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# CRITICAL NOTES ON THE POEM THE CAT RUNS RACES WITH HER TAIL BY JOHN CLARE

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“**The Cat runs Races with her Tail**” is actually part of a larger poem titled “**Signs of Winter**” which it immediately follows in the original publication where Clare did not make any separation.

Consequently, however, the lines beginning “**The Cat runs Races with her Tail**” came to be seen as an individual poem, a view that was enhanced because it was printed independently in anthologies.

Reading it as a separate and independent poem does not rob it of its beauty but it necessary to see the entire poem titled “**Signs of Winter**” in terms of Clare's original composition.

What **Clare** is presenting in his evocation of the winter season can be seen in these lines where he refers to the closing year' and the shortening of the day. To natural cycle and the routine of life come to be affected by such a shift in seasons.

There is a shift in orientation in the lines beginning with the cat as the focus shifts to a world of human and animal activity, including those that reflect the movement of tame animals.

The cat is the first in the series, whose movement shows an atmosphere of peace and ease, echoed by the dog and the swine, the crow, the owl, and the duck each responding in their own ways to what they see around them.

There is an undercurrent of haste in these lines, beginning with the word 'run' in the first line and culminating in the word 'hurry' in the last.

The movement of the ducks, for instance, suggest the semblance of routine activity, but even this is circumscribed by a process that seems to operate to accommodate the sudden change brought about by the sudden rain. The maids, who hurry to gather the dry clothes in order to avoid them getting wet, offer another perspective to the whole scene: they are participants in a scheme of things where the worlds of man and nature come together in one common plane.

This is a world where the regulated and the natural elements are situated beside

one another and both animals and human beings must respond with equal alertness to what goes around them.

If seen as part of the larger "**Signs of Winter**" sequence, these lines that begin with the cat's run are connected to the earlier ones by the image of the mossy barn' which keeps the consistency of the scene intact.

"**The Cat runs Races with her Tail**" has a series of images that deal with the experience and condition of movement (the words dealing with pace are repeated and emphasized throughout these lines: 'haste,' 'hasty,' 'hastily,' 'hurry'), and irrespective of whether it is natural, or brought about by 'nature' (as in the hurried run of the maids) this trope is crucial to what the poem thematically deals with. There is a sense of being at ease in the environment in which the animals find themselves, a world where the pace is set not by the demands of the busy life that we associate with urban living, but by the circumstances of nature.