these labels assume the associated attributes and role identities consistent with the label. As a result, this process produces a fundamentally altered identity and a new social role for the labeled person. The labeled individual is now expected to perform in accordance with his new role and, indeed, these expectations initiate a chain of thoughts and behaviors that lead to an altered self-image while reinforcing the continuous appearance of deviance. Such a process constitutes *primary labeling theory* (Hinshaw 39-40).

⁴⁵ "Labeling theory suggests that in some cases of what is called mental illness, a diagnosis to that effect may result in undesirable consequences, such as ridicule and social and/or self-rejection" writes Thomas Scheff in "Normalizing Symptoms: Neither Labeling nor Enabling." *Ethical Human Psychology and Psychiatry* 12.3 (2010): 232-237. p. 242.

Primary labeling theory's tenets, however, have been frequently challenged in light of evidence that the behaviors typically labeled exist independently of whether a diagnosis or label is applied to them. Consequently, primary labeling theory has since yielded to what is termed *secondary labeling theory*, or *modified labeling theory*. Its basic premise is that although labels may not "cause" sustained mental illness, the stigma associated with the *treatment* of mental disorder affects the course of one's illness by lowering a person's self-esteem, constricting his or her interpersonal networks, and reducing his or her chances for employment and income, all of which increase stress. These stressors, in turn, place persons at risk for exacerbated symptoms (Ibid. 137). Ultimately, the label of mental illness, combined with a history of mental hospitalization, can foster stigmatization on the part of perceivers as well as the patient, in terms of an internalization of shared negative beliefs about the social devaluation of mental illness (Ibid. 374).

In effect, institutional practices can be said to contribute to the process of stigmatization. Clare's particular diagnoses provided a terminology rich in connotations, as I have explored in earlier sections, which would have contributed to his internalization of a negative self-image. For example, the *mania* with which Clare's physician, Dr. Skrimshire, diagnosed Clare in the nineteenth century was attributed to a variety of causes. Dr. Nesbitt, of Northampton asylum that Clare was committed to after his escape from High Beach, remarked to Clare's first biographer that the poet's *mania* "had its origin in dissipation" (Bate 410). Bate notes that drink was a common cause ascribed to madness in the early nineteenth century, and furthermore, that the word *dissipation* also had sexual connotations – denoting the derangement often caused by syphilis. I have

already discussed how the socially and morally charged issue of sexually transmitted diseases related to “madness” in Hogarth’s work. During Clare’s stay in High Beach, a book entitled *On Nervous and Mental Conditions* offered a slew of possible causes for mental illness, including, but not limited to: frustrated love, love of admiration, domestic disputes, fear, and sexual indulgence. These purported causes informed the discourse of the time concerning mental illness and its etiologies— a terminology laden with moral, and therefore invariably denigrating, connotations (Ibid. 410).

Clare’s subjugation to the new model of care similarly contributed to the process of stigmatization, as aspects of Clare’s treatment served to foster both socially constructed ideas about madness and the personal degradation of one’s self-identity. The rural-ization of the mental hospital, while intended to be a therapeutic and salubrious alternative to the crowded and destitute conditions of the urban hospital, nevertheless reinforced popular negative perceptions of those within. These state hospitals for the mentally ill and the “feble-minded” – the contemporary term for those with mental retardation – were typically situated a day’s carriage ride from metropolitan areas, or in some cases, near the exact center of a state, to most equitably serve all its residents. However, “the distancing of these facilities from large cities amounted to banishment of those housed there; it also cut off ties between institutionalized persons and their families. In conjunction with occasional overcrowding, such isolation reinforced societal fears of the differences between the mentally ill and the rest of society and emphasized the hopelessness of the endeavor [to find a cure]”. Thus, the very conditions that mental hospitals had been designed to overcome in almshouses and prisons were now amplified,

reinforcing the notion of the mentally ill as dangerous, as freaks, meriting banishment in isolated fortresses (Hinshaw 68).

Competing Signs

Before turning to Clare's asylum poetry, we must briefly return to Kristeva and poetical resistance. "We understand the term "semiotic," writes Kristeva in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, "in its Greek sense... [a] distinctive mark, trace, index, precursory sign, proof, engraved or written sign, imprint, trace, figuration" (25). Like the sign of the stigma, the semiotic operates similarly as a "distinctive mark" in its function of denoting uniqueness or *distinctiveness*. Both types of marks confer distinctiveness, but the semiotic chora's distinctiveness is characterized by the momentary singularity of the creative eruptions that it produces. Moreover, whereas the diagnosis or social label, which precipitate stigmatization, are fixed marks, or marks that serve to position and hold the subject within an epistemology or taxonomy, the semiotic chora is instead mobile and extremely provisional (Ibid. 25). It operates by the constant motions of flows and drives, ebbs and flows, and eruptions of natural *jouissance*. In this way, while the sign of the stigma circumscribes the subject, the semiotic chora frees the subject.

As the next section will show, Clare's poetry underwent dramatic changes after his confinement in a mental hospital. Whilst in the anti-natural realm of disciplinary power and medicine, Clare's palpable disconnection from natural spaces, and consequently, linguistic fertility, infuses his poetry with tragic lamentation over this disconnection. The birds fall silent in Clare's verse, but more poignantly is the loss of Clare's ability to generate his own meaning and own sense of self (his own *significance*) in his daily experience. The result for Clare is a crisis in signification. It is also a

hauntingly familiar experience for many mental patients, including James Gottstein: the loss of the ability to define oneself.

Asylum Poetry

While John Clare wrote prolifically during his time in Essex and Northampton, a focused selection of his poetry will reveal a preoccupation with the struggle to define self-identity, wrested from him as a result of institutional practices attempting to treat his mental illness.⁴⁶ In light of Clare's endeavor to define this sense of self, we begin with a prominent example of his struggle against stigmatization with his poem, "I am".

I am – yet what I am, none cares or knows;
My friends forsake me like a memory lost: -
I am the self-consumer of my woes; -
They rise and vanish in oblivion's host,
Like shadows in love's frenzied stifled throes: -
And yet I am, and live – like vapours tost

Into the nothingness of scorn and noise, -
Into the living sea of waking dreams,
Where there is neither sense of life or joys,
But the vast shipwreck of my lifes esteems;
Even the dearest, that I love the best
Are strange – nay, rather stranger than the rest.

I long for scenes, where man hath never trod
A place where woman never smiled or wept
There to abide with my Creator, God;
And sleep as I in childhood, sweetly slept,
Untroubling, and untroubled where I lie,

⁴⁶ "The poetry Clare wrote while incarcerated in asylums – first at High Beach beginning in June of 1837 and later at Northampton beginning in December of 1841 – show his linguistic and existential grappling, which seem to arise in part from his angst at being a subject of psychiatric classifications" (Faubert 277). Faubert adeptly demonstrates Clare's struggle against the classificatory language of diagnostic rhetoric. However, she does not suggest this struggle to be one occurring in the larger process of stigmatization.

The grass below – above the vaulted sky.⁴⁷

Apart from the profound sense of suffering and loss the reader supposes from Clare's lines is the sense of self misplacement. One senses a lack of that most fundamental sense of being and personhood. The first stanza introduces us to the self of "vapours," which is both ephemeral and immaterial – that which is deprived of any solid form or foundation. The only assertion about the self that occurs in the affirmative is the acknowledgement that the speaker is the "self-consumer of [his] woes". The reduction of the "self" to a vaporous "self-consumer" of woes, gestures towards Clare's experience as a psychiatric patient in which a particular diagnosis, (a *manic* or a sufferer of *delirium tremens*, as examples) as part of the language of psychiatry, serves to create strife between the complex and inscrutable human subject,⁴⁸ and the circumscriptive clinical term that labels him.⁴⁹ Consequently, whatever the real affective qualities of Clare's "woes," they nonetheless "rise and vanish in oblivion's host" as it were, in light of moral

⁴⁷ "I am," *The Later Poems of John Clare 1837-1864*. Eds. Eric Robinson, David Powell, and P. M. S. Dawson, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996-2003) I: 396; 1-18. All references to poems of the later period are cited by volume and page, followed by line numbers.

⁴⁸ "In the eyes of moral management, the patient was simply wrong about his own being if what he thought about himself did not correspond to the doctor's definitions and classifications of him ... When Clare found himself the focus of moral management's classificatory efforts, he experienced the serious repercussions of the instability of language, for it then became apparent to him that his vocabulary was inadequate to tell the story of himself ... to narrate his own identity" (Faubert 276-267). Again, while I focus on Clare's opposition to taxonomy, I argue that this opposition serves as one component in the larger process of stigmatization that Clare is responding to.

⁴⁹ Thomas Scheff recognized the association between labeling and Clare's, poem, "I Am," when he writes, "This excerpt seems to me to contain strong intimations of labeling, social rejection, and self-labeling ... Whether labeling was cause or effect of his symptoms is not clear, but it is possible that it might have been a key part of the cause" (232-3).

therapy's relegating them to observable and classifiable data, diminishing their human significance and fostering a crisis in both personal and linguistic signification.

It follows that the poem's speaker *should* feel "tost" in a tumultuous sea consisting of "nothingness," where he confronts "scorn and noise." "Scorn," a reference to moral treatment's prescriptive admonition against certain behaviors and thoughts, and "noise," a type of cacophonous interference, indecipherable to the lay man. Here, the confrontation with "noise" is Clare's illustration of the personal experience of being classified. The classifications of insanity constitute a highly specialized and professionalized discourse; and so their Linnaean, Latin, and scientific etymologies may well seem as little more than incomprehensible "noise" to the Peasant Poet. As a result, the now *Patient Poet* feels it to be a type of static interference - precluding him from discerning a clear sense of self-identity.⁵⁰ The poem suggests that such an experience is ultimately tantamount to a "waking dream," a surreal place where so much of what seems natural is instead arbitrarily delimited and made to be indiscernible.

Within the same stanza, Clare references social circumstances that may be said to have resulted from the combined experiences of his receiving both "scorn" and "noise" as components of moral treatment. "Even the dearest that I love best/Are strange – nay, stranger than the rest" suggests Clare's sense of the social estrangement and ostracism that have taken place since his committal. His desire in the final stanza to be "untroubled" and even more interestingly "untroubling" indicates that Clare has internalized the contemporary psychiatric and societal views regarding the mentally ill: that Clare is a

⁵⁰ "With the combined authority of Latin and systematic science, binomials subordinate vernacular names, alienating from the common observer the objects to which they are assigned by interposing the scrim of a learned language" (Miller 638).

social burden and that he is troubling, in a multiple sense, to others. This marks a key component in the development of secondary labeling theory, which holds that the associations created by labeling and treatment creates an internalized sense of self that is negative and affects the course of one's illness, tending to worsen symptoms. Our evidence for such symptoms can be disturbingly found in Clare's final stanza, which reveals his desire to "sleep" and at once, "to abide with...God" – a longing for death that amounts to suicidal thoughts.

The sonnet, identically titled "I am," also demonstrates a grappling with the mechanisms of stigmatization. Here, Clare contends with the circumscriptive and binding effects of moral therapy and classification:

I feel I am; - I only know I am,
And plod upon the earth, as dull and void:
Earth's prison chilled my body with its dram
Of dullness, and my soaring thoughts destroyed,
I fled to solitudes from passions dream,
But strife pursued – I only know, I am,
I was a being created in the race
Of men disdaining bounds of place and time: -
A spirit that could travel o'er the space
Of earth and heaven, - like a thought sublime,
Tracing creation, like my maker, free, -
A soul unshackled – like eternity,
Spurning earth's vain and soul debasing thrall
But now I only know I am, - that's all.⁵¹

From the sonnet's first line, Clare expresses the dissension between *feeling* and *knowing* who he is. The Romantic poet is inclined toward *feeling*; an intuitive understanding that resonates with Wordsworth's assertion that "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." But in the age of the "birth of psychiatry," an age striving toward classifiable limits on radical behaviors and powerful emotions, Clare finds himself at

⁵¹ "I am," I: 397; 1-14.

odds with Romantic emotional effusions. Indeed, Clare corrects himself: No longer does he have any *feeling* for who he is, but instead he *knows*, only in the way that an insubstantial scientific proof or label can confer meaning on one's identity.

Far from leading an existence where his thoughts and body may roam freely, Clare finds himself plodding a "dull and void" earth deprived of personally conferred meaning: in effect, "Earth's prison". Clare's use of "prison" here conveys several meanings. First, Clare's feeling of imprisonment within the confines of the asylum touches on the close association seen in our examination of Hogarth that both prisons and asylums shared over the course of the previous century. As depicted in *Rake's Progress*, prior to the late eighteenth century, the predominant method of "care" for the mentally ill consisted of confinement in prisons, dungeons, or former monasteries, if not banishment to the countryside. In such settings, cages, boxes with iron gratings, or citadel towers were employed for the internment of lunatics alongside convicted criminals. Indeed, the degradation of reason that the early eighteenth century associated with madness amounted to camaraderie between madmen and convicts that both deserved punishment (Rothman 82-4). After the establishment of specialized mental hospitals like Bedlam, the mentally ill still found themselves quartered in conditions sometimes worse than prisons, but nonetheless resembling the overall environment of constraint and Foucaultian disciplinary power. Moral treatment's fundamental principles sought to do away with such associations, restoring the humanity of the mentally ill. However, Clare's association in his poem shows a cementing in historical basis as a firmly ingrained part of the public's perception of the mentally ill. Moreover, for some time Clare suffered delusional thoughts of being imprisoned for the crime of bigamy (Bate 436). The fact that

Clare would adopt such a fantasy, and moreover, adopt the role of an incarcerated criminal, possibly suggests his internalization of this prevalent social association between crime and insanity. His internalization of a criminal role, one leftover from the popular connection between crime and madness in the Augustan age, undoubtedly serves as evidence of what current psychiatry deems “automatic stereotype activation.”⁵²

That Clare seeks to escape these earthly shackles in this poem similarly suggests his desire to free himself of a bodily prison, where he might instead assume the properties of an unbounded “spirit.” In so doing, Clare would be free to roam all of creation apart from his current existence’s “vain and soul debasing thrall.” In this instance, one sees a sharp critique of what Clare considers to be both binding and, at the same time, vain and “soul debasing”: moral treatment’s classification system of mental illness. Momentarily returning to our analysis of Certeau, we know that moral therapy’s particular treatment regime acts directly on the body of the subject, serving to inscribe contemporary psychiatry’s standards on his very flesh, effectively marking it. As Clare finds his subjugation to such a process “soul debasing,” an affront to Romantic individualism and tantamount to material objectivity’s subdual over Romantic subjectivity, it follows that Clare would wish for deliverance from such an experience. The poem ends with an expression of such yearning, to be “unshackled” from contemporary science’s measures of classification and categorization – effectively escaping the mechanisms of stigmatization.

⁵² “Knowledge of cultural stereotypes may affect behavior...Because of associative linkages in memory between stereotypes and the behaviors they imply, activation of stereotypes can automatically lead to behavior that assimilates to the stereotype” (Major and O’Brien 393).

Clare's experience of stigmatization as a result of therapeutic practices, in which an internalized label supplants a fundamental sense of self, is most powerfully expressed in his poem, "An Invite to Eternity." As with the previous poems, we see familiar themes with "An Invite": a stark desolation of the self, the feeling of estrangement and isolation, and the intimation of death as a release from an imprisoned existence.

Wilt thou go with me sweet maid
Say maiden wilt thou go with me
Through the valley depths of shade
Of night and dark obscurity
Where the path hath lost its way
Where the sun forgets the day
Here there's nor life nor light to see
Sweet maiden wilt thou go with me

Where stones will turn to flooding streams
Where plains will rise like ocean waves
Where life will fade like visioned dreams
And mountains darken into caves
Say maiden wilt thou go with me
Through this sad non-identity
Where parents live and are forgot
And sisters live and know us not

Say maiden wilt thou go with me
In this strange death of life to be
To live in death and be the same
Without this life, or home, or name
At once to be, & not to be
That was, and is not – yet to see
Things pass like shadows – and the sky
Above, below, around us lie

The land of shadows wilt thou trace
And look – nor know each others face
The present mixed with reasons gone
And past, and present all as one...⁵³

⁵³ "Invitation to Eternity" I: 347-8; 1-28.

At first, the address to a maiden appears to be an acknowledgement of Clare's identity as defined by the presence of a distinct other from which he is differentiated. However, upon closer examination, her presence exists as merely an inextricable, reflexive projection of Clare's suffering rather than a distinct entity. One sees that by the fourth stanza, the maiden's face is completely unrecognizable, designating her status as that of a non-entity.⁵⁴ This is to say that Clare's experience of isolation has not subsided as a result of the maiden's figuration into the poem, but in fact has only intensified. Clare acknowledges his ostracized and isolated status as a mental health patient when he describes his current existence in that place "Where parents live and are forgot/And sisters live and know us not". The increasing lack of correspondence and visitations from Clare's friends and family toward the end of his time in Northampton General Asylum (Bate 478-84) would have surely intensified such feelings of being "forgot." The reference to Clare's sister, however, as dwelling in such a place confirms that it is indeed a place of death: his twin sister died when Clare was only a few weeks old. Therefore, that this place would find her alive insinuates Clare's need to occupy the same state of death to experience her.

⁵⁴ Tim Chilcott explains, "But what I called a moment ago the saving dualism of subject and object (of his self realizing that it perceives something *as* object, in this case the girl) is, I think, in these lines largely nominal. She exists more as another aspect of the solipsistic self, a kind of reflexive projection of its despair, than a separate, identifiable presence; and it is not insignificant that her image is in the fourth stanza diffused beyond recognition..." (202). Chilcott expounds on the importance of this ontological separation between the maiden and Clare, however does not credit its significance to Clare's experience in the context of the asylum. It is my argument that this poetic device is crucial in illustrating Clare's affective experience within the asylum. Moreover, it is consistent with his Romantic qualities as a poet seeking to validate affect as an authentic response to his experience.

The poem additionally offers a glimpse of the sort of non-place Clare now finds himself in, a place without any navigable landmarks, natural forms, sense of time, or even light. It is a place in which Clare feels without “life, home, or [even a] name.” Indeed, Clare effectively illustrates a place beyond life or death, a purgatorial “sad place of non-identity.” Distinct from the other poems in our examination, “An Invite” explicitly addresses the notion of Clare’s identity and its express lack of form during his subjection to diagnostic classification. The obfuscation of the physical environment (“the land of shadows”) and natural objects (“Where stones will turn to flooding streams/Where plains will rise like ocean waves”) firmly establishes Clare’s experience as contiguous with his opposition to the taxonomic, Linnaean classification of nature. Furthermore, the poem encompasses his experience of a breakdown of the symbolic order while confined in the asylum. Indeed, Clare illustrates his perception of classificatory labors as a force of obscurity, robbing subjects and objects of their natural symbolic forms and supplanting them with something alien and delimiting. By way of example, Miller writes of Clare that poems like “The Mores” and “[The Badger] explore the desolate universe revealed after the taxonomists have been exposed as inadequate not to justice alone, but also to the metamorphoses and lability of identity” (Miller 644). While Clare’s deployment of a subtle variation of the iambic tetrameter would suggest his unique imprinting of the self, an act of assertion, the poem’s somber tone and sublime imagery indicates Clare’s pinnacle affective response to stigmatization: a crisis of identity. Indeed, the breakdown in the subject-object order that Clare illustrates is suggestive of the identity crisis that diagnostic rhetoric precipitates.

A larger discussion would, of course, examine Clare’s prolific prose writings

that provide additional evidence as to his affective preoccupations with the effects of stigmatization. Clare's principal prose work during this time on the topic of *Self Identity*, for example, reveals a deep concern for what he argues is "one of the finest principles in everybodys life and fills up the outline of honest truth in the decision of character." This observation about the fundamental nature of self identity and its paramount importance to both the social and personal spheres points toward an awareness of the chief effects that stigmatization has upon the notion of the self. Namely, that it threatens its most underlying foundations.⁵⁵ This would suggest Clare's preoccupation with social standards of masculinity, virtue, and how others perceive him in relation to such standards. In effect, the labeling Clare receives as a component of his treatment in the asylum serves to undermine his masculine sense of control and autonomy in self-definition, and ultimately, contributes to his sense of loss in social value, worth, and competency.

The Bodily Text

During Clare's early years, Bate writes that some of Clare's first poems were scrawled on almost any surface he could find in nature, including the very crown of his hat (Bate 74). Inscribed with Clare's verse, these natural objects reflected Clare's poetic preoccupations, style, skill, and voice. Their very surface served as a text in which all of these things could be read at once. Accordingly, as Clare became subject to the tenets of moral treatment in the asylum, so too did Clare's person serve as a parchment on which a text,

⁵⁵ Major and O'Brien argue that "contemporary perspectives on stigma emphasize the extent to which stigma's effects are mediated through targets' understanding of how others view them, their interpretations of social contexts, and their motives and goals... These perspectives assume that stigma puts a person at risk of experiencing threats to his or her social identity... self-esteem (personal and collective), and can lead to attributional ambiguity, i.e., uncertainty as to whether outcomes are due to one's personal identity or social identity" (Major and O'Brien 398).

detailing all of the contemporary standards of classification, medical knowledge, and treatment, could be read. His subjugation to moral treatment, diagnosis, and his removal to remote locations collectively contributed to a form of inscription on his person that fundamentally altered the way that others read Clare, and how Clare read himself. Acutely aware that his subject had been written on by the “dark system” of Linnaean classification and contemporary social ideas about mental illness, Clare ultimately came to lose his sense of self. Supplanting this self was a negative internalization of the host of connotations that his diagnosis, or label, carried. If not causing him to flounder in feeling a loss of self-identity, or assuming the identities of Shakespeare or Byron, Clare instead associated himself with an imprisoned criminal. Moreover, he implored his friends and family that they needn’t “trouble” themselves to visit him. In accordance with secondary labeling theory, Clare’s treatment ultimately contributed to a process of stigmatization in which Clare experienced the internalization of a negative, or non-existent, self. Subsequently, Clare felt devalued, emasculated, and criminalized – possibly leading to worsening symptoms.

Clare’s poetry clearly serves as a response to this psychologically tormenting, socially alienating process, as when Clare, invoking Byron, writes in the stanzas of “Child Harold”:

My Mind Is Dark & Fathomless & Wears
The Hues of Hopeless Agony & Hell...

Or in “Ballad – Fragment”:

Plain Honesty Still Is The Truth Of My Song
And I’ll Still Stick For Right to Be Out Of The Wrong[.]⁵⁶

⁵⁶ “Child Harold” I: 40-88; 1011-12. “Ballad – Fragment” I: 39; 11-12.

The intense suffering, the concern for “plain” or natural truth (as opposed to a scientifically manufactured truth), and the desolation of identity all point toward the obfuscation and circumscription of the self that Clare felt as a function of his having been *labeled*. Similarly, both Clare’s correspondence and prose during the asylum years show a frequent association made between his confinement in the asylum and the imprisonment meted out to criminals. This association is consistent with our previous examination of contemporary stereotypes of the mentally ill as deviant, dangerous transgressors. The evidence of an internalized negative conception of the self as a result of stigmatization is further demonstrated in Clare’s prose when he attempts to dissuade others from visiting, as though *deserving* his isolation.

Clare’s opposition to what are ultimately products of the Enlightenment place him within the Romantic artistic, literary, and intellectual movement that validated strong emotion as an authentic source of aesthetic experience. As we have seen, Clare’s poetry is rife with affect. His feelings of desolation, agony, and displacement approach that of the sublime – an intense affective and aesthetic response to popular and professional discourses of mental illness. Examining these discourses in relation to their prompted artistic responses, in Clare’s poetry for example, allow us to uncover modes of *resistance* to the stigmatizing effects of these discourses, which often codify and reify negative associations. Lastly, while Clare’s therapeutic labeling regime left long-term marks, or *stigmata*, that codified his ostracism and isolation, it may prove some consolation to Clare that in moving toward an understanding of their underlying cultural influences, one also moves closer to a reversal of the experience that he wrote so darkly of, in what was perhaps the last addition made to “Child Harold” before leaving the asylum:

My soul is apathy – a ruin vast
Time cannot clear the ruined mass away
My life is hell – the hopeless die is cast
And manhoods prime is premature decay...⁵⁷

⁵⁷ “Child Harold” I: 48; 221-4.

Conclusion: From Interdisciplinary Understandings to Interdisciplinary Remedies

This thesis began by seeking a greater awareness of the underlying mechanisms of stigmatization and the critical intersections between cultural and medical understandings of mental illness. In my analysis that sought to trace developments over the course of the Enlightenment and beyond, I hoped to demonstrate how social constructs of mental illness inform medical practices, which then in turn inform cultural understandings of mental illness. As we begin to comprehend the complex relationship between medicine and culture, the grander endeavor will be to move from interdisciplinary understandings of stigma to interdisciplinary approaches to mitigating its effects. What problems, for example, might interdisciplinary understandings of mental illness stigmatization help us solve? To answer this, it is important to more explicitly relate my cultural analyses of Hogarth's engravings, popular discourses in periodicals, and Clare's poetry to the more tangible, health-related consequences of stigmatization in terms of Primary and Secondary Labeling Theories, Expectancy Confirmation Process, and Automatic Stereotype Activation in order to move toward tangible solutions.

For example, returning to the notion of Bedlam-as-theater explored in Section I, one sees strong cultural evidence in support of such negative features explained by Labeling Theory. As I mentioned earlier, the concept of Labeling Theory explains that when professional authorities assign labels to behaviors in order to begin to control or treat them, the individuals receiving these labels assume the associated attributes and role identities consistent with the label. As a result, this process fundamentally alters identity. The labeled individual is now expected to *perform* in accordance with his new role and, indeed, these expectations initiate a chain of thoughts and behaviors that lead to a

changed self-image while reinforcing the continuous appearance of deviance. (Hinshaw 39-40). The label of a mental disorder, combined with the experience of mental hospitalization, can foster stigmatization on the part of perceivers as well as the patient, in terms of an internalization of shared negative beliefs about the social devaluation of mental illness (Hinshaw and Stier 374). As we have seen, Clare's acceptance of his isolation in his letters to his family seen in Section II, in addition to the alternate identities he assumed while confined in the asylum, support the idea that the expectations associated with his role as a mental health patient and his diagnostic labels, perhaps gave rise to a performativity that was associated with an internalized, negative sense of self.

Expectancy Confirmation Process is another facet of stigmatization in which the stigmatized may conform to a role consistent with cultural stereotypes and prejudices. In this case, "perceivers' negative stereotypes and expectations can lead them to behave toward stigmatized targets in ways that directly affect the targets' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The targets' behavior may then confirm the initial, erroneous expectation and even lead to expectancy-consistent changes in the targets' self-perceptions" (Major and O'Brien 398). Similarly, Automatic Stereotype Activation-Behavior is yet another way recognized by current mental health experts in how dominant cultural stereotypes about marginalized groups, including the mentally ill, can affect behavior. Even in the absence of others, mere knowledge of cultural stereotypes (like those exhibited in Hogarth's work) may affect behavior because of associative linkages in memory between stereotypes and the behaviors they imply, "activation of stereotypes [through ideomotor processes] can automatically lead to behavior that assimilates to the stereotype (Ibid. 398). Whatever the mechanism, Clare's experiences within the asylum suggest that his

internalized, negative self-image arose as part of his institutionalization that originated in society's structure of stigmatizing associations concerning madness. This may result in real consequences for institutionalized individuals who accept their role and assimilate to stereotypes: "Knowledge of cultural stereotypes may affect behavior... Because of associative linkages in memory between stereotypes and the behaviors they imply, activation of stereotypes can automatically lead to behavior that assimilates to the stereotype." (Ibid. 394).

These several palpable mental health risks posed by labeling relate to the central issue raised in the introduction, namely, psychiatry's propensity to impose upon the subject against its will. Gottstein told us that the problem with psychiatric diagnostic practices is that "everything you do or say can be labeled as a psychiatric symptom... the system basically forces things on [people] that they don't want." Like Clare, one's agency over self-definition is wrested from him or her as a result. The subjective sense of self is effectually ploughed, fenced, and partitioned. Seeking interdisciplinary remedies, our approach at an interdisciplinary understanding considers supplementing the efforts of institutions like the CDC and WHO, which seek to reduce the effects of stigmatization by undertaking such measures as educating the public about mental health. But, what about the individual subject or patient? What is his or her recourse? Turning to Clare's example, we may observe a therapeutic method involving a cultivation of creative expression through language, at the site of Kristeva's semiotic chora, in order for the patient to re-establish autonomy over the sense of self and environment. More importantly, however, is finding a method that allows for the subject to reassert control over their own production of *significance*, whether that production be through words or otherwise.

Allowing patients some forum in which to assign personal significance to their ailments so that they may negotiate subjective ways of coping, resisting, and healing, should therefore be critical in mitigating the effects of labeling and stigmatization. For while John Clare's asylum poetry often struck a somber note, we may find his unique experience at the crucial juncture between culture and medicine an illuminating one, as it points the way toward producing significance in one's experience with illness through subjectivity, resistance, and healing.

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