

# The John Clare Society of North America

## *Newsletter*

Volume Eighteen, February 2017



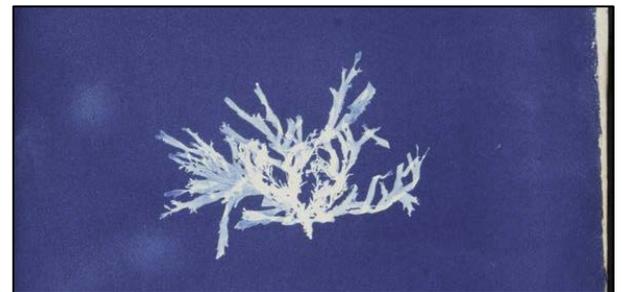
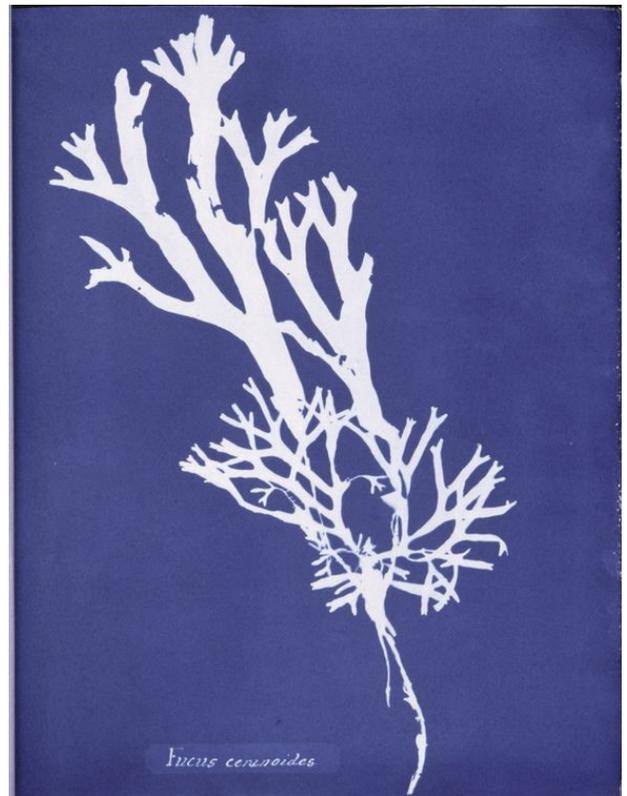
### From the New Editor

Seth T. Reno  
Auburn University at Montgomery

I am pleased to take over the newsletter editorship from Stephanie Kuduk Weiner, who is now Vice President of JCSNA. Stephanie did an amazing job with the *Newsletter* these past six years, and I hope I can continue her excellent work. I would like to thank Stephanie for her advice and support, as well as James McKusick for his invitation to serve as the new editor.

In this eighteenth volume of the *Newsletter*, I have continued the design and structure of recent volumes. This year's *Newsletter* contains "Musings" poems by American poet Barbara Wiedemann, a report on the panel at the MLA convention, a call for papers, a book review, a list of recent academic writings, and some images from botanist Anna Atkins's *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions* (1843-53).

In future volumes, I hope to continue the "musings" tradition and to help publicize and promote scholarly and creative work on Clare. So, please send me your musings, citations, references, essays, and notes, in whatever form. I can be reached at [sreno@aum.edu](mailto:sreno@aum.edu). I hope you enjoy the volume!



**Musings**  
*Three Poems*  
by *Barbara Wiedemann*

**“Returning to the River”**

On the bank above the Coosa,  
its water still, quiet, shimmering,  
reflecting clouds and moss-laden oaks,  
she stands gazing,  
not quite belonging to the scene,  
gathering the parts  
that used to be her.  
Here they can be pieced together.  
Here among the grass, the river, the distant cows,  
she can find the center

A slight breeze ripples the water  
and cools the October day.  
The bluffs turn golden in the slanting light,  
begging for a Constable or a Turner.  
Why is it people tear her apart  
and only trees and grass and sky  
can make her whole?

**“An Afternoon Visit to a Smaller World”**

The snake,  
eighteen inches  
pencil thin  
gray and beige stripes  
fits itself  
into the slight crevice  
of a gray and beige rock,  
a foot or so from the shore.  
There it suns itself  
joined by blue dragonflies.  
Slowly the snake  
s-curves onto a branch  
gently swayed by wind waves.  
There it waits and stares  
into the region beneath the surface,  
so still  
flies crawl along its length.  
Its orange tongue  
tastes the water

and by tasting it  
senses prey,  
or so it seems.  
A golden shiner,  
just a minnow really,  
ventures near,  
a sudden lunge  
a miss  
and the snake  
resumes its wait.  
Finally unnourished  
It curls back on itself  
to regain its island rock.

I continue my walk  
along Castle Lake  
and when I return  
the snake is gone—  
at least to me.

**“Homage to Beauty”**

In the Sangre de Cristo Mountains  
of New Mexico  
at ten thousand feet  
there is a small alpine meadow  
of only a few acres  
with a stream flowing through it.  
If you're still  
you can hear the water  
move over rocks  
and if you're really still  
you'll see elk at dawn  
grazing in the meadow  
with its many shades of green  
punctuated by patches  
of sunny yellow flowers  
each with hundreds  
of delicate petals.  
Botanists call them by a Latin name—  
we call them  
dandelions.



Barbara Wiedemann is an American poet and  
Professor Emeritus at Auburn University  
Montgomery.

**Proceedings of the John Clare Panel at  
the 2017 MLA Convention**  
*by Seth T. Reno*

At this year's MLA Convention in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the John Clare Society of North America convened the session "John Clare: The One and the Many," chaired by Erica McAlpine (St Edmund Hall, University of Oxford). The session included papers by Stephanie Kuduk Weiner (Wesleyan University), Richard Ness (University of Wisconsin-Madison), and Chris Washington (Francis Marion University).

In "Exemplary Figures in Clare's Descriptive Poems," Weiner argued that the many persons, animals, and birds that populate Clare's descriptive poetry occupy a curious space between individuality and typicality that can be best understood through the logic of exemplarity. These well-known figures offer vital, often unstated justifications for the existence of poems without definitive "points" or "endings," what Weiner calls the "poetry of non-statement." Poems from the middle period in particular offer exemplary figures to show that apparently trivial places and events are actually valuable and meaningful in their typical, illustrative, and archetypal nature. In Clare's later works, by contrast, Weiner finds true individuals, and, on the other side of exemplarity, beings who stand in for abstract ideas.

In "Invasive Natives and Abject Objects: John Clare and the Rhetoric of Division," Ness focused on Clare's fascination with what we might call the foreign, the invasive, and the undesirable: weeds, cesspools, gypsies, moles, wasteland, tree stumps. Ness argued that this fascination reflects Clare's poetic language, which disrupts our ability to divide the foreign and the native. By analyzing "Shadows of Taste" and "Taste," Ness revealed Clare's aesthetic to be similar to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "multiplicity." Clare brings objects into sharp focus as he blurs their contours,

capturing nuance so it can recede into the multiplicity of its environmental surround.

The final paper, "Birds Do It, Bees Do it: John Clare and the Nonhuman Origins of Love," examined Clare's trans-species theorization of love as a challenge to the alienation of humans from nonhumans inherent in capitalism. Washington argued that love is a form of poiesis that resists the typical human/anthropocentric vision of love and creates a non-ontological space-time. In readings of "I Am" and the sonnet "I Am," Washington showed that Clare captures the estranging features of nonhuman life that make love possible. As Clare sees it, avoiding a history that repeats the farcical tragedy of the commons of global capital requires a multitude built on a love engendered by nonhumans that are not mere fodder for human species preservation, but rather existences that alienate us from our own identity, our own anthropocentric "human I-amness," so that we may, finally, learn to love in common.



Seth T. Reno is an assistant professor of English at Auburn University Montgomery. He is the author of *Amorous Aesthetics: Intellectual Love in Romantic Poetry and Poetics, 1788-1853* (Liverpool UP, 2018), and co-editor of *Wordsworth and the Green Romantics: Affect and Ecology in the Nineteenth Century* (U of New Hampshire P, 2016).



## Call for Papers

The John Clare Society of North America invites proposals for its guaranteed session at the Modern Language Association Convention in New York City, 4-7 January 2018.

Title of session: "John Clare: Encounters." Scholarship on any aspect of "encounter" (mental or physical, human or animal), ecology, and/or interrelation in Clare's life and work.

Please submit an abstract and short bio by email to Dr. Erica McAlpine by 10 March 2017 ([erica.mcalpine@ell.ox.ac.uk](mailto:erica.mcalpine@ell.ox.ac.uk)).

Note: All MLA program participants must be members of the Modern Language Association by 1 April 2017. For further information on the convention, go to [www.mla.org/convention](http://www.mla.org/convention).

## Book Review

*by Stephanie Kuduk Weiner*

***John Clare: The Trespasser*, by John Goodridge and R. K. R. Thornton (Five Leaves, 2016), 90 pp., \$9.00**

"I could not wait till I got back without reading it and as I did not like to let any body see me reading on the road of a working day I clumb over the wall into Burghly Park and nestled in a lawn at the wall side the Scenery around me was uncommonly beautiful at that time of the year and what with reading the book and beholding the beautys of artful nature in the park I got into a strain of descriptive rhyming on my journey home this was 'the morning walk' the first thing I committed to paper" (*John Clare by Himself*, p. 11).

This is how Clare describes his experience of reading the first book he ever bought, a copy of James Thomson's *The Seasons*, and of writing down the first poem he ever rendered in pen and ink. As he becomes an author of his own text and a reader

of his own books, he also becomes a trespasser. Indeed, "one might say that his whole life would become a sort of trespass," write Goodridge and Thornton: "Clare writes repeatedly of his own confrontations with physical and metaphysical boundaries, and he deploys in his writings a large and motley army of boundary-breakers, trespassers, and other free spirits" (pp. 16, 18).

Goodridge and Thornton track Clare's representations of trespass across poems about humans and animals who move into and across private property, about enclosure, about gypsies and Scottish drovers, about the artful artlessness of unimproved spots, and about what they call "the politics of landscape" (p. 37). Taken together, these poems chart Clare's wide-ranging explorations of the "ideology and psychology of human boundedness and freedom," from his earliest pieces to the poems he wrote from the asylum (p. 37).

This lovely and accessible book, a revised and expanded version of an essay included in *John Clare in Context* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), makes a quiet methodological claim for interpreting Clare's corpus as a unified body of work. "Clare's power derives," the authors write, "from a deeply metaphorical understanding of the world [that] ties his poems together in an intricate web" (p. 7). "This web of ideas and images gives the poems a wonderful coherence and effectiveness," as these "complex and understated patterns" build themselves up within and across poems (p. 7).

*John Clare: The Trespasser* is an illuminating study, worthy of a place on any shelf.



Stephanie Kuduk Weiner is Professor of English at Wesleyan University. She is the author of *Clare's Lyric: John Clare and Three Modern Poets* (Oxford UP, 2014), as well as a number of articles on nineteenth-century British literature.

## Recent Academic Writings

Albernas, Joseph. "John Clare's World." *European Romantic Review*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2016, pp. 189-205.

Bedford, William. "The Flitting I.M. John Clare." *John Clare Society Journal*, vol. 35, 2016, pp. 53-58.

Bewell, Alan. *Natures in Translation: Romanticism and Colonial Natural History*. Johns Hopkins UP, 2016. (chapter 7 on Clare)

Burnett, Elizabeth-Jane. "Sounding the Non-Human in John Clare and Maggie O'Sullivan." *John Clare Society Journal*, vol. 35, 2016, pp. 31-52.

Chilcott, Tim. "John Clare's Language." *John Clare Society Journal*, vol. 35, 2016, pp. 5-22.

Farley, Paul. *John Clare: Poems*. Faber, 2016.

Goodridge, John, and R. K. R. Thornton. *John Clare: The Trespasser*. Five Leaves, 2016.

Haas, Ryan. *Sound and Vision: Sonic Experience in Wordsworth, Blake, and Clare*. Dissertation, Stanford University, 2016.

Houghton-Walker, Sarah. *John Clare's Religion*. Routledge, 2016.

Levine, Caroline. "Revaluing Repetition: John Clare's Verse-Thinking." *Modern Language Quarterly*, vol. 77, no. 1, 2016, pp. 65-80.

Lynes, Jeanette. "Introduction: My Own Ginton Spire." *John Clare Society Journal*, vol. 35, 2016, pp. 23-30.

Mahood, M. M. *A John Clare Flora*. Trent Editions, 2016.

Ottum, Lisa. "On (Not) Hugging Trees: Affect, Emotion, and Ecology in Wordsworth's 'Nutting.'" *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2016, pp. 257-281. (also discusses Clare)

Poetzsch, Markus. "The Ornithographies of John Clare and Henry David Thoreau." *Transatlantic Literary Ecologies: Nature and Culture in the Nineteenth-Century Anglophone Atlantic World*, edited by Kevin Hutchings and John Miller, Routledge, 2017, pp. 91-104.

Reno, Seth T. "John Clare and Ecological Love." *John Clare Society Journal*, vol. 35, 2016, pp. 59-76.

Rowney, Matthew. "Music in the Noise: The Acoustic Ecology of John Clare." *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2016, pp. 23-40.

## The Election of Society Officers

In accord with the bylaws of the John Clare Society of North America, the Board of Directors organized a secure online ballot in June 2016 to elect new officers to five-year terms. We had a ballot return rate of 60% from our current members, which is very impressive for this type of election. The vote was unanimously in favor of the slate presented to the membership by the Board; and accordingly the following officers are now elected to five-year terms, effective August 1, 2016: **President:** Bridget Keegan, Creighton University; **Vice President:** Stephanie Weiner, Wesleyan University; and **Executive Director:** James McKusick, University of Missouri-Kansas City.

In addition, two outstanding Clare scholars have been appointed by the Executive Board to serve in the following positions: **Program Chair:** Erica McAlpine, St. Edmund Hall, University of Oxford; and **Newsletter Editor:** Seth T. Reno, Auburn University at Montgomery.

Thank you very much to everyone who voted! A biographical sketch is posted for each of these officers on the JCSNA webpage: [www.johnclare.org](http://www.johnclare.org). The new officers look forward to working closely with all of our members to advance the scholarly and educational mission of the John Clare Society of North America.



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