

John Clare. 1793–1864

Written in a Thunderstorm, 15 July 1841

THE heavens are wrath; the thunder's rattling peal
Rolls like a vast volcano in the sky;
Yet nothing starts the apathy I feel,
Nor chills with fear eternal destiny.
My soul is apathy, a ruin vast;
Time cannot clear the ruined mass away;
My life is hell, the hopeless die is cast,
And manhood's prime is premature decay.
Roll on, ye wrath of thunders, peal on peal,
Till worlds are ruins, and myself alone;
Melt heart and soul, cased in obdurate steel,
Till I can feel that nature is my throne.
I live in love, sun of undying light,
And fathom my own heart for ways of good;
In its pure atmosphere, day without night
Smiles on the plains, the forest, and the flood.
Smile on, ye elements of earth and sky,
Or frown in thunders as ye frown on me;
Bid earth and its delusions pass away,
But leave the mind, as its creator, free.

The Badger

WHEN midnight comes a host of dogs and men
Go out and track the badger to his den,
And put a sack within the hole and lie
Till the old grunting badger passes by.
He comes and hears - they let the strongest loose.
The old fox hears the noise and drops the goose.
The poacher shoots and hurries from the cry,
And the old hare half wounded buzzes by.
They get a forkéd stick to bear him down
And clap the dogs and take him to the town,
And bait him all the day with many dogs,
And laugh and shout and fright the scampering hogs.
He runs along and bites at all he meets:
They shout and hollo down the noisy streets.
He turns about to face the loud uproar
And drives the rebels to their very door.
The frequent stone is hurled wher'er they go;
When badgers fight, then everyone's a foe.
The dogs are clapped and urged to join the fray;
The badger turns and drives them all away.
Though scarcely half as big, demure and small,
He fights with dogs for hours and beats them all.
The heavy mastiff, savage in the fray,
Lies down and licks his feet and turns away.
The bulldog knows his match and waxes cold
The badger grins and never leaves his hold.
He drives the crowd and follows at their heels

And bites them through - the drunkard swears and reels.
The frightened women take the boys away,
The blackguard laughs and hurries on the fray.
He tries to reach the woods, an awkward race,
But sticks and cudgels quickly stop the chase.
He turns again and drives the noisy crowd
And beats the many dogs in noises loud.
He drives away and beats them every one,
And then they loose them all and set them on.
He falls as dead and kicked by boys and men,
Then starts and grins and drives the crowd again;
Till kicked and torn and beaten out he lies
And leaves his hold and cackles, groans and dies.

John Clare

Written in Northampton County Asylum

I AM! yet what I am who cares, or knows?
My friends forsake me like a memory lost.
I am the self-consumer of my woes;
They rise and vanish, an oblivious host,
Shadows of life, whose very soul is lost. 5
And yet I am—I live—though I am toss'd

Into the nothingness of scorn and noise,
Into the living sea of waking dream,
Where there is neither sense of life, nor joys,
But the huge shipwreck of my own esteem 10
And all that 's dear. Even those I loved the best
Are strange—nay, they are stranger than the rest.

I long for scenes where man has never trod—
For scenes where woman never smiled or wept—
There to abide with my Creator, God, 15
And sleep as I in childhood sweetly slept,
Full of high thoughts, unborn. So let me lie,—
The grass below; above, the vaulted sky.