



Newsletter

Volume 8, February 2006

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.

Report on the John Clare Panel at the MLA Conference in Washington, D. C. December 29, 2005

By Dr. Timothy Ziegenhagen, Northland College

The John Clare Society of North America hosted an engaging panel at this year's Conference of the Modern Language Association, in Washington D.C. Titled "Twenty-First Century Clare," the panel was well-attended, with an audience of over thirty enthusiasts. Before the reading of the papers, the Society's Executive Director, James McKusick, reminded the audience of an effort to raise funds towards the purchase and maintenance of Clare's Cottage, in Helpston; donations both large and small may be made through the JCSNA's website and are completely tax deductible.

After McKusick's appeal, Timothy Ziegenhagen introduced the readers. Though Mr. Sam Ward was absent, Dr. Bridget Keegan read his paper, "One Hundred Songs: Clare's Melodies in the Marketplace." Carefully reconstructing Clare's composition of a projected book of songs in 1820, Ward shows how the poet negotiated the marketplace strategies of his publishers and the literary expectations of patrons like Lord Radstock. Despite his loyalty to Taylor and Hessey, Clare began working with Edward Drury and James Powers (Thomas Moore's publisher), who seemed more receptive to Clare's proposed book of songs. Frustrated by Taylor's inability to deal with the "interference of Lord Radstock" in the publication of the third edition of *Poems Descriptive*,

John Clare continued work on the songs with Drury's encouragement. Ward shows the estrangement between Clare and Radstock as a result of these negotiations, as well as the ensuing (and somewhat self-aggrandizing) attempts by Eliza Emmerson to patch up the rift between them. In the end, Clare's book of songs never appeared—though individual pieces were printed—but their composition enabled the poet to learn "to mediate popular and polite culture to greater effect... [T]he songs which Clare wrote in the summer months of 1820 paved the way for his latter collection of 'National and Provincial Melodies.'"

Following Ward's paper, Professor Eric H. Robinson read "A New Light on Clare's Prose," elucidating his preparations for a forthcoming edition of Clare's prose. Professor Robinson argues that with the publication of the excellent, reliable Oxford editions of Clare's poetry, it is time for not just Clare's natural history writings, as in Margaret Grainger's edition, but the full scope of Clare's prose in a scholarly edition. The prose shows the complexity of Clare's social and political views, and also his religious beliefs, which have been often misunderstood.

The prose writings demonstrate Clare's tremendous variety of interests and considerable range. His novel, *Barnaby*, gives the reader a portrait of country people and of village life (Robinson suggests that the influences of *Peregrine Pickle* and *Pamela* can both be seen in this novel). In addition to fictional works, the new prose edition would contain non-fiction, including sermons and essays on a number of subjects. Clare's letters show his interest in issues of the day as well as his "intense enjoyment of the English language." In sum, Professor Robinson left the audience delighted at the prospect of a comprehensive edition of Clare's prose, which is clearly overdue.

Mr. Jeff Schragel concluded the panel with "Sites of Resistance in Clare's Early Verse." Schragel suggests that Clare's poetry is characterized by the creation of "anti-space[s]" that "resist definition and quantification." Dismayed at the destruction of the common lands through the Enclosure Acts, Clare establishes these rhetorical spaces through a number of poetic techniques, including a blurring of "the boundaries between the written word, orality, and natural sound." Schragel further argues that Clare's blurring creates a virtual terrain from which the poet can resist dominant modes of expression, particularly the Wordsworthian sublime. Clare's use of rapture creates another kind of space that enables an erasure of self and immersion into the "biorhythms of nature." In addition, Schragel suggests that Clare seeks out natural images that reinforce a liminality that break down clear barriers; this liminality is emphasized in Clare's poetry and is also a form of resistance, frustrating the imposition of categories necessary for the commodification of nature. Through these and other literary techniques, Schragel argues, Clare is able to create "different spaces from which to oppose" the forces of cultural hegemony and economic exploitation.

**John Clare's Outburst Against Shylock
in the Peterborough Theater,
14 July 1830: A Note**

By Dr. Eric Robinson

John Clare was invited to a performance of *The Merchant of Venice*, on July 14, 1830, by Herbert Marsh,

Bishop of Peterborough, and his wife, Marianne. The Tibbles corrected the date to 1830 from Frederic Martin's mistaken 1836. They also tell us that it was Thomas Robertson's company that was performing, though at this date the company was probably being managed by his wife, since at some time in 1830, Thomas Robertson had fallen seriously ill.

But who was playing the part of Shylock? Could it have been the famous Edmund Kean? The *Cambridge Chronicle and Journal and Huntingdonshire Gazette* for Friday, 10 September 1830, published the following statement under the heading "Peterborough":

"Mr Robertson having engaged Mr Kean to perform three of his principal characters on the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th September ... On Saturday Mr Kean did appear in the character of Shylock, before a crowded house, but he was evidently labouring under the effects of his recent illness and performed his part with difficulty, being obliged to be supported from the stage to the dressing room; notwithstanding his diminished energy, Mr Kean went through the character with that perfect propriety of speech and action so peculiar to him, and though he must have used great exertions, he concealed his laborious efforts, in his display of natural feeling and involuntary passion, particularly in the scene with Tubal, where his exultation and depression were shared by

all who saw him. He identified himself with the Jew throughout, but his inexorable denial of mercy, and eager preparation to cut the ‘forfeiture from the bankrupt’ was a masterly performance ...”

Was it such a performance that Clare saw? The latest biography of John Clare by Jonathan Bate makes no reference to the company of actors performing the play, nor to the actor performing the part of Shylock.

The John Clare Cottage Appeal

The cottage in Helpston, England, in which John Clare was born, lived, and worked, was temporarily secured in early October 2005 by the National Environment and Educational Trust. The aim, in close partnership with the John Clare Trust, the John Clare Society (U.K.), and other organizations, is to conserve the cottage and to establish a dynamic center for writing, education and environmental activities celebrating Clare’s legacy.

Inspired by the life and work of John Clare (1793-1864), and by his humble home in this beautiful, rural corner of England, the trust’s mission will be to inspire and educate new generations about the natural world. The cottage will also become a major resource for all those interested in the literary, social, natural and cultural history of Britain in the early nineteenth century.

The John Clare Trust is applying to large public and private organizations and is also appealing to individual supporters across the world. We need your help to repay the temporary loan that enabled the purchase of the cottage and to fund the center. All major donors will be formally acknowledged in the cottage itself which – as a unique educational and environmental resource – will celebrate the generous spirit of Clare’s global community.

The John Clare Society of North America is assisting in this effort by seeking contributions from donors who reside in the United States. All funds raised for the John Clare Cottage Appeal will be used to purchase, conserve, and develop the John Clare Cottage as an educational resource.

Founded in 1997, the John Clare Society of North America is organized and operated exclusively for charitable, literary and educational purposes within the meaning of Section 501(c)(3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code. Donations by U.S. residents are tax-deductible to the extent provided by law.

For further information, or to donate funds to the John Clare Cottage Appeal, please visit our website: www.johnclare.org



New Book Information:

First Publications of John Clare's Poems by David Powell

Research Papers on John Clare, number 1

© Copyright 2004 by the John Clare 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 nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Every scholar of John Clare – especially those who are engaged in research concerning the reception history of Clare's poetry in the nineteenth and twentieth 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!

This perfect-bound paperback book is exclusively available from the John Clare Society of North America for just \$12.00 per copy (U.S. currency). There is no extra charge for shipping, handling, or sales tax. Please consider ordering additional copies for friends, colleagues, students, and university libraries!

To order this book, please visit our website: **[www:johnclare.org](http://www.johnclare.org)**
and click on the link to "Purchase John Clare books, postcards, and audiotapes"