

How does john clare
evoke emotion in the
readers of his poems
i am and to john cl...



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

John Clare was an English poet who lived mostly in rural Northamptonshire from 1793 to 1864. In 1837, he had a mental breakdown and was admitted to an asylum in Epping Forest. Four years later, he discharged himself and walked the 80 miles home in three and a half days, living on grass he ate by the side of the road. Later that year (1841), he was certified insane and was committed to the Northampton Asylum. He lived there until his death in 1864 writing occasionally. His poetry was often a means of escape to him - a way to break free of his incarceration.

Clare's poems reflect his own thoughts and feelings making the poems autobiographical, almost as if they were a page from a diary. This feature of the poems particularly brings out emotion with the readers as they see Clare's life through his eyes and experience what he is going through. Clare was a romantic poet and often used sensitive natural imagery to convey his message in his poems. He was self-educated and from a very poor background making his literary eloquence even more remarkable.

In his poems 'I am' and 'To John Clare' Clare uses skilled techniques to make the reader empathise with the poetry. The first stanza of 'I am' explains John Clare's perception of being forgotten and being almost like a ghost that nobody sees, hears or notices. Clare conveys this by repeatedly using the phrase 'I am'; it is like Clare is trying to work out his identity. He is confused and the constant repetition suggests he is trying to express he is still alive, to assert his existence for fear of losing himself. This confusion is emphasised further in verse one by the tortured and complex syntax.

It is as if Clare is physically struggling with his mental condition. The repeated 'F' sound in the phrase 'frenzied stifled throws' is very harsh on the ear and seems almost as if the words are being spat at the reader. The second stanza of 'I am' continues to reflect Clare's discontent showing that his life has no excitement; all he has wanted in his life is gone. Part of this stanza refers to the love of his life Mary Joyce whose father would not allow them to be together 'Even the dearest, that I love the best are strange'.

The image of a shipwreck used 'the vast shipwreck of my life's esteems' seems to make a point about how he feels about his life - traumatic for a short time and then out of sight and forgotten. This part of the verse harks back to a line in the first stanza 'my friends forsake me like a memory lost' showing a deep feeling of sadness running throughout the poem. The reader shares in Clare's feeling of rejection by his associates and neglect from his friends and family due to the deeply personal nature of the phrases and the passionate way in which he writes making one engage in his plight.

The third stanza shows that he wants something new in his life. To start his life again and to live with nothing holding him back. Clare expresses a wish to return to the simplicity of childhood 'to sleep as I did in childhood, sweetly slept' or even the tranquillity of death 'there to abide with my creator, God'. This final verse uses very powerful imagery to evoke emotion in the readers 'Untroubling, and untroubled where I lie, the grass below - above the vaulted sky'. The use of childhood is particularly touching and makes the reader feel pity for Clare and the way his life's course has run.

Religious ideas make this stanza peaceful and calm compared to the anger coursing through the end of verse one and through verse two. ? The poem is an eclectic mix of emotions starting calm, escalating into anger and then calming back down into a sort of resigned tranquillity once more to end as it started. This change of emotions is shown through the rhyme scheme and the rhythm of the verses. At the beginning of verse one the rhythm is iambic - calm and simple, but as the poem progresses it becomes more resentful and self pitying shown by the trochaic rhythm from the end of verse one and into verse two.

This trochaic rhythm shows his anger and frustration, almost like a storm in the poem. As the poem escalates in anger from the end of verse one and into verse two, enjambment is used to stop the verse change halting the flow of emotions. The end of verse two sees the end of the storm and a return to the calmness of iambic meter. The rhythm acts as a heartbeat to the poem - speeding as emotion swells and slowing as it calms. This makes the poem seem alive to the reader and so is more involving.

The rhyme scheme is quite simple, the second two stanzas ending in a rhyming couplet to emphasise Clare's message. This simplicity reflects Clare's state of mind and mirrors his wish in his poems for tranquillity and calm - he wants his life to be as his poems are, uncomplicated and purposeful. 'To John Clare' is a less complex poem than 'I am' and finds different ways to engage the readers' emotions. It is relaxed in style with gentle, natural, images 'the spring is come and birds are building nests, the old cock-robin to the sty is come'. The poem concerns memories from a peaceful time of his life.

<https://assignbuster.com/how-does-john-clare-evoke-emotion-in-the-readers-of-his-poems-i-am-and-to-john-clare-essay-sample/>

The attention to detail suggests that Clare is in his own little world – only focussing on the things he wants to, however minute they may be ‘ then crows and looks about for little crumbs swept out by the little folks and hour ago’ . The consideration of the little things makes the world Clare creates very real and involving for the reader and causes their emotions to be aroused more freely. Clare writes very nostalgically for his old life using cosy images ‘ The pigs sleep in the sty the bookman comes the little boy lets home-close-nesting go’.

These images are all peaceful and comforting things that hark back to childhood. Clare wishes he could transport himself away from his situation and shows this by using images such as sleep (where dreams are a form of escape) ‘ the pigs sleep in the sty’ and, at the end of the poem, children’s stories. These are the ultimate form of escapism, transporting the reader to magical, unknown world that can block out reality for their duration. Clare uses fewer poetic techniques (such as alliteration) in ‘ To John Clare’ than in ‘ I am’ but this does not take away from the power of the poem.

The simplicity makes the whole poem naive and vulnerable in nature. This vulnerability has its own intensity that arouses strong emotion in the reader, wanting to help or protect Clare in his seeming innocence. Overall, the poems of ‘ I am’ and ‘ To John Clare’ are both deeply emotionally involving to the reader. Clare uses a variety of techniques to produce this emotion such as the syntax, enjambment and changing rhythm in ‘ I am’ and gentle, sensitive imagery in ‘ To John Clare’. These methods bring the poetry to life, making it more realistic and affecting for its audience.