

Volume Twenty-Three, February 2022

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# The John Clare Society of North America Newsletter





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## From the Editor

Many of us thought we would return to some semblance of our regular routines and activities in 2021, but it has been another irregular year, both personally and professionally. Conferences and symposia have remained largely in the virtual world, and so we've lost out on the many convivial aspects related to the JCSNA. But there were several excellent Clare-related virtual events, including the annual session at the MLA Convention, as well as some new and exciting publications. This year's newsletter celebrates those events and publications, and it includes a CFP for next year's MLA Convention, a list of recent academic writings, and, as always, some wonderful new poems by Barbara Wiedemann. I hope you enjoy the volume, and let's hope for more in-person Clare events in 2022!

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## Seth T. Reno ([sreno@aum.edu](mailto:sreno@aum.edu))

Seth Reno is Distinguished Research Associate Professor at Auburn University Montgomery. He is author of *Early Anthropocene Literature in Britain, 1750-1884* (Palgrave, 2020) and *Amorous Aesthetics: Intellectual Love in Romantic Poetry and Poetics, 1788-1853* (Liverpool University Press, 2019); editor of *The Anthropocene: Approaches and Contexts for Literature and the Humanities* (Routledge, 2021) and *Romanticism and Affect Studies* (Romantic Circles, 2018); and co-editor of *Wordsworth and the Green Romantics: Affect and Ecology in the Nineteenth Century* (University of New Hampshire Press, 2016).

# Musings: Two Poems by Barbara Wiedemann

## Requiem for the Bees

The bees are still here  
in these Appalachian mountains.  
The bees are still here  
finding the yellow flowers  
the dwarf golden asters, the butterweed, and others  
that decorate the grasses in the meadow  
bordered by birch and spruce.  
The bees are still here  
and the buzzing reaches my ears  
mingled with the sound of the wind in the trees.  
The bees are still here  
amid the flowers and grasses,  
plants untouched by pesticides and herbicides  
uncontaminated by genetic modification.  
The bees are still here in the cool mountain air  
and so are the butterflies—  
painted ladies and yellow swallowtails.

Unlike my home in Alabama  
where in my yard planted with jasmine,  
both Confederate and North Carolina,  
planted with three kinds of salvia, gardenias  
yarrow and so much more,  
there are no honey bees.  
The zucchinis flower gloriously  
but bear no fruit

## Camping at Hartman Rocks

What do I have to do this morning  
but drink my coffee and eat a bagel?  
What do I have to do  
but watch the chipmunks  
scurry around searching for seeds?  
What do I have to do  
but look out over the sage-covered mesa  
alive with doves, ravens, and Western bluebirds,  
the same mesa that harbors a rare milk vetch?  
What do I have to do  
but gaze at the red granite boulders and cliffs  
and the snowy peaks of Crested Butte beyond?

What do I have to do  
or maybe the question is  
what can I do to save all this  
for my grandchildren  
and their grandchildren.  
What can I do?

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**Barbara Wiedemann** is an American poet and Professor Emeritus at Auburn University Montgomery. Her most recent chapbook is *Desert Meditations* (Finishing Line Press, 2018).



## Proceedings of the John Clare Panel at the 2022 MLA Convention

by James McKusick

This year's session for the John Clare Society of North America at the MLA Convention was entitled "John Clare and Extravagance." The session was organized and chaired by Erica McAlpine (St. Edmund Hall, University of Oxford) and included three scholars working on interdisciplinary approaches to Clare: John Rooney (The Ohio State University), Moinak Choudhury (University of Minnesota, Twin Cities), and Brian Milthorpe (University of Wisconsin-Madison).

In "A Weed in Nature's Poesy": Rewriting the Georgic Progress Poem in John Clare's 'Progress of Rhyme,'" Rooney argued that Clare's poem transgresses the neoclassical conventions of the 18th-century progress poem. Instead, Clare imagines a progress poem that surges inward and earthward in a lyrical renunciation of advancement. Since John Philips's *Cyder* (1708), the oft-paired georgic and progress poem had conflated expression and expansion, communication and conquest. Positioning Clare's poem as an extravagant Romantic reaction to the 18th-century georgic revival, Rooney explained how Clare's georgic reverses the roles of poem/nature and poet/laborer in envisioning "poesy" that has sown Clare. Clare envisions a georgic whose self-culture refuses mastery and a progress poem whose voice privileges denaturalized utterance over expansionist rhetoric. In examining Clare's subversion of the progress poem's formal conventions, Rooney suggested that "The Progress of Rhyme" is the song on the other side of the georgic process, nature's verdant negation of the poet's markedly endeavor. Poesy is not Clare's flower; Clare is poesy's weed.



In “The Reasoning Jargon of Unreasoning Fools’: John Clare and *Sensus Communis*,” Choudhury elucidated how Clare’s expansive sense of self/society and language/space breaks the bounds of emerging disciplinary distinctions to reinforce the notion of *sensus communis*. Clare’s poetics of resistance reengages with the prevailing 19th-century conception of common sense. On the one hand, Clare presents a defense of the commons as an expansive space allowing new empirical associations and formations of taste to counter prescriptive visions of the professional disciplines; simultaneously, his poetics challenges the language of the Poor Laws and the Reform Acts. Clare’s poetry resists both an inward withdrawal into nature and the 19th-century impetus towards linguistic, disciplinary, and spatial fragmentation.

In the final paper, “Clare’s Vagabond Vision,” Milthorpe explored Clare’s fascination with contemporary visual technological. In an 1821 letter to John Taylor, Clare commented on the appeal of a popular spectacle: “but let me wait another year or two & the peep show will be over.” The portable viewing apparatuses known as peep shows were indissociable from the itinerant showmen who deployed them to treat spectators to intimate glimpses of distant visas, enhanced by backlighting, rudimentary animation, and optical effects. Perpetually out of place, the traveling peepshow man, like Clare himself, became a classed guarantor of a rarefied spectacle. Milthorpe placed Clare’s poetics of peeping within contemporary visual technologies like the peep show and demonstrated how such a techno-poetics anticipates early 20th-century work in the miniature world of puppet animation. Clare’s poems employ a unique kind of pre-cinematic visual technology to attract and repel visual participation while interrogating the lines between the animal and artifactual, human and nonhuman, mobile and static.

James McKusick is Professor of English at the University of Missouri–Kansas City. He serves as executive director of the John Clare Society of North America and president of the Wordsworth-Coleridge Association. He is author of *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology* (Palgrave, 2000).

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**Call For Papers MLA 2023:** The JCSNA invites paper proposals for its guaranteed panel at the MLA Convention in San Francisco, 5–8 January 2023.

Abstracts of 250–300 words are welcome on any aspect of John Clare’s writings, his life and times, and the work of his contemporaries. Please submit abstract and short bio by 15 March 2022 to Dr. Erica McAlpine at:

**[erica.mcalpine@ell.ox.ac.uk](mailto:erica.mcalpine@ell.ox.ac.uk)**



## New Book Spotlight

Erica McAlpine's *The Poet's Mistake* (Princeton UP, 2020), which includes a chapter dedicated to John Clare, has garnered much attention over the past two years, including reviews and write-ups in *The Guardian*, the *LA Review of Books*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, and *The New York Review of Books*.

Poetry—even by the greats—is rife with mistakes. McAlpine gather together numerous instances of these errors, from well-known historical gaffes to never-before-noticed grammatical incongruities, misspellings, and solecisms. But unlike the many critics and other readers who consider such errors felicitous or essential to the work itself, she makes a compelling case for calling a mistake a mistake, arguing that denying the possibility of error does a disservice to poets and their poems. McAlpine demonstrates that the study of poetry's mistakes is also a study of critical attitudes toward mistakes, which are usually too generous—and often at the expense of the poet's intentions. Through remarkable close readings of Wordsworth, Keats, Browning, Clare, Dickinson, Crane, Bishop, Heaney, Ashbery, and others, *The Poet's Mistake* shows that errors are an inevitable part of poetry's making and that our responses to them reveal a great deal about our faith in poetry—and about how we read.

# The Poet's Mistake

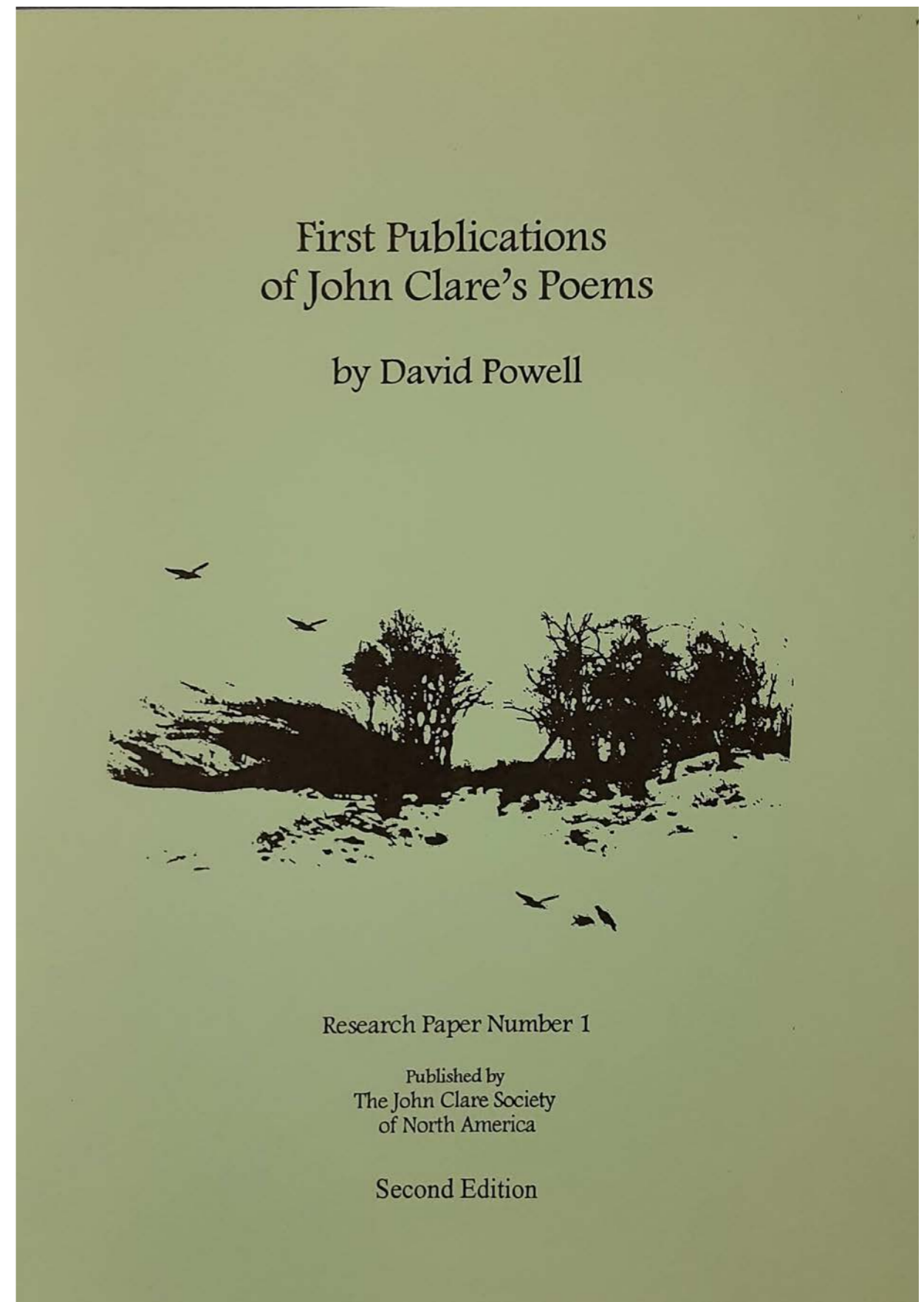


ERICA McALPINE

# New Edition Spotlight

David Powell's *First Publications of John Clare's Poems* (John Clare Society of North America, 2009) is now available as a free e-book at: <https://www.johnclare.org/PowellBook.htm>

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, published in 2009, was 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. Reflecting many years of scholarly research by a distinguished editor of Clare's poetry, this indispensable volume provides a comprehensive survey of Clare's poems published in books and periodicals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Every scholar of John Clare—especially those who are engaged in research concerning the reception history of Clare's poetry in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—should obtain a copy of this essential work. Readers of John Clare's poetry will be fascinated to learn where each one of his poems was first published.



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## Recent Academic Writings

Collins, Jayme. "John Clare in Neon: Environmental Crisis and the Poetics of the Field." *The Wordsworth Circle* 52, no. 3 (2021): 415–432.

Cooper, Lauren. "John Clare's 'Lament of Swordy Well' as Wasteland." *The Wordsworth Circle* 52, no. 3 (2021): 401–414.

Doyle, Sarah. "'Four Seasons Fill the Measure of the Year': Romantic Meteorology." *Keats-Shelley Review* 35, no. 1 (2021): 93–99.

McAlpine, Erica. *The Poet's Mistake*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020. (fourth chapter on John Clare)

McGrath, Brian. "Common Catastrophes: or, Personification Reconsidered." In *Trauma and Literature in an Age of Globalization*. Edited by Jennifer Ballengee and David Kelman. London: Routledge, 2021. 50–64.

Sehna, Tyler Martin. "'In Nature There Is Nothing Melancholy': Romantic Poetry and Selfish Constructions of Nature and Sadness." *New Literaria* 2, no. 1 (2021): n. pag.

Swann, Karen. "John Clare: The Sonnet 'Ill at Rest'." *The Wordsworth Circle* 52, no. 2 (2021): 200–216.







The John Clare Society of North America

## Officers of the John Clare Society of North America

The John Clare Society of North America is a non-profit literary organization devoted to the study, preservation, and publication of the works of John Clare. Officers are elected by the membership for a term of five years.

**President:** Bridget Keegan, Creighton University

**Vice President:** Stephanie Kuduk Weiner, Wesleyan University

**Executive Director:** James McKusick, University of Missouri–Kansas City

**Program Chair:** Erica McAlpine, St. Edmund Hall, University of Oxford

**Newsletter Editor:** Seth Reno, Auburn University at Montgomery

For further information, please visit: [www.johnclare.org](http://www.johnclare.org)