

## The Fallen Elm

Old Elm that murmured in our chimney top  
The sweetest anthem Autumn ever made  
And into mellow whispering calms would drop  
When showers fell on thy many-coloured shade,  
And when dark tempests mimic thunder made  
While darkness came as it would strangle light  
With the black tempest of a Winter night  
That rocked thee like a cradle to thy root,  
How did I love to hear the winds upbraid  
Thy strength without, while all within was mute;  
It seasoned comfort to our hearts' desire.  
We felt thy kind protection like a friend  
And pitched our chairs up closer to the fire,  
Enjoying comforts that was never penned.  
Old favourite tree, thou'st seen time's changes lour  
Though change till now did never injure thee,  
For time beheld thee as her sacred dower  
And nature claimed thee her domestic tree.  
Storms came and shook thee many a weary hour  
Yet steadfast to thy home thy roots hath been.  
Summers of thirst parched round thy homely bower  
Till earth grew iron; still thy leaves was green.  
The children sought thee in thy Summer shade  
And made their playhouse rings of sticks and stone;  
The mavis sang and felt himself alone  
While in thy leaves his early nest was made  
And I did feel his happiness mine own,  
Nought heeding that our friendship was betrayed.  
Friend not inanimate, though stocks and stones  
There are and many formed of flesh and bones,  
Thou owned a language by which hearts are stirred  
Deeper than by a feeling clothed in words;  
And speakest now what's known of every tongue,  
Language of pity and the force of wrong;  
What cant assumes, what hypocrites may dare  
Speaks home to truth and shows it what they are.  
I see a picture that thy fate displays  
And learn a lesson from thy destiny:  
Self interest saw thee stand in freedom's ways  
So thy old shadow must a tyrant be.  
Thou'st heard the knave, abusing those in power,  
Bawl freedom loud and then oppress the free.  
Thou'st sheltered hypocrites in many a shower  
That when in power would never shelter thee.  
Thou'st heard the knave supply his canting powers  
With wrong's illusions when he wanted friends,  
That bawled for shelter when he lived in showers  
And when clouds vanished made thy shade amends;

With axe at root he felled thee to the ground  
And barked of freedom – O I hate that sound;  
Time hears its visions speak, and age sublime  
Had made thee a disciple unto time.  
– It grows the cant terms of enslaving tools  
To wrong another by the name of right;  
It grows the licence of o'erbearing fools  
To cheat plain honesty by force of might.  
Thus came enclosure – ruin was its guide  
But freedom's clapping hands enjoyed the sight,  
Though comfort's cottage soon was thrust aside  
And workhouse prisons raised upon the site.  
E'en nature's dwellings far away from men,  
The common heath, became the spoilers' prey;  
The rabbit had not where to make his den  
And labour's only cow was drove away.  
No matter – wrong was right and right was wrong  
And freedom's bawl was sanction to the song.  
Such was thy ruin, music-making Elm.  
The rights of freedom was to injure thine.  
As thou wert served, so would they overwhelm  
In freedom's name the little that is mine.  
And there are knaves that brawl for better laws  
And cant of tyranny in stronger powers,  
Who glut their vile unsatiated maws  
And freedom's birthright from the weak devours.

Written c. late 1830.

*John Clare*. Edited by R. K. R. Thornton. London: Everyman, 1997. 79–81.  
With grateful thanks to Professor Thornton.