

I Love To See The Summer Beaming Forth

By

John Clare

I love to see the summer beaming forth
And white wool sack clouds sailing to the north
I love to see the wild flowers come again
And mare blobs stain with gold the meadow drain
And water lilies whiten on the floods
Where reed clumps rustle like a wind shook wood
Where from her hiding place the Moor Hen pushes
And seeks her flag nest floating in bull rushes
I like the willow leaning half way o'er
The clear deep lake to stand upon its shore
I love the hay grass when the flower head swings
To summer winds and insects happy wings
That sport about the meadow the bright day
And see bright beetles in the clear lake play

Teacher Resource -

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Wool Sack Clouds - Big cumulus clouds with curved edges; Clare is saying the clouds look like huge bales of wool

Mare Blobs - A colloquial term for the bright yellow marsh marigold, also known as kingcups

Flag Nest - A nest made of reeds or rushes

About The Poem

The poem is delightfully naïve - John Clare writes "I love..." as any primary school child might say, and lists the things that he loves to see. The poem is more or less a **list** of images - things that a country person would see. You can still see most of them today.

The view is very much a close-up look at nature. We may not find this in poetry so much as we once did - but it has a lot in common with natural history broadcasts for TV, especially those where hidden cameras can record the things which the countryman used to have to look for patiently.

Clare describes the scene in a pond or small lake, where reeds grow and waterfowl nest. Where Gerard Manley Hopkins' **Inversnaid** shows water in a violent and energetic form, this poem shows still water, teeming with life. It is wild, in the sense that all sorts of animals and plants live there, but this means that it can support human life, too. Clare would see the waterfowl as food, the rushes as building material and the hay grass as food to support animal husbandry.

Hopkins goes to the country, both in Wales and Scotland, as a very observant tourist - full of wonder at what he sees. Clare lives in the country and knows it in the way a gardener or natural historian does - and he knows where to look to see the things he loves.

The Poem In Detail

The first line of the poem is very simple and unremarkable - almost a general introduction, before the details appear. The first of these is the likening of the cloud to the wool sack - Clare is thinking of the untreated wool that fills the sacks in a wool market. The third line is also rather vague, but then we get examples. These are the golden marsh marigolds, the white water lilies and the clumps of reed. Clare notes that they "rustle like a wind shook wood" - this reminds us that the reeds are large and sturdy plants, growing as high as some trees. ("Wind shook" may also reveal Clare's lack of education - he uses the non-standard grammar of "shook", where we would expect the past participle "shaken".)

Clare may disregard standard verb forms but he does know that moorhens make floating nests out of flag irises (a floating nest gives less opportunity to predators, like rats or foxes, that might eat the eggs or the chicks). He enjoys the sight of the willow that overhangs the lake - perhaps the species we call weeping willow. And, looking at the long grass that will be cut for hay, he notices the insects that fly around it - imagining that they are happy. This leads him to think of the insects that "play" in the lake.

The poem shows a childlike sense of innocent pleasure in very simple natural things. Perhaps in the modern world they are too simple for us - after a few minutes we find them boring.

Helpful Explanations

Mare blobs are flowers. The common name is marsh marigold - older dialect names are mare blebs and water blobs. (**Mare** here is presumably the Latin word for water as in **marine** or **Weston-super-Mare**).

The **drain** is not a hole in the ground covered with an iron grating. It is a large drainage ditch or dyke, which would carry water away from the fields for most of the year, perhaps drying out in late summer, but suitable for marsh plants like the marigolds.

The moorhen's **flag nest** is a floating nest, built out of the stems of the yellow flag iris - a plant that commonly grows around the edges of ponds.

Hay grass is allowed to grow to its full height, before it is cut, dried and stored to provide food for animals in winter when they cannot graze. (Not to be confused with straw, the thicker stems of cereal plants. Straw is not suitable for food, and is used to provide bedding for animals and for people in the past)



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