

Introduction

My sister Katie gave me a book of Clare's poetry for Christmas 2015, and I knew immediately that I would set some of them, but not for what combination. Later that year I was wrestling with writing a string quartet and I wasn't pleased with the results, but I was enjoying writing for the medium. So I opened the Clare book at random, and before I knew it a choral setting of *Summer Moods* had begun to compose itself. So it just seemed natural to score it for string quartet.

When I'd finished computerizing that I turned the page in the anthology and *A Vision* hummed itself to me. I took it to bed and finished composing it the following day. I was then busy with other projects for a few days, but when I reopened the book for a third song *The Graves of Infants* hit my eye and, almost involuntarily, I composed what I consider one of my most beautiful pieces in a single day.

John Clare 1793-1864, was the son of a casual labourer in Helpstone, Northamptonshire. His twin sister died a few weeks after their birth. (The loss of a twin may have preyed on his mind, for he wrote several poems on the subject as well as *The Graves of Infants* – which was to be sadly prophetic of the death of his own grand-daughter shortly afterwards.) Clare had been brought up in abject poverty, attending school only intermittently, and his achievement of learning to read and write and compose poetry was therefore all the greater. The more so as Clare had to support his entire family by labouring as a farm worker from a young age. Indeed he first sought publication of his poems in an attempt to raise money to stave off his parents' eviction.

First appearing in print in 1822, Clare initially sold well and he enjoyed a vogue as the Labourer Poet; but his attempts to adopt a middle-class literary persona coupled with the decline in sales of subsequent volumes led him to become increasingly disoriented and unstable. In 1837 he was committed to Epping Asylum. Four years later he escaped and walked home to Helpstone, apparently seeking his lost first love Mary Joyce. He was then committed to Northampton asylum and for the next few years wrote incessantly – the 800 poems of this period only surviving in manuscript copies made by one of the warders. *A Vision* was written in August 1844 by which point Clare believed Queen Victoria was his daughter. Eventually he stopped writing caught, as Adam Foulds has written, 'between longing for a lost childhood and the grave.'

Summer Moods

I love at eventide to walk alone
 Down narrow lanes o'erhung with dewy thorn
 Where, from the long grass underneath, the snail
 Jet black creeps out and sprouts his timid horn.
 I love to muse o'er meadows newly mown
 Where withering grass perfume's the sultry air,
 Where bees search round with sad and weary drone
 In vain for flowers that bloomed but newly there,
 While in the juicy corn the hidden quail
 cries "wet my foot", and hid as though unborn
 the fairylike and seldom-seen landrail
 Utters "craik craik" like voices underground,
 Right glad to meet the evening's dewy veil
 And see the light fade into glooms around.

The Graves of Infants

Infants' graves are steps of angels where
Earth's brightest gems of innocents repose;
God is their parent, they need no tear,
He takes them to his bosom from earth's woes,
A bud in their lifetime and the flower their close.
Their spirits are an iris of the skies,
Needing no prayers – a sunset's happy close.
Gone are the bright rays of their soft blue eyes;
Dews on flowers mourn them, and the gale that sighs.

Their lives were nothing but sunny shower,
Melting on flowers as tears melt from the eye;
Their death where dewdrops on heavens amaranthine bower,
Twas told on flowers are summer gales went by.
They bowed and trembled yet they left no sigh
And the sun smile to show their end was well.
Infants at nought to weep for ere they die.
All prayers are needless – beads they need not tell;
White flowers their mourners are, nature their passing bell.

Written 6/1844

A Vision

I lost the love of heaven above,
I spurned the last of birth below,
I felt the sweets of fancied love
And hell itself my only foe.

I lost earth's joys but felt the glow
Of heaven's flame abound in me
Till loveliness and I didn't grow
The bard of immortality.

I loved but woman fell away
I hid me from her faded fame,
I snatched the sun's eternal ray
And wrote till was but a name.

In every language upon the earth,
On every shore, o'er every sea,
I gave my name immortal birth
And kept my spirit with the free.

Written 8/1844

Summer Moods

John Clare

Michael Maxwell Steer

28/6/16

I ♩ = 40 Contrasted moods of bluster and warm stillness

S I long at ev-en-tide to walk a-lone

A

T

B

VI *mf* *f* *tf* *p* *sim* *p* *dolce* *quasi f*

V2 *light trem* *mp* *mfp* *mfp* *p*

Va *light trem* *mp* *mfp* *mfp* *p*

Vc *mp* *quasi f* *pizz* *dolce*

4

S down narr- owlanes o'er- hung with dew- y thorn

A down narr- owlanes o'er- hung with dew- y thorn

T

B

VI *mp* *pp*

V2 *f* *mf*

Va *f* *mfz* light trem

Vc *arco* *mp* *pizz* *Qf* *arco* *mf*

7

S *poco più f* where, from the long grass und- er- neath

A where, from the long grass und- er- neath

T where, from the long grass und- er- neath

B

VI *Qf* *p* *Qf*

V2 *quasi f* *mf*

Va *f* *mp*

Vc *pizz* *Qf* *arco*

10 < ... trattenuto ... >

S snail jet black creeps out and sprouts his tim- id horn.

A snail jet black creeps out and sprouts his tim- id horn.

T snail jet black creeps out and sprouts his tim- id horn.

B

V_I < ... trattenuto ... >

V₂ *mp*

V_a *mp*

V_c *ff*

12

S

A

T I love to muse o'er mead-ows new- ly mown where

B

V_I *forte plus* *sp*

V₂ *sp*

V_a *sp*

V_c *sp*

15

S

A

T

B

V_I

V₂

V_a

V_c

with' ring grass- es per- fume the sul- try air,

with' ring grass- es per- fume the sul- try air,

mp

mp

mp cr

pizz

6

3

17

S

A

T

B

V_I

V₂

V_a

V_c

bees search round with sad & wear- y drone

bees search round with sad & wear- y drone

p legg

p legg

come prima

mf

mf

mf

pizz

3

3

3

in

24 25

S 'wet my foot' and as thoughts un- born the fair- y-

A 'wet my foot' and as thoughts un- born the fair- y-

T 'wet my foot' and as thoughts un- born the fair- y-

B 'wet my foot' and as thoughts un- born the fair- y-

VI

V2

Va

Vc

26

S like & sel- dom seen land- *sub mf*

A like & sel- dom seen land- *sub mf* rail utt- ers her 'craik craik'

T like & sel- dom seen land- *sub mf* rail utt- ers her 'craik craik'

B like & sel- dom seen land- *sub mf*

VI

V2

Va

Vc *ff*

28

S rail un- der- ground.

A 'craik' 'craik' like voi- ces un- der- ground.

T 'craik' 'craik' like voi- ces un- der- ground.

B rail un- der- ground.

V_I 8va

V₂

V_a

V_c

31

S

A

T

B

V_I mp mfzpp mfzpp

V₂ mp mfzpp mfzpp

V_a

V_c mp

34

S
A
T
B

Right
Right
Right
Right

V_I
V₂
Va
Vc

37

S
A
T
B

< ... trattenuto ... >

glad to meet the eve- ning's dew- y veil
glad to meet the eve- ning's dew- y veil
glad to meet the eve- ning's dew- y veil
glad to meet the eve- ning's dew- y veil

V_I
V₂
Va
Vc

pp *quasi f*
pp *quasi f*
pp *quasi f*
pizz quasi f *arco mp*

40

S and see the light fade in- to the

A and see the light fade in- to the

T and see the light fade

B and see the light fade in- to the

V_I *pp*

V₂ *pp*

V_a *pp*

V_c *pizz* *Qf*

42

S glooms a- round.

A glooms a- round.

T glooms a- round.

B glooms a- round.

V_I

V₂ *mp*

V_a *mp*

V_c *arco*

The Graves of Infants

John Clare

Michael Maxwell Steer

19/7/16

I ♩ = 90 *With a tender lilt*

S *mp* In- fants' graves are the steps of

A *mp* In- fants' graves are the steps of

T *mp* In- fants' graves are the steps of

B *mp* In- fants' graves are the steps of

V_I *p* *sp*

V₂ *p*

V_a *p*

V_c *p*

7

S ang- els where earth's bright- est gems of inn- o-

A ang- els where earth's bright- est gems of inn- o-

T ang- els where earth's bright- est gems of inn- o-

B ang- els where earth's bright- est gems of inn- o-

VI

V2

Va

Vc

13

S cence re- pose;

A cence re- pose;

T cence re- pose;

B cence re- pose;

VI

V2

Va

Vc

19

S *mf* God is their par- ent, *sp* they need no tear, *cr* He

A *mf* God is their par- ent, *sp* they need no tear, *cr* He

T *mf* God is their par- ent, *sp* they need no tear, *cr* He

B *mf* God is their par- ent, *sp* they need no tear, *cr* - He

V1 *mf* *sp* *cr*

V2 *mf* *sp* *cr*

Va *mf* *sp* *cr*

Vc *mf* *sp* *cr*

25 < ... trattenuto ... >

S takes them to his bos- om from earth's woes, *mp*

A takes them to his bos- om from earth's woes, *mp*

T takes them to his bos- om earth. A bud their life-

B takes them to his bos- om earth. A bud their life-

< ... trattenuto ... > *quasi f* *8va*-----

V1 *quasi f*

V2 *quasi f*

Va *quasi f*

Vc *p*

31

S their close. Their spi-rits

A their close.

T time and a flower their close. Their spi-rits

B time and a flower their close.

V_I *8va* *quasi s. vib*

V₂ *quasi s. vib*

V_a *quasi s. vib*

V_c

37

S are an ir- is of the skies, need- ing no prayers - *mfp*

A need- ing no prayers - *mfp*

T are an ir- is of the skies, need- ing no prayers - *mfp*

B

V_I *vib normale* *mf*

V₂ *vib normale* *mfp*

V_a *vib normale* *mfp*

V_c *mfp*

43

S need- ing no prayers - a sun- set's happ- y close.

A need- ing no prayers -

T need- ing no prayers -

B

VI

V2

Va

Vc

mf

mf

mf

p

p

50

S *Quasi f* *dim* *Quasi f* *dim*
bright rays blue eyes;

A *Quasi f* *dim* *Quasi f* *dim*
are the bright rays their soft blue eyes;

T *Quasi f* *dim* *Quasi f* *dim*
Gone are of their

B *mf* *mf*
Gone rays of eyes;

VI *Dolciss* *8va*

V2

Va

Vc

56

S *Quasi f* Dews on flowers mourn them, *mf* and

A *Quasi f dim* on flowers *Quasi f* and the

T *Quasi f dim* Dews on flowers

B *mf* Dews

V_I

V₂

Va

Vc

63

S *Smorz* sighs.

A *dim* gale sighs.

T *Quasi f dim* gale sighs.

B *Quasi f dim* and the gale that sighs.

V_I *Smorz* *ppp*

V₂

Va

Vc *Quasi f* *mfp* *mfp*

70 **A Tempo**

mp

S Their lives were noth- ing but a sunn- y shower,

A Their lives were noth- ing but a sunn- y shower,

T Their lives were noth- ing but a sunn- y shower,

B Their lives were noth- ing but a sunn- y shower,

8va-----

A Tempo

V1

V2 *molto cr*

Va *molto cr*

Vc *molto cr*

76

S Melt- ing on flowers as tears melt from the eye:

A Melt- ing on flowers as tears melt from the eye:

T Melt- ing on flowers as tears melt from the eye:

B Melt- ing on flowers as tears melt from the eye:

8va-----

V1

V2 *sub p*

Va *sub p*

Vc *sub p*

83

S *mf* Their death were dew- drops *sp* on heav- en's ar- a- man- thine *cr*

A *mf* Their death were dew- drops *sp* on heav- en's ar- a- man- thine *cr*

T *mf* Their death were dew- drops *sp* on heav- en's ar- a- man- thine *cr*

B *mf* Their death were dew- drops *sp* on heav- en's ar- a- man- thine *cr*

V1 *mf* *sp* *cr*

V2 *mf* *sp* *cr*

Va *mf* *sp* *cr*

Vc *mf* *sp* *cr*

89 < ... trattenuto ... >

S bow- ers 'twas told on flowers as summ- er gales

A bow- ers bowers 'twas told on flow- ers as summ- er gales

T bow- ers bow- ers 'twas told on flow- ers as summ- er gales

B bow- ers 'twas told on flowers as summ- er gales

V1 < ... trattenuto ... >

V2 < ... trattenuto ... >

Va

Vc

95

S
went by.

A
went by.

T
went by. *ad lib* They bowed and trem- bled yet they

B
went by.

V1
sord *ppp trem*

V2
sord *ppp trem*

Va
sord *ppp trem*

Vc
sord *ppp trem*

102

S

A

T
left no sigh

B

V1
progressively slow trem to 0

V2
progressively slow trem to 0

Va
progressively slow trem to 0

Vc
espr

109

S *pp* the sun smiled to show their end was well.

A *pp* the sun smiled to show their end was well.

T *pp* sun smile end well.

B *pp* sun smile

V_I *quasi s. vib* *mfzpp*

V₂ *quasi s. vib* *mfzpp*

V_a *quasi s. vib* *mfzpp*

V_c *quasi s. vib* *mfzpp*

114

S **< Trattenuto >** In- fants have nought to weep for ere they die.

A In- fants have nought to weep for ere they die.

T In- fants have nought to weep for ere they die.

B **< Trattenuto >** In- fants weep ere they die.

V_I **< Trattenuto >** *mfzp*

V₂ **< Trattenuto >** *mfzp*

V_a **< Trattenuto >** *mfzp*

V_c **< Trattenuto >** *mfzp*

118 **Più energico** **Allarg**

S Prayers are need- less - beads they need not tell;

A Prayers are need- less - beads they need not tell;

T Prayers are need- less - beads they need not tell;

B Prayers are need- less - tell;

VI **Allarg**

V2 **Allarg**

Va **Allarg**

Vc **Allarg**

Espansivo 124 **Espansivo**

S *ff* *dim sempre* white flowers their mourn- ers are,

A *ff* *dim sempre* white flowers their mourn- ers are,

T *ff* *dim sempre* white flowers their mourn- ers are,

B *ff* *dim sempre* white flowers their mourn- ers are,

VI *dim sempre* *fff>f* *ff>f* *ff>f* *f>mf* *f>mf*

V2 *dim sempre* *fff>f* *ff>f* *ff>f* *f>mf* *f>mf*

Va *ff*

Vc *ff*

130

quasi f *mf*

S nat- ure their pass- ing bell.

A *quasi f* *mf* nat- ure their pass- ing bell.

T *quasi f* *mf* nat- ure their pass- ing bell.

B *mf* pass- ing bell.

V_I *quasi f* *mf* *mp*

V₂ *quasi f* *mf* *mp*

Va *f* *mf*

Vc *f* *mf*

136

S

A

T

B

Molto rit

V_I *p* *pp* *ppp* *pppp*

V₂ *p* *pp* *ppp* *pppp*

Va

Vc

A Vision

John Clare

Michael Maxwell Steer

14/7/2016

I $\text{♩} = 78$ Exuberantly

S p Ah-hah, ha- ha. Ha-hah, ha- ha. Ah-hah, ha- ha. Ha-hah, hah.

A f I lost the love of hea- ven, of hea- ven a- bove,

T *ostia: I doubles A at the octave & then in unison with B*

B f **I**

$\text{♩} = 78$ Exuberantly

V1 f

V2 mf

Va f

Vc mf

4

S *mf* Ah- hah, ha- ha. Ha- hah, ha- ha. Ah- hah, ha- ha Hah. *f* I

A Ah- hah, ha- ha Hah.

T *f* I felt the sweets of fan- cied love

B spurned the love of earth be- low, *f* I

VI *mp* *mf cresc*

V2 *mp*

Va *ff* *mf*

Vc

7

S felt the sweets of fan- cied love

A I felt the sweets of fan- cied love

T I felt the sweets of fan- cied fan- cied love and hell it-

B felt the sweets of fan- cied love and hell it-

VI *p*

V2 *mf* *p*

Va *mf* *f* *p*

Vc *f*

IO

S

A

T

B

V_I

V₂

Va

Vc

self my on- ly foe. I lost earth's

self my on- ly foe. I lost earth's joys

f

mf cresc

sp

sp

sp

sp

13

S

A

T

B

V_I

V₂

Va

Vc

lost earth's joys but felt felt the

I lost earth's joys but felt the

joys but felt the

but felt the glow

mf cresc molto

mf cresc

mf

cresc

cresc

qf

f

15
8

15
8

15
8

15
8

15
8

15
8

15
8

15

S glow of heav- en's flame a-

A glow of heav- en's flame a-

T glow of heav- en's flame a-

B of heav- en's flame a-

VI *mf cresc molto* tr tr tr tr tr

V2 *sub mf cresc molto* tr tr tr tr tr

Va tr tr

Vc *ff*

17 *f cresc molto*

S bound in me till love- li- ness and

A bound in me till love- li- ness and

T bound in me till love- li- ness and

B bound in me till love- li- ness and

VI

V2

Va

Vc

20

S I did grow the bard bard of im- mor- tal- i-

A I did grow the bard bard of im- mor- tal- i-

T I did grow the bard bard of im- mor- tal- i-

B I did grow the bard bard of im- mor- tal- i-

VI *molto dim*

V2 *molto dim* *pp*

Va *molto dim*

Vc *molto dim* *pp*

23

S ty. I loved but wom- en

A ty. I loved but wom- en

T ty. *pp* Ah- hah, ha- ha. Ha- hah, ha- ha.

B ty.

VI *mf*

V2 *mf*

Va *mf*

Vc *mf*

26

S fell a- way

A fell a- way

T Ah- hah, ha- ha Hah. I hid me from her fad- ed fame,

B I hid me from her fad- ed fame,

VI

V2

Va

Vc

29

S I snatched the sun's e- tern- nal ray I

A I snatched the sun's e- tern- nal ray I

T I snatched the sun's e- tern- nal ray I

B I snatched the sun's e- tern- nal ray I

VI *ff* *sub p legg*

V2

Va

Vc *sub p legg*

32

S wrote till earth was but a name.

A wrote till earth was but a name.

T wrote till earth but name.

B wrote & wrote & wrote & wrote till earth was but a name.

V_I *sub p molto cr*

V₂ *sub p molto cr*

V_a *sub p molto cr*

V_c *sub mf molto cr*

34

S

A

T

B

V_I

V₂

V_a

V_c

36

S *p* Ah-hah, ha- ha. Ha-hah, ha- ha. Ah-hah, ha- ha. Ha-hah, hah.

A on

T *f* In ev' ry lang- uage up- on the earth, on

B *f* In ev' ry lang- uage up- on the earth, on

V_I *Qf*

V₂ *mf*

V_a *mf*

V_c *mf*

39

S *mf* Ah- hah, ha- ha. Ha- hah, ha- ha. Ah- hah, ha- ha Hah. *f cresc* I

A ev- er- y shore, o'er ev- er- y sea, *f cresc* I

T ev- er- y shore, o'er ev- er- y sea, *f cresc* I

B ev- er- y shore, o'er ev- er- y sea, *f cresc* I

V_I

V₂ *mp*

V_a

V_c

41

S gave my name im- mort- al birth

A gave my name im- mort- al birth

T gave my name im- mort- al birth

B gave my name im- mort- al birth

V_I

V₂

V_a

V_c

44

S and kept, kept my spir- it

A and kept, kept my spir- it

T and kept, kept my spir- it

B and kept, kept my spir- it

V_I

V₂

V_a

V_c

48 **Rit molto**

S with the free. and

A with the free. and

T with the free. and

B with the free. and

VI

V2

Va

Vc

52

S kept my spir- it with the free.

A kept my spir- it with the free.

T kept my spir- it with the free.

B kept my spir- it with the free.

VI

V2

Va

Vc

pizz

pizz

pizz

pizz

Choral Compositions

1

Title	Voices	Date	Lyrics	Length : Description
Alleluia	SsAaTB	1976(R)96	Sue Porteous	Anthem
Angelus ad virginem	SsATtBb(+Org)	2000	trad	3' Christmas anthem
Beguine Motets	SsAaTtBb	2003	Hadewijch von Brabant /Mechtild von Magdeburg	10' acappella concert piece
<i>/Beatrijs von Nazareth 13th C poems expressing feminist spirituality</i>				
By the Waters of Babylon	SSAA	2009	Psalms (BCP)	3½' acappella anthem
Can it be true?	SATB+Pno	2014	Susan Hill	4½' choral carol
Chakra Music for Singers		1993		flexible improvisation map for ensemble
The Death of Absalom	SAaTtB+Org	1981(R)96	KJV	6½' Anthem
Dream Prayer	SsAaTtBb	1991	MMS	4' acappella anthem
Dylan Thomas Poems	SSAATTBB	1969/83	DylanThomas	13' Concert piece
<i>There was a Saviour :: Why East Wind Chills :: A stranger has come</i>				
Easter Dawn – Canticle 1	SsAaTtBb+Pno	2004	MMS	23' Motet
Easter Hymn	Unis+Pno/Org	1970	Bill Champion	Anthem p.Novello
Epithalamium	SATB+Org+StrQ	2008	MMS	10' Wedding Anthem
Goodwill Hymns	Unis /SATB	1998–2014	MMS	
1. A soul that's sincere (SATB+StrQ		1998)		
2. We love, we trust (Unis+Pno/Org		2009)		
3. Wedding Hymn (Unis+kb		2009)		
4. Another day (SATB+fl+kb+gtr		2009)		
5. Glory Glory (SATB+kb		2009)		
6. Carol: We hymn (SATB+kb		2010)		
7. Trust (Unis+kb		2014)		
8. While we praise (SATB		2009)		
9. I sing (SATB		2008)		
10. Psalm 150 (SATB		2014)		infinite canon for unlimited voices
John Clare Poems	SATB+StrQ	2016	John Clare	12' Concert piece
Lord's Prayer	SATB	1995	BCP	2' liturgical setting
Lord's Prayer (in other words)	SATB+Org	1998	MMS	Modern language version
Nature & Transcendence	SSAA+harp	2009	MMS	5½' Lyrical poem
Pater Noster	SATB+Org	2014	trad. latin	6' anthem
Prophets – Canticle 3	SSAATTBB+tpt+org	2011	Bible texts in modern language	21' motet
The Quiet Spaces	SATbarB	2012	Sally Purcell	13'acappella concert piece
<i>Eternal Image :: First Mystery :: Poem for Lent or Advent :: Magi :: I see them walking in an air of glory :: Rilke</i>				
The Quip	SATB+Org	2009	George Herbert	3' Anthem
Remember my bonds	SSAATTBB	1976 (R)96	anon	Prayer from E Europe
Salve Regina	SSSAATTBB	2013	trad. latin	6' Motet
Silent Witness	SAATB	2013	MMS	25'acappella concert piece
<i>Hawk in the Open Air :: Golden Melody :: The Trackway :: The Tempest :: Nature & Transcendence</i>				
Soul Voyaging	ATBarB	1978	MMS	Concert piece (for Hilliard Ens)
Temenos	SATB choirs (20 voices)	2012	Sally Purcell	9' acappella anthem, complementing <i>Spem in Alium</i>
They – Canticle 2	SATB---SATB	2006	MMS	17' concert motet
The Voice of the Martyrs	SSATTBB	1976(R)96	T Klassen	4' Prayer from E Europe