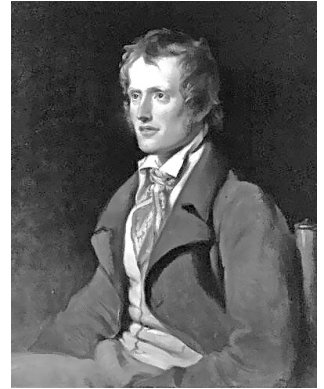


The John Clare Society of North America

Newsletter

Volume Sixteen, March 2015



From the Editor

This year's *Newsletter* contains a pair of "Musings" poems, a call for papers, a report on the proceedings of the panel at the recent MLA annual convention, and a list of recent academic writings about Clare. Please feel warmly encouraged to send me your "musings" in whatever form, citations of recent work, and accounts of events. I'd be very glad to hear from you. — Stephanie Kuduk Weiner, Wesleyan University



W. H. Miller & Co.

Musings Two Poems By Barton Sutter

An Apple Tree

Out back the Helpston tenement, a plot
Of vegetables and one large apple tree,
A Golden Russet, eased their poverty.
The apples grew so thick they often bought
The annual rent. John Clare clearly thought
Most highly of that tree, for he sent Hessey
And Taylor, confident that they'd agree,
A box that bulged with fruit they had not sought.

How I would love to take that little man
To stand out in our yard and simply stare
At Zestar, Sweet Sixteen, our orchard planted
So far back it bows with what it bears.
My wife would nudge him, tenderly demand,
"Will you have an apple, Mr. Clare? A pear?"



The Green Man Goes to Town

When Clare's first book appeared, his backers
brought him
Down to London, where the clown had never
been.
He wore a bright new coat, grass-green.
Well, what did he know? Who'd have taught
him?
Nervous but triumphant, all the rage,
He visited with Hazlitt, Charles Lamb,
And a fine soprano sang his poetry on stage.
His reputation high, a long way from "I Am."

I love that ghastly coat; it's so appropriate
For someone stupefied by city sights,
Who'd grown up botanizing, keeping pets,
And, stunned by London, kept on saying,
"Christ!"

This poet was a trophy. They had shot him.
They sent him home and gradually forgot him.



Barton Sutter lives in Minnesota and is a three-time winner of the Minnesota Book Award. His poems, stories, and essays have appeared in *Poetry*, *North American Review*, *Strong Measures* . . . and this newsletter.



Proceedings of the John Clare Panel at the 2015 MLA Convention

By Nathalie Wolfram

At the 2015 MLA Convention in Vancouver, B.C., the John Clare Society of North America convened the session "John Clare: Vanishings," chaired by Erica McAlpine (University of Oxford). Held on January 9, the session included papers by Simon Kövesi (Oxford Brookes University), Seth Reno (Auburn University at Montgomery), and Michael Nicholson (UCLA).

In "John Clare: Lost Poet of No Place," Kövesi resisted the dominant assumption that Clare is fundamentally a poet of place; rather, Clare is a poet of loss. In practical terms, he argued, physical place is vital to Britain's booming "literary heritage industry," including the John Clare Cottage and other sites that mark Clare's onetime presence. Yet Kövesi observes that unlike the paved roads and developments being named after the poet, Clare's poems are persistently "footloose" and "deracinated," resisting confinement. To illustrate what it means to look at Clare's poetry "when let loose from confines of nature and place," Kövesi closed with the example of Clare's poem "The Meeting," which over the course of the nineteenth century was set to music and even absorbed into the American folk tradition. Dislocated from Clare's name and the places associated with him, these musical adaptations suggest what his legacy might look like beyond the "poet of place."

In "Clare's Poetics of Love and the Vanishing of Subjectivity," Seth Reno asserted love as central to both Clare's poetry and to high romanticism more broadly. "Often deemed too sentimental or squishy" for critics' taste, love enables Clare's ecophilia and the resulting erasure of human subjectivity in his poems, Reno argued. Working within Wordsworth's dialectical model of self and erasure, Clare vanishes his own subjectivity through his "ecological love." By reading Clare's sonnets as love poems, Reno explored how such ecological love allowed Clare at once to assert and to vanish

the self. “Swordy Well,” for instance, opens with “I’ve loved thee,” then presents a speaker with a ghost-like, faded subjectivity whose thoughts mimic the orchids he is there to “botanize/ & hunt.” Through these close readings, Reno illustrated how the vanishing of subjectivity serves as a central motif in Clare’s middle and late-period poetry.

In “The Itinerant ‘I’: John Clare’s Lyric Defiance,” Michael Nicholson argued that Clare rejects the “clear and present lyric ‘I,’” opting instead for “vagrant lyric subjects” that reflect Clare’s relationship to enclosure as a field worker witnessing the ravaging and containment of the landscape around him. The “vanishing” of the pre-enclosure landscape, Nicholson argued, fueled his deliberately anachronistic itinerant “I” that resisted real, physical barriers and insisted on the common greens of Clare’s memory. Reading Clare’s lines, “When beneath old lea close oak I the bottom branches broke/ To make our harvest cart like so many working folk” in “Remembrances,” Nicholson observed that rhyme and assonance intertwine nature, labor, and community. These and so many other of Clare’s lyrics, he argued, depart from Wordsworth’s self-contained lyric “I,” enabling instead a subject who is itinerant and resistant to boundaries, enclosure, and confinement. In this and other of Clare’s love sonnets, Nicholson argued, the speaker pursues solitary love rambles that illustrate the interdependence of nature and illustrate how, for Clare, poetry is a source of affect.



Nathalie Wolfram received her Ph.D. from Yale University and is currently an adjunct assistant professor at the University of Montana. Her work on eighteenth-century fiction and drama has appeared in the journal *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* and in the collection *Theatre and Ghosts: Materiality, Performance, and Modernity* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).



Call for Papers

The topic for the 2016 panel will be “After John Clare.” Scholarship on any aspect of Clare’s influence on nineteenth, twentieth, or twenty-first century writers and/or his poetry’s continuing relevance to the field of lyric studies is welcome. Please submit an abstract and short bio by email to Dr. Erica McAlpine by March 15, 2015.

The MLA Convention will be held in Austin, Texas, January 7-10, 2016.

Recent Academic Writings

Alison Hawthorne Deming, “The Gravity of the Living (and Three Kinds of Lightness),” *American Poetry Review* 43.3 (May-June 2014): 9-11.

Nancy Derbyshire, *John Clare: Helpston's Amanuensis*, City University of New York, Graduate Center (2013).

Simon Kösevi, “John Clare’s Horizons,” *Essays in Criticism: A Quarterly Journal of Literary Criticism* 63.4 (Oct. 2013): 375-92.

Erin Lafford and Emma Mason, “Falling from Trees: Arborescent Prosody in John Clare’s Tree Elegies,” in *The Eudaimonic Turn: Well-Being in Literary Study*, ed. James O. Pawelski, D. J. Moores, and Adam Potkay (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2014): 97-113.

David Tagnani, "Identity, Anthropocentrism, and Egocentrism in John Clare's 'To an Insignificant Flower,'" *Explicator* 72.1 (Jan.-Mar. 2014): 34-37.

Adam White, "The Order of Authors: Degrees of 'Popularity' and 'Fame' in John Clare's Writing," *Authorship* 3.1 (2014): [no pagination].

Thomas Williams, "George Crabbe and John Clare: Refinement and Reading," *Romanticism* 20.2 (July 2014): 174-84.

Revised Clare Reference Book

Second Edition of the Scholarly Research Guide
By David Powell (1925-2012)

SECOND EDITION

First Publications of John Clare's Poems
by David Powell

A revised and augmented second edition of the 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). In this volume, readers of John Clare can discover where each of his poems first appeared in print. The second edition is thoroughly revised and augmented on the basis of new research, with dozens of poems and places of first publication appearing here for the first time.

This spiral-bound paperback book lies flat for ease of reference. It is exclusively available from

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Erica McAlpine becomes Program Chair of the Society

Erica McAlpine has assumed the position of Program Chair for the John Clare Society of North America. McAlpine, Robin Geffen Career Development Fellow in English at Keble College, Oxford, has published essays about nineteenth- and twentieth-century poets from Keats to Bishop, including "Keeping Nature at Bay: John Clare's Poetry of Wonder" (*Studies in Romanticism* [Spring 2011]), as well as her own poems.

She is currently finishing a book manuscript entitled *Lyric Elsenhere*, which explores the similarities between psychological mechanisms of defense and formal displacement of perspective in poems. She is also at work on a book entitled *The Poet's Mistake*, which investigates the tension between errors of craft and moments of unintended creativity.

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



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