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John Clare: the Poet and the Place, by PETER MOYSE, with a Foreword by Ronald Blythe, second edition. Helpston: published by Peter Moyses. 1999. 120 pp. £10 softbound.

John Clare: Selected Poems, edited with an Introduction and Notes by GEOFFREY SUMMERFIELD (London: Penguin Books, 2000), Penguin Classics series, second edition with title and first line indexes, pp. 400, £8.99 softbound.

There are two ways of looking at 'Clare Country'. One is that it is a rather unremarkable landscape, which only the genius of Clare could transform into something out of the ordinary. John Taylor was an early advocate of this opinion, seeing nothing of interest in the waters at Lolham Brigs. The other, strongly contrasting view is that if Clare could see something special, then so can we: perhaps we could even capture, or at least emulate Clare's vision of the landscape ourselves, if we could only look hard enough and long enough. It was the pursuit of this aim, or something very like it, that made Peter Moyses bring his cameras and himself to Clare country a number of years ago.

The results, presented in *John Clare: The Poet and the Place*, are remarkable, not only because these monochrome photographs provide a beautiful and lasting record of the changing landscape that Clare once inhabited, but because Peter Moyses has a powerful kinship with Clare's ways of looking at things. Three areas come immediately to mind: trees, skies, and the fine details of the natural world. Peter Moyses's trees, like Clare's, are beloved havens for nesting birds, offerers of shelter, markers of the horizon or the pathway. They offer the eye a continuously changing variety of textures and forms. His skylscapes and cloudscapes, like Clare's, are 'circling' and sometimes threatening. The desolate scene of 'Stormclouds near Helpston' (p. 46), with its stump of an old fence dominating the foreground, is especially effective. The fine details of the natural world include images of be-dewed and be-frosted spiders's webs, delicate ferns and grass plants, and a wonderful, tiny 'Loiterer on the Barley's Beard'. Each photograph is placed opposite a suitable Clare poem or extract. This corrected second edition of the book is finely produced, and very welcome indeed.

Equally welcome is the second edition of the late Geoffrey Summerfield's selection of Clare, which has been moved from the Penguin Poetry Library to the Penguin Classics series. Summerfield was one of the most interesting modern Clare critics, a key figure, who initiated the archival work that led to the major modern

editions of Clare, and spent a lifetime thinking about the poet. This edition is the final result of that thought. The general and themed section introductions are subtle and effective, and while there are other selections which offer more texts, none offers such an illuminating or sympathetic pathway through Clare's work. It fully deserves its new status as a 'Classic'.

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