

# The John Clare Society of North America

## *Newsletter*

Volume Seventeen, February 2016



### From the Editor

This year's *Newsletter* contains "Musings" poems from Danielle Vogel and Louisa Ballhaus, a call for papers, a report on the panel at the MLA convention, a book review, a list of recent academic writings, and some beautiful images, including prints of a pair of flying swallows and of a white-eyed vireo's nest from the New York Public Library's open access digital archive. I hope you enjoy it!

— Stephanie Kuduk Weiner, Wesleyan University



### Musings *from Edges and Fray* By Danielle Vogel

For all creatures, the most primal form of shelter is a hollow: a simple cavity dug into earth, a depression in the sand, the carved out alcove of a tree. For a writer, the most primal form of shelter is a word. All words are terranean. Each, beginning deep below its own surface.



A nest's helixical nature, suspended in-tension. Silence in relation to making a trace. Listen.

A bird leaves to return, leaves, returns again. Weaves a thing. Presses its breast against the circle. Inverts itself against the weave.



Each bird is an archivist of debris, always in a constant state of accretion. The microcosm of a nest: its accrual, collected, woven, incubated, and then, in some cases, abandoned—has helped me to better understand language and intimacy, architecture, our abilities—as builders—to story and spell.



Danielle Vogel is an artist and cross-genre writer. She is the author of *Between Grammars* (Noemi Press, 2015).

**Musings**  
***Two Poems***  
***By Louisa Ballhaus***

I place gold medals on my eyes

got caught with cold Carolina caring  
southern winters full of fatted sheep  
through frozen attic windows  
lined with prohibition cufflinks cutting

threads around your hands I say  
you look respectable  
tongue flattened on your onyx eyes  
hands buttoning over straw

all the birds left at the same time  
and you raised your arms  
like flying? like flying  
let's toast the trees instead of burning, freeze  
before you start becoming

call me mother  
watch the axe slip through my hands



Flatline with me

hold your breath until computer screens can't tell  
us that we're living, no we need  
to smash the jars and hold the long-not beating  
hearts  
indulge the fervent hunt for life  
dirt under-liquidated feet

and was it green like this?  
the carpets  
your photorealist eyes

(hoof-deep in ants, crying out  
on an armful of leaves)

did you say smile?  
stop the timer  
you're always in my science fiction  
drenched with bruising

and asking  
if I'd touch



Louisa Ballhaus grew up in Berlin and Brooklyn,  
where she now lives. She works as a poetry  
editor for *2 Bridges Review* and writes poems,  
primarily about the feminine experience of time.



**Proceedings of the John Clare Panel at  
the 2016 MLA Convention**  
***By Seth T. Reno***

At this year's MLA Convention in Austin,  
Texas, the John Clare Society of North America  
convened the session "After John Clare," chaired  
by Bruce Graver (Providence College). The session  
included papers by Alan Vardy (Hunter College,  
City University of New York), Heidi Scott (Florida  
International University), and Florian Gargaillo  
(Boston University).

In “‘They feel the change’: Clare’s Lyric Events,” Vardy discussed Clare’s verse as tracking intensely a series of seemingly insignificant events through time. These “lyric events,” which resist conventional categorization, often emerge from subtle somatic and sensual changes in the ecosystem. Vardy offered Clare’s “Sudden Shower” as a key example, which he called “the most precise poem ever written about getting caught in the rain.” The entire movement of the poem, Vardy argued, proceeds from the recognition by “humming hive bees” of an impending storm: Clare writes, “They feel the change.” Vardy also cited “The Mouse’s Nest” and “A Scene” as examples of Clare’s lyric events, which demonstrated further the significance of experimental sonnets to Clare’s ecological poetics.

In “John Clare’s Lyrics as Ecosystems,” Scott approached the small ecosystems that saturate Clare’s poetry as microcosms. By reading Clare’s poems in relation to microcosm studies and ecological science, Scott showed that Clare makes an ethical point about the value of nature in context, as opposed to the decimated, deracinated collections that filled cabinets of curiosities, as well as an epistemological point about how nature in miniature is an elaborate system that can educate readers about how nature works on a larger scale. Through this approach, Scott situated Clare in the history of formal, material ecological observation.

The final paper, “Impersonal Yet Intimate: John Clare and the Early Poems of Seamus Heaney,” examined the influence of Clare on one of his most vocal poetic admirers. Gargaillo argued that Clare was a major influence on Heaney’s earliest nature poems, particularly “The Barn,” “Death of a Naturalist,” and “Turkeys Observed.” As Gargaillo explained, Heaney’s deep reading of Clare’s Northborough poems taught him how to apprehend nature with both detachment and intimacy. Through close readings of Heaney and Clare’s poems, Gargaillo illuminated particular uses of words and phrases that indicate the influence of Clare on Heaney’s writing.

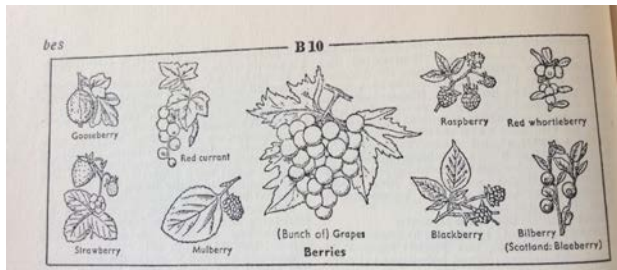


Seth Reno is assistant professor of English at Auburn University Montgomery. His essays appear or are forthcoming in *European Romantic Review*, the *Keats-Shelley Journal*, *The CEA Critic*, *Kudzu House Quarterly*, *Romantic Circles Pedagogy Commons*, *Romantic Sustainability: Endurance and the Natural World, 1780-1830* (Lexington, 2015), *Critical Insights: Mary Shelley* (Salem, 2016), and the *John Clare Society Journal*. He is also co-editor of *Wordsworth and the Green Romantics: Affect and Ecology in the Nineteenth Century* (New Hampshire, 2016).



## Call for Papers

The John Clare Society of North America invites proposals for its guaranteed session at the Modern Language Association Convention in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, January 5-8, 2017. Topic: “John Clare: the One and the Many.” Scholarship on any aspect of singularity, multiplicity, unity, disorder, and/or the myriad meanings, images or forms in Clare’s life and work. Please submit a 250-300 word abstract and short bio by email to Dr. Erica McAlpine at [erica.mcalpine@keble.ox.ac.uk](mailto:erica.mcalpine@keble.ox.ac.uk) by March 15, 2016.



## Book Review

by *James C. McKusick*

### *New Essays on John Clare: Poetry, Culture and Community*, ed. Simon Kövesi and Scott McEathron

(Cambridge University Press, 2015) xii + 244  
\$99.00

In *New Essays on John Clare*, several leading scholars offer fresh perspectives on the development of John Clare's poetry in its social and cultural contexts. This volume makes an important contribution to Clare studies by providing bold and insightful readings of Clare's poetry and prose that are informed by the latest advances in biographical and archival research. Edited by Simon Kövesi and Scott McEathron, both well-regarded Clare scholars, this volume is meticulous, well-rounded, and admirably eclectic in its approach.

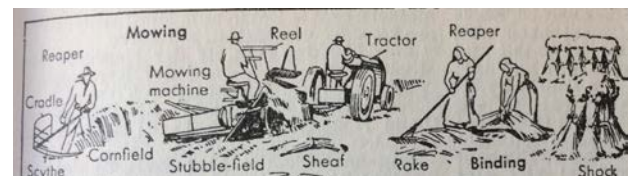
Through the diverse approaches of ten scholars, this collection shows how Clare's many angles of critical vision illuminate current understandings of environmental ethics, aesthetics, Romantic and Victorian literary history, and the nature of work. The volume includes essays by distinguished Clare scholars from Britain and North America: Simon Kövesi, Scott McEathron, Fiona Stafford, Adam Rounce, Sarah M. Zimmerman, John Burnside, Emma Mason, Robert Heyes, Sam Ward, and Richard Cronin.

An unexpected treasure in this volume is John Burnside's essay, "John Clare and the new varieties of enclosure: a polemic." As a professional poet, Burnside brings a writerly approach to understanding Clare's poetry, and in this essay he offers a lively, provocative reading of Clare's enclosure poems from the standpoint of contemporary environmental activism. Not pulling any punches, Burnside quotes from Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* on the evils of parliamentary enclosure, and he cites Edward Abbey on the ecological importance of keystone predator species. Burnside concludes that "the essential Romantic enterprise, the search for an *informed dwelling*, continues with ecocriticism . . . and without doubt, one necessary forebear of this development is John Clare" (91).

Burnside's passionately polemical essay exemplifies much that is memorable about this volume: it is engaging, well-researched, and full of fascinating insights. *New Essays on John Clare* makes an essential contribution to John Clare studies, and it will prove rewarding to Clare specialists and to generalist readers who seek to understand Clare's place in the broader historical development of literary culture in the Romantic and Victorian periods.



James McKusick is Founding Dean of the Honors College and Professor of English at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. He is the author of *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology* and *Coleridge's Philosophy of Language*.



## Recent Academic Writings

Lindsey Eckert, “‘I’ll Be Bound’: John Clare’s ‘Don Juan’, Literary Annuals, and the Commodification of Authorship,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 69:4 (March 2015): 427-54.

Sara Guyer, *Reading with John Clare: Biopoetics, Sovereignty, Romanticism* (Fordham UP, 2015).

Andrew Hodgson, “An Allusion to Robert Southwell in John Clare’s ‘The Flitting?’” *Notes and Queries* 62:3 (Sept. 2015): 410-12.

Isabel Karremann, “Human/Animal Relations in Romantic Poetry: The Creaturely Poetics of Christopher Smart and John Clare,” *European Journal of English Studies* 19:1 (April 2015): 94-110.

Simon Kösevi and Scott McEathron, eds., *New Essays on John Clare: Poetry, Culture and Community* (Cambridge UP: 2015)—see James McKusick’s review earlier in this issue!

Mukoma Wa Ngugi, *Chirality and the Politics of Authorized and Unauthorized English in the Works of John Clare and Amos Tutuola* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison: 2013).

Michael Nicholson, “The Itinerant ‘I’: John Clare’s Lyric Defiance,” *ELH* 82:2 (Summer 2015): 637-69.

Shalon Noble, “‘Homeless at Home’: John Clare’s Uncommon Ecology,” *Romanticism* 21:2 (July 2015): 171-81.

Ewa Panecka, “The Poet and the Real World: Linguistic and Literary Representation in the Poetry of John Clare and Thomas Hardy,” *Hardy Society Journal* 11:1 (Spring 2015): 36-54.

Chase Pielak, *Memorializing Animals During the Romantic Period* (Ashgate, 2015).

David Tagnani, “Identity, Anthropocentrism, and Ecocentrism in John Clare’s ‘To an Insignificant Flower,’” *Explicator* 72:1 (Jan.-Mar. 2014): 34-37.

Ve-Yin Tee, “The Moral Language of Nature,” *Romanticism* 21:2 (July 2015): 160-70.

Chris Washington, “John Clare and Biopolitics,” *European Romantic Review* 25:6 (Dec. 2014): 665-82.

## Officers

The officers of the Society are Eric Robinson (President), Bridget Keegan (Vice President), James McKusick (Executive Director), Stephanie Weiner (Newsletter Editor), and Erica McAlpine (Program Chair).



The John Clare Society of North America

