



Newsletter

Volume 9, February 2007

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.

Editor's Column

In this issue of the Newsletter, we offer some of the standard sections—the MLA report and an update on the Clare Cottage preservation work. We also introduce some new columns that we hope will become standards—a Spotlight section that contains news of members and a Pop Culture Clare section that lists events that featured Clare in some way. And special to this issue, we feature an excerpt of the speech given to honor Eric Robinson when he was awarded the Leonardo da Vinci Medal. This is a great honor for Eric, and we are very proud to recognize him as one of our executive officers. Happy reading!

Proceedings of the John Clare Panel at the Philadelphia MLA, Dec. 30, 2006

By Prof. James McKusick, University of Montana

The John Clare Society of North America hosted an engaging panel at this year's Conference of the Modern Language Association in Philadelphia. Titled "John Clare: Pastoral and Performance," and chaired by David Worrall of Nottingham Trent University, the panel was well-attended by a diverse audience. Before the reading of the papers, the Society's Executive Director, James McKusick, discussed the substantive contributions made by allied literary societies to the professional and educational mission of the MLA, and he encouraged all of

those present to become members of the John Clare Society of North America.

The first speaker, Dr. Simon Kövesi of Oxford Brookes University, began with "Minoritarian Rhizomes: John Clare and the Eco-Linguistics of Nature," an examination of how Clare's sonnet, "The shepherds almost wonder where they dwell," problematizes, while celebrating, the interconnectedness among bodies and processes of the rural world. This sonnet folds itself around the ampersand —&— the icon of conjunction. Because of this dependency, Kövesi proposed a turn to Deleuze and Guattari's theory of the rhizome, as a way of fully exposing and exploring the liberating politics of Clare's green grammar. Deleuze and Guattari present the rhizome as a metaphor of hidden relation and alliance between ideas, bodies, planes of reference – which they squarely oppose to the metaphor of the tree – a shape which they believe to be the dominant one in the Western history of ideas. The tree is hierarchical, fixed, centered, rooted, subordinating; the rhizome by contrast is leveling, mobile, de-centered, radical and coordinating. The ideal syntactical feature of rhizomatic writing is "and..."

and... and....” Kövesi argued that such a positive reading of Clare’s anaphoric ampersands might be used to recover a predominant linguistic feature so often denigrated as evidence of Clare’s unwitting recourse to descriptive listing. Through Deleuze and Guattari we might also realize just how radical, and how ecological, is Clare’s resistance to the unifying, controlling, organizing subject.

Mr. Kurtis Hessel, of Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, then read “Fluidity in the Poetic Identity of John Clare.” Hessel argued that the term “nature poet,” long imagined as a settled description of Clare, is inherently complicated, and sometimes contradictory in itself. For Clare, the relationship between nature and poesy is not a simple one – the terms cannot be easily reconciled in a single stable self; rather, they are highly unstable, both characterized by a mutual referentiality. This results, for Clare, in a fluidity of identity that is mirrored in his fluid poetic syntax. Hessel examined this fluidity in Clare’s “The Progress of Rhyme,” and illustrated these parallels between Clare’s self-identity and poetic syntax in order to explore Clare’s personal identification with the act of poetic composition. He showed how Clare moves back and forth between describing objects in nature in two contradictory ways: (1) as having an independent existence, and (2) as existing purely as a function of poetic “song.” Hessel went on to examine how this wavering, conflicted sense of poesy is, for Clare’s psyche, a good thing – it shows a “positive nonidentity” that provides Clare a sense of flexibility, opportunity, and aspiration. Hessel concluded by suggesting that this same kind of dialectic is writ large in Clare’s struggle for the assertion of a coherent personal identity. Hessel regards the late years of Clare’s life as a shutting-down, narrowing, and constraining of his earlier sense of opportunity and flexibility.

Professor David Worrall, of Nottingham Trent University, concluded the panel with “John Clare’s Stamford: Types of Theatricality in a Georgian Market Town.” Worrall endeavored to situate Clare within various layers and contexts of theatricality. The first of these concerns Dr. Sam Ward’s (Nottingham Trent University) discovery of the 1820 Drury Lane playbill carrying programming of one of Clare’s songs sung by Madame Vestris. Worrall explained the significance of this playbill: There was a considerable demand for theatrical songs because of the preeminence of burletta, and thus songwriting for the stage was a viable career (as it was for the contemporary songwriter, Jacob Beuler). Technically, Clare’s song was an unlicensed performance since it had not been approved by the Lord Chamberlain. Moreover, Madame Vestris was on the eve of enormous fame and notoriety. Was it the threat of such notoriety that prompted the Huntingdon parson James Plumptre to write to Clare not long afterwards? Plumptre was not only the author of *The English Drama Purified* (1812), but his sister Anne Plumptre (who died in 1818) had been a notable translator of August von Kotzebue, the playwright around whom the British censure of German immorality had arisen. Additionally, Worrall pointed out that, rather than being a rural backwater, Stamford, Peterborough, and even Spalding and Wisbech all had substantial theatrical seasons, coinciding with the rural economies of horse racing and agricultural fairs. Worrall concluded his presentation with a look at the astonishing range of drama played at Stamford, including William Dimond’s *The Peasant Boy*.

There was a lively discussion following these three papers, and several audience members offered insights on Clare, natural history, ecology, theatricality, and popular culture. Many attendees lingered to

continue discussion of Clare and his poetry even after the panel had adjourned.

**The Leonardo da Vinci Award,
Given to Eric H. Robinson for
Lifetime Achievement**

Editor's Note: The following is excerpted from David Hounshell's remarks honoring Eric H. Robinson, recipient of the 2006 Leonardo da Vinci Medal. The complete text can be read in Hounshell's "Da Vinci Medal Award." *Technology and Culture* 48:1 (2007), 127-132. The Editor wishes to thank Johns Hopkins University Press and the Society for the History of Technology for graciously allowing JCSNA Newsletter to reproduce these remarks.

In 1953, an eight-page article on the Derby Philosophical Society appeared in the British journal, *Annals of Science*. Its author, a research fellow at the University of Bristol, argued that this small English literary and philosophical society of the late eighteenth century "foster[ed] scientific activity" owing to the "great social qualities and the insatiable scientific interest of its founder, Erasmus Darwin."...In this relatively short article, Eric H. Robinson...in conjunction with the late A. E. Musson and Douglas McKie, [began building a] massively documented case for the critical role of knowledge production in the development of British industrial technology in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries...

The project culminated in the 1969 publication...*Science and Technology in the Industrial Revolution*...In it, [Musson and Robinson] showed how British inventors and industrialists cultivated scientific knowledge and...an interest[] in new technology...In this early period in the history of our

discipline, Robinson and his colleague contributed a foundational work that served as a model both for how to deal with the history of industrialization...and, even more broadly, how to practice the history of technology.

...Indeed, the careful scholar who reads...Margaret Jacob's *The Cultural Meaning of the Scientific Revolution* and Joel Mokyr's *The Gifts of Athena: Historical Origins of the Knowledge Economy* must understand the enormous debt such works have incurred to the pioneering scholarship displayed in *Science and Technology in the Industrial Revolution*...

[Also in 1969, the same year that this classic volume was published, Robinson] and Musson brought out a documentary history... *James Watt and the Steam Revolution*, and Robinson and the late British historian of chemistry Douglas McKie published the book, *Partners in Science: Letters of James Watt & Joseph Black*...Since 1972 Robinson has published many critical reviews...In these reviews, he has consistently showed the breadth and depth of his knowledge about technical change in its social, political, cultural, economic, and scientific contexts.

...In addition to his achievements as a scholar of the British Industrial Revolution and his actions as a deeply caring and generous man, Eric Robinson has distinguished himself in other ways that demonstrate his commitment to humanist ideals. First, he has earned an excellent reputation as a teacher at the University of Manchester, the University of Massachusetts at Boston, and several other institutions in Britain, Nigeria, and the United States...For the last two years he has dedicated himself to the Latino community in Northern Virginia...

Second, his work as an editor of and critical commentator on the work of the nineteenth-century British poet John Clare has extended over four decades and has set the standard against which all future work on Clare must be judged. Robinson's editions of

Clare's poetry span a sixty-year period of the poet's life—the years that saw much of the English countryside and its way of life transformed by the Industrial Revolution that Robinson knows so well—and also includes autobiographical writings and an assortment of previously unpublished work by Clare. Robinson's work on Clare totals two dozen titles, three of which are two-volume works, and *The Collected Poems of John Clare* (1989-2003) totals nine volumes. He is currently editing projected volumes on John Clare's prose. Robinson's work in the field of English literature so captured the esteem of literary scholars at Cambridge University that in 1991 he was awarded the Litt.D....

Eric Robinson's career is one that betokens the image of the true Renaissance man after whom SHOT's highest honor is named. Eric Robinson—historian of science, technology, and economy of modern Britain and English literary scholar and master of the poetry of John Clare—is a genuine man of letters, richly deserving of both the Society for the History of Technology's highest honor, the Leonardo da Vinci Medal, and our deepest thanks for the legacies he has provided.

**Update on the Preservation of
the John Clare Cottage,
Excerpted from the John
Clare Trust Website**

**John Clare Cottage Receives Major Grant
Funding**

In July 2006 the John Clare Education & Environment Trust was awarded a "Stage One Pass" from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for the project to buy and restore John Clare's Cottage in Helpston and to open it to the public for the first time. This includes an

initial grant of £39,600 towards the fuller development of the scheme, and a pledge of £1,272,000 on approval of the final application.

The lottery cash will go towards restoring the cottage using traditional building methods, fitting it out to tell the story of Clare's life, and recreating a number of rooms as they would have looked in the 18th century. The adjacent dovecote will be used as a reception area, shop, and gallery space, and a small new building will be created to house modern amenities. The core project supported by the HLF will also cover the costs of a Manager and Education Officer for a period of five years.

The restored cottage will bring the poet's past to life through a wide range of interpretation, from telling the story of 18th-century rural life and traditional folk tales to environmental seminars, literacy programs, and creative writing workshops.

The HLF require match funding, so the John Clare Education & Environment Trust does still need donations to unlock their grant. The Trust will be very grateful for any contributions, payable by cheque in British Pounds made payable to the "John Clare Education & Environment Trust" – please visit their website for contacts and mailing address: <http://www.jceet.co.uk>.

Alternatively, U.S. and Canadian residents can visit the John Clare Society of North America website, <http://www.johnclare.org>, and click on "The John Clare Cottage Appeal" at the top of the page for details on donation by check or credit card. The John Clare Society of North America is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, and donations by U.S. residents are tax-deductible to the extent provided by law.

Paul Chirico, Chair of the John Clare Trust, comments: "We are delighted by this crucial support from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Alongside the contributions of many generous supporters, this grant will transform John Clare's cottage into a truly dynamic center for the celebration of Clare's life and legacies. Clare's story can be an inspiration for visitors of all ages, and his passion for his environment will engage new generations with today's urgent issues."

Barry Sheerman MP, project champion and Chair of the House of Commons Select Committee on Education and Skills, adds: "This project will safeguard the birthplace of our most important poet of nature and create a wonderful new center for exploring our relation to the environment in Clare's time and our own."

Pop Culture Clare

In the February 2005 Newsletter, Volume 7, Eric Robinson requested news of popular culture interest in Clare in North America. Here are three, submitted by George V. Van Deventer.

1. George V. Van Deventer was invited to New York City to MC the United Nation's Montessori School's 'Voices for Peace Across the Globe', April 26, 2006. George welcomed Mrs. Nane Annan and guests by reading a poem of John Clare. The following are George's edited remarks, followed by the Clare poem he read.

...This evening we will hear poets announce in song, dance and verse the ancient call for life and happiness—that celebratory joy of being here together. I am going to read a poem by the 19th century rural English Poet, John Clare, who...made poems celebrating

the tiny things of nature where he lived. But [Clare] was a sad man. Alone. Enclosed in a tiny place he loved, he felt terribly restricted...Clare's joy and sadness is a theme embedded in the writing's of many poets. Robert Frost's "Mending Wall," and Emily Dickenson's, "I'm Nobody! Who are You!" are two poets that come to mind. I will read John Clare's poem: TRESPASS.

TRESPASS

I dreaded walking where there was no path
And pressed with cautious tread the meadow
swath
And always turned to look with wary eye
And always feared the owner coming by'
Yet everything about where I had gone
Appeared so beautiful I ventured on
And when I gained the road where all are free
I fancied every stranger frowned at me
And every kinder look appeared to say
"You've been on trespass in your walk
today."
I've often thought, the day appeared so fine,
How beautiful if such a place were mine'
But, having naught, I never feel alone
And cannot use another's as my own.

2. On June 4, 2006 at St Giles Episcopal Church, George V. Van Deventer organized the second "Music and Verse in the Sanctuary -- One World Community." One of the musicians, Dudley Laufman from New Hampshire, played tunes familiar to Clare: "Ashley's Ride", "Christchurch Bells", "Brighton Camp (Girl I Left Behind Me)", "Jockey To The Fair".

3. On June 6, 2006 the 20th Anniversary Nevola Symposium: Spiritual Practices that Promote Healing and Wholeness, sponsored by Nevola, MD Memorial Fund, Maine-Dartmouth Family Practice Residency, and Maine General Medical Center, George V. Van Deventer led two workshops. The first

one "Speaking Choir: Rediscovering a Lost Art Form for Creating Community," included a group recitation and performance of Clare's: "Summer Moods" and Langston Hughes' "As Befits A Man." The second, "Poetry: A Touchstone of Spiritual Practice," included Clare's "I Am" and a few lines from "The Overseer."

Spotlight

News and Notes of Members

Eric H. Robinson, President of the JCSNA, was awarded the 2006 Leonardo da Vinci Medal. This medal, the highest recognition from the Society for the History of Technology, is presented to an individual who has made an outstanding contribution to the history of technology. Former recipients include Joseph Needham, Maurice Daumas, Lewis Mumford, and David Landes. An edited text of the speech given in Eric's honor is printed in this Newsletter.

Drew Hubbell, editor of the JCSNA Newsletter, is organizing the 2007 Nineteenth Century Studies Association Conference, to be held at Susquehanna University, March 8-10. This year's theme for the interdisciplinary conference is "Race and Ethnicity in the Nineteenth Century." Over 150 people are expected to attend.

James McKusick, Executive Director of JCSNA, and Fredrick Burwick recently discovered a verse translation by Coleridge of Goethe's *Faust*. Their edited text is forthcoming September 2007 from OUP: <http://www.oup.com/uk/catalogue/?ci=9780199229680> Jim and Fred are also planning a one-day conference on their discovery of Coleridge's *Faust*, to be held at the Huntington Library, March 16, 2007. Jim and

Fred's detective work have caused quite a stir in both the academic and popular press.

James McKusick and Bridget Keegan have published a new online collection of essays that contains several on John Clare, available in the Romantic Pedagogy Commons: <http://www.rc.umd.edu/pedagogies/commons/ecology/>

Jason N. Goldsmith, assistant professor of English at Butler University, recently published "The Promiscuity of Print: John Clare's "Don Juan" and the Culture of Romantic Celebrity" *SEL* 46, 4 (Autumn 2006): 803-832. Jason writes that "this essay offers a new reading of John Clare's 'Don Juan,' a hard-hitting and deliberately vulgar denunciation of English society and letters.... Tracing Clare's imaginative and textual investments in prostitutes and boxers, figures located at the margins of London's criminal underworld, the essay shows how the compulsive misogyny of "Don Juan" and its obscene sexual punning form part of a concerted, if not entirely coherent, response to a culture increasingly organized by the spectacle of celebrity." He is completing a book entitled *Cult Figures: Popular Celebrity and the National Character in Romantic Poetry*.