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, Kadzü 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 by March 15, 2016.
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


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!


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).