

An Invite to Eternity

Wilt thou go with me sweet maid?
Say, maiden, wilt thou go with me
Through the valley depths of shade,
Of night and dark obscurity,
Where the path hath lost its way,
Where the sun forgets the day,
Where there's nor life nor light to see?
Sweet maiden, wilt thou go with me?

Where stones will tum to flooding streams,
Where plains will rise like ocean waves,
Where life will fade like visioned dreams
And mountains darken into caves,
Say, maiden, wilt thou go with me
Through this sad non-identity,
Where parents live and are forgot
And sisters live and know us not?

Say, maiden, wilt thou go with me
In this strange death of life to be,
To live in death and be the same
Without this life, or home, or name;
At once to be, and not to be,
That was, and is not – yet to see
Things pass like shadows – and the sky
Above, below, around us lie?

The land of shadows wilt thou trace
And look – nor know each other's face;
The present mixed with reasons gone
And past, and present all as one.
Say, maiden, can thy life be led
To join the living with the dead?
Then trace thy footsteps on with me;
We're wed to one eternity.

Composed sometime in the mid-1840s, when Clare was resident in the Northamptonshire Lunatic Asylum.

John Clare. Edited by R. K. R. Thornton. London: Everyman, 1997. 63–4.
With grateful thanks to Professor Thornton.