



Newsletter

Volume 6, January 2004

The editor invites submissions of items relevant to Clare studies, including calls for papers, announcements of recent publications, details of upcoming events, and scholarly notes. Please send submissions to Andrew Hubbell: hubbell@susqu.edu. The editor would like to thank all of the contributors to this issue.

Greetings From the New Editor

“Wery glad to meet you, and I hope our acquaintance may be a long one!’ as the gen’leman said to the five pound note.” For those who do not know me, I am assistant professor of 19th Century British literature at Susquehanna University in Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania, a small town on the banks of the Susquehanna River, not far from where Coleridge and Southey planned to establish Pantisocracy, and where Joseph Priestly settled in 1794. Though I have focused my research on Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Byron, I hope that by being the new editor of the Newsletter for the John Clare Society of North America, I will be drawn further into Clare’s poetry and Clare scholarship. I will work to maintain the high standards of editing set by Sarah Zimmerman, and look forward to meeting you all at the next Clare conference. ‘Till then, happy reading!

Report on the John Clare panel at MLA, San Diego

By Timothy Ziegenhagen

On Sunday, December 29, the John Clare Society of North America sponsored an MLA panel called "The Borderlands of John Clare." Timothy Ziegenhagen of Northland College chaired the panel, well attended by over 30 attentive listeners. Carol McGuirk of Florida Atlantic University began the panel with "Of Mice, Men, and 'Difference.'" McGuirk proposed that Clare envisions the mouse in "Mouse's Nest" as "disquietingly alien," quite a different notion of the animal compared to Barbauld's "The Mouse's Petition" or Burns's "To a Mouse." Unlike Burns, who establishes "elaborate 'poetic' sympathy" for the mouse he has unnested, Clare observes his own encounter less dramatically, "at more of a distance." This refusal to establish poetic sympathy—to "talk to or as the mouse" in the manner of Burns or Barbauld—returns the mouse to its own protected space, a mouse's space (however literarily constructed). McGuirk observes, "Mice are prey; the way to show them kindness is to acknowledge their need to go back into hiding." Clare refuses to impose his own subjectivity on the mouse, and allows it to "be herself and then to disappear, even from her own sonnet."

Following McGuirk, Bridget Keegan of Creighton University read "Excursion with the Angler": Clare's Piscatorial Poetry," which explores Izaak Walton's idea of "completeness," and how that is expressed in Clare's poems about fishing. Keegan argues that, influenced by Walton's inclusive, "hybrid" text, Clare finds ways to articulate a proto-environmental ethic valuing "completeness," achieved particularly in his discursive, thick descriptions of the natural world. Keegan argues that while much of Clare's poetry mourns the loss of biotic diversity as a result of parliamentary enclosure, it nevertheless celebrates and promotes a sense of "completeness" that Walton introduced. Keegan aptly suggests that more attention needs to be paid to the piscatorial connections between the two authors, that "Walton's place in Clare's works helps to shift our critical lens from green to blue."

The final panelist, Gary Harrison of the University of New Mexico, then read "Invite to Alterity: Mimicry and Hybridity in John Clare's Later Poems." Building on the work of postcolonial theorists Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, Harrison explored the way Clare's "hybridized identities" as "peasant-poet" enable him to mimic the "poetry and poetics of Lord Byron as a way to appropriate and return the gaze of the metropole," leveled at him as a laboring class celebrity. Harrison argued that Clare does not just "parrot" Byron's poetic voice in Child Harold, but creates a "multiple-voiced, polyphonic poem that interrupts and destabilizes its precursor text." In so doing, the narrator of Clare's poem becomes a kind of "trickster," who not only "flaunts his

freedom" from specifically delineated roles (like the "peasant-poet"), but creates a voice that enables him to address and critique "centers of cultural and political control."

Following Harrison's paper, a lively and lengthy question-and-answer period ensued; the discussion had not lost any of its energy or interest when Ziegenhagen announced that the panel had reached the "event horizon," the end of its allotted time.

John Clare Conference 2003

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On March 21st, as the bombing of Iraq gathered intensity and the spring sunshine did its best to pierce the torrential rain on the American east coast, around thirty-five Clare enthusiasts gathered at the Belmont Conference Center in Elkridge, Maryland, between Baltimore and Washington DC, for the first conference of the John Clare Society of North America.

After the friendly atmosphere had been nurtured a little at the bar, Michael Suarez and Sarah Zimmerman began with a joint presentation of their research into the history of Taylor and Hessey's publishing firm, detailing the few books that they printed contemporaneously with Clare. Eric Robinson then discussed issues surrounding the editing of Clare, paying particular attention to the

evidence in 18th and 19th century dictionaries that many of Clare's dialect words had a much wider currency than is often supposed. Friday evening continued with a great dinner followed by a reading of some Clare work by the poet Galway Kinnell who, in reference to "Clock a Clay," remarked that Clare tends to make unconscious bargains with animals: they offer him a language with which to understand his own feelings, a gift which he repays with the offer of immortality in verse. The evening concluded with a fine performance of a selection of Clare's folk songs by Tim White and Victoria Robinson. In between these events, conference goers enjoyed a magnificent exhibition of original prints and watercolors by Barbara Weber: "John Clare and His Poetry, Muse for the Artist." Each image was accompanied by a well-chosen selection from Clare's poetry.

Saturday began with an impressive trio of papers on Clare and the natural world. David Simpson offered an invigorating re-reading of "The Lament of Swordy Well," Bridget Keegan traced the fascinating genealogy of Clare's poems on rivers, and Alan Vardy discussed the "natural history prose elegies" identifiable in Clare's 1824-25 journal, leading to some interesting comparisons between Clare's nostalgia and that of Wordsworth. In the subsequent session on Clare's later career, Gary Harrison discussed linguistic plenitude and polyphony in Clare's increasingly complex texts, Sara Lodge offered an intriguing exploration of the tragedies which Clare began to sketch in the later 1820s, and Joanna Ball presented some striking evidence of the quite pervasive literary culture surrounding Clare at the asylum in

Northampton. After a very good lunch and a chance to admire our rural setting, now bathed in sunlight, the final session was principally an opportunity for group discussion. To that end I attempted to gather together a few of the points which had been debated with such enthusiasm and erudition within and between papers. Happily our attention was drawn back to the texts by Richard Gillin's striking and intricate account of ekphrasis in sonnets such as "Crowland Abbey" and "Glinton Spire."

The conference was intended partly as a celebration of the publication of the final volume of the Oxford edition of Clare's poetry, which most of us saw for the first time. When this stimulated a discussion of the status of Clare in schools and universities, we took the opportunity to write a joint letter to Oxford University Press urging a reprint of Eric Robinson and David Powell's more affordable Oxford Authors paperback volume on both sides of the Atlantic. We are also hopeful that many papers from the conference will appear in a special issue of *The Wordsworth Circle*, a good possibility given the high quality of both the presentations and discussion. Many thanks are due to Jim McKusick for his energetic organization, and to all who helped with the conference, not least Christoph Irmischer and Maura Smyth.

The conference was followed by a short business meeting of the John Clare Society of North America (to which transatlantic visitors were cordially invited), and I then took the opportunity to explore a little of Baltimore, famous for crab cakes and Edgar Allan Poe, but boasting also (at least) two wonderful

galleries. On the day of my visit, the Walters Art Museum was holding a Russian Family Festival, with Russian and Jewish folk songs resounding in its fine halls, and scores of children and adults sitting enthralled by an energetic presentation of Prokofiev's musical story Peter and the Wolf. And at the beautifully brash American Visionary Art Museum, a former whiskey warehouse that now celebrates "art produced by self-taught individuals, usually without formal training, whose works arise from an innate personal vision that revels foremost in the creative act itself," I thought of Clare. The quality and variety of work is inspirational; perhaps most memorable is a room full of tiny figural patches embroidered in incredible detail by Raymond Materson while a prison inmate, using the colored cotton from unraveled socks, and forming a haunting visual autobiography. I'd very highly recommend these galleries; members will be pleased to know that plans are already underway to tempt visitors back to Baltimore for another Clare conference.

*Editor's note: Papers presented at the John Clare Conference 2003 were published in **The Wordsworth Circle**, volume 34, number 3 (Summer 2003), edited with an introduction by James McKusick. Complimentary copies of this journal have been sent out to all current members of the John Clare Society of North America.*

UK Report for 2003

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Clare seems to have had more coverage in the UK media than at any time since the 1993 bicentenary, thanks largely to Jonathan Bate's biography, the first since 1982. (Clare's Oxford editors, Eric Robinson, David Powell and P.M.S. Dawson, also completed their mammoth task this year.) Bate's biography was widely and positively reviewed in the broadsheet press, and made several 'best book of the year' lists. Even the former Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, took part in a discussion of Clare on the BBC Radio Four programme, 'Start the Week'. Other notable Clare events include the joint reading (and singing) of Clare, Hardy and William Barnes poems in the splendid setting of Wimborne Minster, Dorset on March 1st. A compact disc of this event is being compiled by the three literary societies involved, for those of us who missed it.

On May 12th, to celebrate the naming of the John Clare Lecture Theatre complex, I hosted a symposium and reception at Nottingham Trent University. In the larger of the two auditoria, Tom Bates's sculpture of Clare, kindly donated to the university by the Society, was unveiled. At least two generations of Clare scholars were represented by speakers Mina Gorji and Simon Kövesi (who took his doctorate at NTU in 1999), Tom Paulin and John Lucas (Emeritus Professor at NTU), the Clare Society's founding-member, Rodney Lines, and its President, Ronald Blythe. The talks were interesting and varied, and it was good to see the new lecture theatre filled with Clare enthusiasts.

Later in the summer, at the John Clare Festival in Helpston on July 12th, Simon Kövesi was again a featured speaker,

along with Emma Trehane. Their common theme was 'Clare in Love', and some 150 members of the Clare Society enjoyed these talks and the other events. At the Annual General Meeting earlier in the day, members supported my proposal to offer honorary Vice-Presidencies of the Clare Society to Rodney Lines and Peter Moyses. Both men have given over twenty years of valuable service to the John Clare Society and been remarkable ambassadors for Clare. Rodney has taught lectures and courses on Clare for the Worker's Educational Association all over East Anglia and the East Midlands, and Peter's evocative photographs of Clare country are known by Clareans worldwide.

For me, the most memorable moment of the Festival was an unscheduled car ride with members of the Langdyke Trust to Swaddywell Pit, a mile south of Helpston (and half a mile east of Clare's 'Swordy Well'). The Trust has been working for some years to conserve the natural history and amenities of Clare country. It has now taken over this disused quarry and begun the arduous task of cleaning it up and making it into a nature conservation area. It is a fascinating site, with a reedy pond, and a cliff edge marking the geological fault-line that made it a suitable place to quarry rock in the first place. After having been abandoned for quarrying, it was taken over a few years ago by a group of motor-racing enthusiasts. The veteran poet and author Arnold Rattenbury wrote a spirited defence of their somewhat raucous presence in Clare country ('Clare and the Bikers', *London Magazine* 38: 9-10 (December 1998/January 1999), 33-42). But they abandoned it when the planning

authorities turned down their bid to develop the site. Now the hubcaps, oil slicks and old shotgun cartridges are gradually disappearing among orchids and cowslips, and the crested newts and sand martins are returning to the site. This event reminded me of an incident that happened a few years ago, when one of my undergraduate students decided that for his Clare project he would try to find the exact location of Swordy Well. He found the field but not the exact spot because, as he discovered, it had finally been filled in with papermaking waste some decades ago. I rather bitterly said that the authorities ought to erect a memorial 'blue plaque', perhaps on the giant electricity pylon that stands nearby, quoting the last two lines from 'The Lament of Swordy Well':

My name will quickly be the whole
That's left of swordy well

(John Clare, 1793-1864)

It is a great pleasure now to be able to report something better: that the name of swordy or swaddy well can once again indicate more than just an absence, can indeed name a living successor to Clare's beloved orchid-ground.

This Word is Not What It Appears...

By Eric Robinson

Given that the state of Clare's manuscripts is often poor, which makes microfilms of them even more difficult to read, it's my experience that studying Clare's writings in his original texts is

best. As for printed versions, the nine volumes of the OET Clare are quite reliable but not, of course, perfect. At the moment, there are many discoveries still to be made.

For example, a few weeks ago I was checking our transcripts of Pforzheimer Misc. 198. On page 36, I noticed that the first letter of the word 'trailing' had been written over the letter 'd'. Checking the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), that most valuable of authorities, I found the following:

Drail, v. Obs. Also drayl(e) [app. an altered form of TRAIL, influenced by draw, drag, draggle]

1. trans. To drag or trail along.
1598 T. BASTARD Chretoleros (1880) First would I sterve myselfe ... Or these rude chufs should **drayle** me through their tayles ... 1664 H. More Antid. Idolatry. To Rdr, He returned **drailing** his sheephook behinde him.

2. intr. to trail, draggle, move laggingly.
1598 GRENEWAY Tacitus' Ann., Germanie i. 259 Neither going too hastily before the horsemen, nor **drailing** after.
1716 SOUTH SERM. (1737 vi.xii, R). Unless we have also a continual care to keep it from **drailing** in the dirt.

Clare seems to have begun to write 'drailing', a word with which he must have been familiar, but then changed his mind and wrote 'trailing', a more standard

form. This is one of many examples of Clare's self-censorship. It should be noticed that OED's first example of 'drailing' is dated 1598, both as a transitive and an intransitive verb. The last example of the transitive form is 1664, of the intransitive form, 1716. Clare was writing in 1830-31. Clare's use of such an old word as 'drail' is less striking than his remark to Taylor that he was 'astonied' to find so many of Chaucer's words still in use in Helpston. But to find the use of 'drailing' in its intransitive form in 1830-31 is still quite amazing.

On page 34 of Pzf. Misc. 198, the word 'bluffed' is used: 'The world is bluffed up into such a hollow hearted existence.' The OED has:

Bluff, v. Obs. or dial. [Onomatopoeic, associated with blow, puff... to swell out, to become distended.]
1722 LISLE Husb. (1757) 483 Pigs would **bluff** & swell much with their feeding the first six or seven days.

Many times, Clare uses a word that reflects at least two meanings. In this text, 'bluff' not only reflects the OED definitions, but also carries something of the ordinary meaning of 'bluff' as "deception." Clare's language is very intricate and should never be taken for granted or lightly altered. The manuscripts provide the best evidence of this complexity.

Thus, it is necessary first to establish the form of a word used by Clare by referring to OED or to some authoritative source

such as the OET Clare. Second, it's necessary to be alert to Clare's use of obsolete or dialect forms of common words. And third, the reader should be aware that Clare is given to punning and also the use of words that combine the meanings of other related words.

New Book Information:

*First Publications of John
Clare's Poems*

By David Powell

First Publications of John Clare's Poems

By David Powell

Research Papers on John Clare, number 1

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Society of North America

A definitive guide for researchers on John Clare, this 100-page book offers detailed bibliographic information on the first place of publication for every poem included in the complete Oxford English Texts edition of Clare's poetry (9 volumes, 1984-2003). For the first time, readers of John Clare can discover where each of his poems first appeared in print. Reflecting many years of scholarly research by a distinguished editor of Clare's poetry, this indispensable volume provides a comprehensive survey of Clare's poems published in books and periodicals of the 19th and 20th centuries. Every scholar of John Clare – especially those who are engaged in research concerning the reception history of Clare's poetry in the 19th and 20th centuries – should obtain a

copy of this essential work. Readers of John Clare's poetry will be fascinated to learn where each one of his poems was first published!

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