

chris hall

enclosure

(In 1837 the poet John Clare was admitted to High Beach Asylum, Epping Forest, suffering from delusions. In July 1941, he left High Beach and walked the ninety miles to his home in Northborough, in the diocese of Peterborough; subsequently, in December of that year he was committed to Northampton Lunatic Asylum where he remained until his death twenty-three years later. The text alludes to the contemporary clearances of common pastures, which directly affected Clare as a worker on the land, and to his delusions, one of which was his episodic belief that he was George Gordon, Lord Byron, and another that he was haunted by the legendary folk-hero, Jack the Giant Killer.)

enclosure

from this vantage sat beside th sill
gazes vacant thru th sullen pane
dusty with dread n debris from th air
th while t ponder past n present woes

nd thru spent years v torment nd despair
 summoning spectres thru th fantomgate
 espies a figure dawdling thru th lich
 having brief-tarried in the churchyard there
 f rest n respite in this haunt v ghosts
 t harken to th voices nd their tones
 before th recommencement v th trudge
 striding,
 halting,
 stumbling at th stile
 treading th nettl; cursing the stubborn briar
 fern n foliage, uncyth'd since summer pruning

creeping like pootycroop
leaping th loping hare
awake
abroad
skitty as ladycow
song v th throsth
drifting along the wind
trotty wagtail
skirting th woodland verge

a waymarkt wanderer
a village bard

potboy
poet

taking th Morning Walk
from highbeach t th beckning netherhome
at boro north
close t the petersoke

four days th passage given th biding time
th journey out v essex into hell (tho home it was I sought when setting out)

a steady journey cross a stricken land
 glimpsing t right
 th palings nd the posts
t left forbidding signs
 th thornifence th sunderd pasture
 nd th plunder'd soil

a ninety-mile stretch from start t cusp
nd at its end that strange familiar hearth
n sojourn all too brief t suage th woe;

but that was then n when
 n was nd why? not what i thought it be, nor which nor here
 now jack th giantkiller lurks n waits
 nd calls me byron thru th vacant air

shutter'd north v hampton
west v where

now, with my dazzl'd eye i scan th rim
th liquid glaze, the scorching gleams, th glass
that sifts th time n scopes th coming tide

a rural muse
mad as th dandiprat
riddl'd with hatreds
anguish
body aches

lost in a peartree lane by maple shoot
soaring with swallow, brimming with humble bee
th child harold striving on living sea
natural as pig's sleep
cockcrow
firetail

writhing where daisies blow

th fivefoot peasant
penning th verse nd scan

with summer's mellowing pencil scrawling free
counfounding th cumber'd curse v sanity

nd past these wantonwalls
they steal th spring
seizing th land
thieving the common weal

whilst here inside
they seep my essence out
nd blare banaliti within my skull

