

Volume Twenty-Five, February 2024

The John Clare Society of North America Newsletter





From the Editor

This year's newsletter celebrates Clare-related events and publications, including a CFP for next year's MLA Convention in New Orleans, a list of recent academic writings on Clare, and, as always, some wonderful new poems by Barbara Wiedemann (Professor Emerita, Auburn University at Montgomery). I hope you enjoy the volume, and I hope you have a wonderful spring. I'm reminded of some lines about spring by Mary Oliver, certainly a Clare-inspired poet: "Well, who doesn't want the sun after a long winter?" and "There is only one question: / How to love this world." I think this one question also drives much of Clare's poetry, as when he writes, "The Spring comes in with all her hues and smells, / In freshness breathing over hills and dells; / O'er woods where May her gorgeous drapery flings, / And meads washed fragrant by their laughing springs."

Seth T. Reno (sreno@aum.edu)

Seth Reno is Associate Professor of English 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 William Delisle Hay's *The Doom of the Great City* (COVE, 2022) and *Wordsworth and the Green Romantics: Affect and Ecology in the Nineteenth Century* (University of New Hampshire Press, 2016). He is currently working on an OA anthology of lesser-known industrial literature from the 18th and 19th centuries, titled *Popular British Industrial Writing: A Critical Anthology*.

Musings: Two Poems by Barbara Wiedemann

The Pelican Squadron (of Brief, Pod, Pouch, Scoop)

The pelicans appear out of the fog
like ghosts apparitions spirits
Not quite here barely visible silent.

I hear the waves roiling the sand
I hear the water-rounded pebbles tumbling
I hear the wind fluttering my nylon jacket.

The pelicans appear and disappear into the grayness
as if they never existed.

Specter-like another squadron emerges
flying north on this Oregon coast near Langlois,
a coast with boulders driftwood sand
and a lazing sea lion
the only intruders my dog and I.

Pelicans and a sea lion with the gray ocean and sky,
the scene feels timeless and yet . . .

Barbara Wiedemann is an American poet and Professor Emerita of English at Auburn University Montgomery. She is author of four chapbooks published by Finishing Line Press, including *Desert Meditations* (2018), *Death of a Pope and Other Poems* (2013), *Sometime in October* (2010), and *Half-Life of Love* (2008). Her poems also appear in journals such as *Southern Women's Review*, *California Quarterly*, *Feminist Studies*, *Kerf*, and *Riverwind*. In 2019, she received a nomination for a Pushcart Prize.

Mountains and Trees and Caterpillars

In the Manzano Mountains of New Mexico
dense with ponderosa pines and Douglas fir
and bigtooth maples, leaves now scarlet and gold,
a caterpillar, strikingly chartreuse,
with thin black strips along its length
and bands of green tufts circling the body
tufts with poisonous spikes,
this caterpillar undulates along a gray rock.

On this mid September day
the green caterpillar senses a change
the air is cooler, the days are shorter
and it knows.

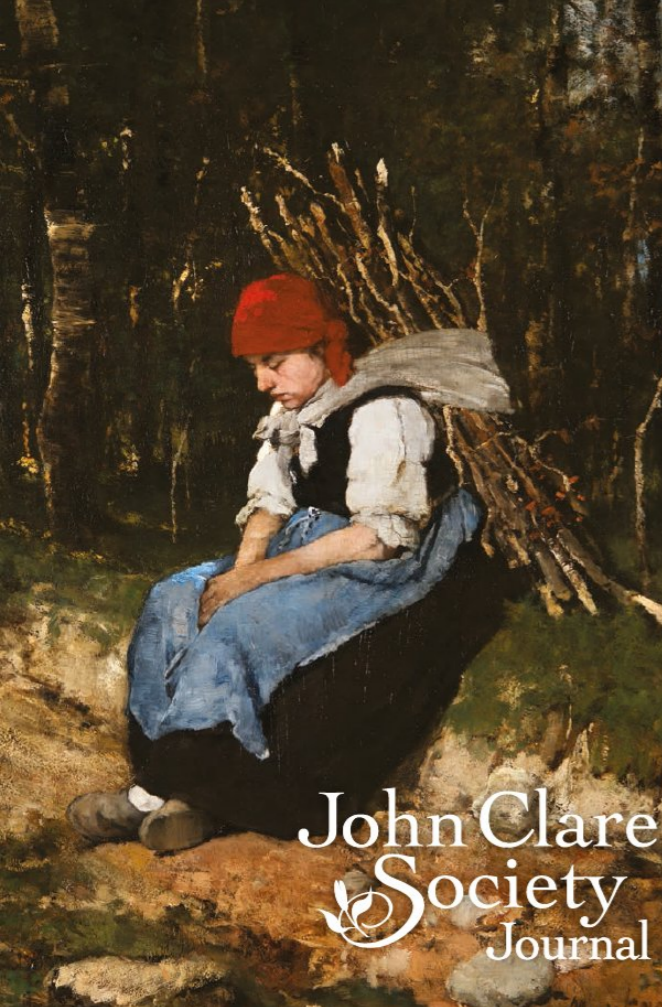
It knows
the days of nibbling and munching
the leaves of Gambel oak saplings
are nearing an end.

It knows
to spin a cocoon
and wait
slowly transforming
into a zephyr eyed silkmoth.

And we also know things—
how to destroy cities with our weapons
how to melt the glaciers
how to acidify the oceans.

We can even raise the temperature of the earth
a feat never before imagined.

But we can't create one green caterpillar.



Proceedings of the John Clare Panel at the 2024 MLA Convention

by James McKusick

This year's session for the John Clare Society of North America at the MLA Convention in Philadelphia was entitled "John Clare: Shifting Critical Approaches." The session was organized and chaired by Erica McAlpine (St. Edmund Hall, University of Oxford). The session featured three scholars working on interdisciplinary approaches to Clare: Jacob Risinger (The Ohio State University), Elena Rotzokou (Columbia University), and Diana Little (Princeton University).

In "John Clare: Influence Beyond Anxiety," Jacob Risinger started by putting Clare in some good but not altogether typical company. Milton's muse tended to strike at night, leaving him with so many lines of blank verse that he occasionally complained in the morning that "he wanted to be milked." Years later, the spirit of Milton took possession of William Blake, entering through his left foot to open up "new regions of the Imagination." Later still, in Harlem in 1948, the spirit of Blake appeared to Allen Ginsberg, offering a vision that he would describe as "my life work in Poesy." Accounts of literary influence have long been skeptical of cases like these, in which inspiration bypasses volition and seems to work by dispossession—one's self set aside to make way for the fruitful vision of another. In his presentation, Risinger looked past speculation about pathology and performance to describe Clare's exploration of a radical openness to influence. He contended that Clare's receptiveness to influence models a better way of thinking about not just where poetry comes from, but what it can do in the world.



In “Repetition and Clare’s Lyric of Withdrawn Revelation: A Twist on Allegorical Doublespeak,” Elena Rotzokou focused on what she terms Clare’s “lyric of withdrawn revelation,” in which the lyric subject attempts to inscribe a nonhuman natural object in its discourse both for mimetic and expressive purposes, but is prevented from doing so due to the nonhuman’s radical dissimilarity to the human. Clare’s triple sonnet “The Flood” exemplifies this type of lyric by deploying allegory to establish an affinity between human subject and nonhuman object that functions on the subject’s own terms. The poem’s prosodic, sound, and rhetorical patterning facilitates allegory’s logic of resemblance insofar as regular repetition appeals to the human conceptual appetite for patterns; as a result, the nonhuman object’s proneness to regularly patterned discourse suggests the object’s likeness to the human lyric subject. Syntactic and figurative irregularity, however, emerges equally as an iterative form in this lyric to clash with regular repetition and disrupt the logic of affinity that the latter furthers. The conceptual dissonance that is generated by the subject’s effort to experience the nonhuman points to the nonhuman object’s status not as a transcendental signified, but as an extra-discursive context that informs lyric utterance.

In “‘Weaves of Homely Stuff’: John Clare’s Nest Sonnets and Formal Ecologies,” Diana Little observed that Clare often uses the sonnet form to explore the role of birds’ nests as “dwellings,” evoking the Ancient Greek root of natural economy or ecology, *oikos*. Clare’s understanding of ecological dwelling emerges out of his experimentation with poetic form. The evocative entanglements of the sonnet’s interwoven rhyme scheme make the sonnet an apt vessel for representing the nest, a dwelling made of intertwined leaves, sticks, rocks, mud, and grasses. How, then, does Clare imagine the sonnet as a dwelling space, as a “weave of *homely* stuff?” What do his nest sonnets

suggest about entanglements of poetic form within material ecologies? Romantic-period poets saw poetry not as the mere mimicry of nature but as *poiesis*, or world-making. Clare’s nest sonnets exemplify this world-making endeavor. In “The Thrushes Nest,” for example, Clare highlights the thrush’s material and poetic forming: “How true she warped the moss to form her nest / And modelled it within with wood and clay.” Here, the thrush is home-maker, sculptor, and poet. Language and form become for Clare materials to be “warped” and “modelled” into living ecologies. Considering Clare’s nest sonnets allows us to better understand how Romantic experimentations with forms and genres were informed by a developing field of ecological science.

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James McKusick 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). He is Professor Emeritus at the University of Missouri–Kansas City.

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Call For Papers MLA 2025: The JCSNA invites paper proposals for its guaranteed panel at the MLA Convention in New Orleans, 9–12 January 2025.

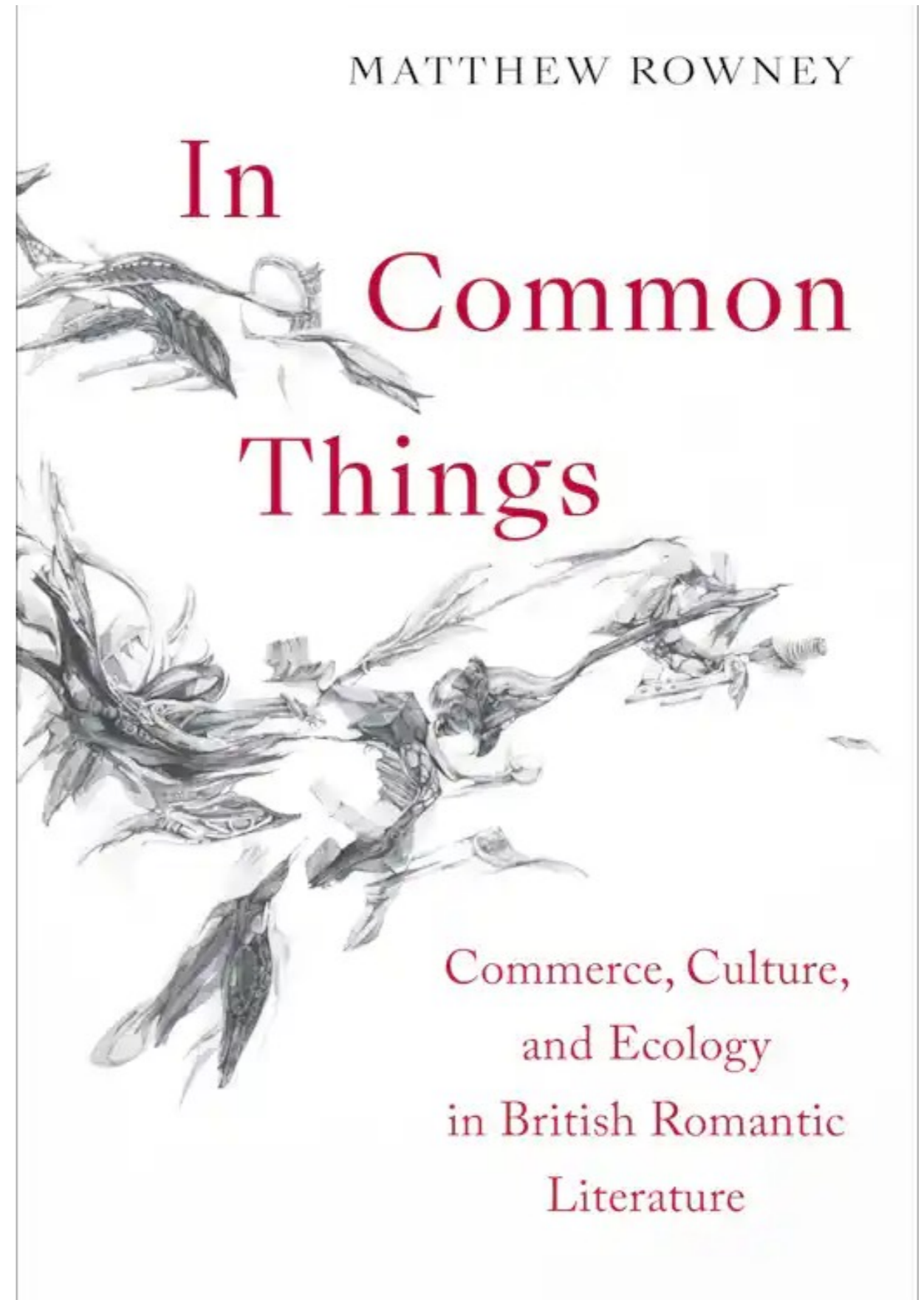
Scholarship on any aspect of Clare’s poetry, prose, life, and/or sphere of influence is welcome.

Abstract and short bio by 15 March 2024 to Erica McAlpine at erica.mcalpine@ell.ox.ac.uk

New Book Spotlight

Matthew Rowney's new book, *In Common Things* (U of Toronto P, 2022), contains much discussion and analysis of John Clare's poetry.

The hardness of stone, the pliancy of wood, the fluidity of palm oil, the crystalline nature of salt, and the vegetable qualities of moss—each describes a way of being in and understanding the world. These substances are both natural objects hailed in Romantic literature and global commodities within a system of extraction and exchange that has driven climate change, representing the paradox of the modern relation to materiality. *In Common Things* examines these five common substances in the literature of Romantic period authors, excavating their cultural, ecological, and commodity histories. The book argues that the substances and their histories have shaped cultural consciousness, and that Romantic era texts formally encode this shaping. Matthew Rowney draws together processes, beings, and things, both from the Romantic period and from our current ecological moment, to re-invoke a lost heritage of cultural relations with common substances. Enabling a fresh reading of Romantic literature, *In Common Things* prompts a reevaluation of the simple, the everyday, and the common, in light of their contributions to our contemporary sense of ourselves and our societies.



Recent Academic Writings

Bate, Jonathan. "Eliza Emerson Reads *The Village Minstrel*." *John Clare Society Journal* 42 (2023): 29–34.

Broadhead, Alex. "John Clare and the Northamptonshire Dialect: Rethinking Language and Place." *John Clare Society Journal* 42 (2023): 47–68.

Goodridge, John. "After Reading in a Letter Proposals for Building a Cottage." *John Clare Society Journal* 42 (2023): 8–10.

Gunaratnam, Anjalee. "Aliens of Our World: Nineteenth-Century Naturalists in H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* and John Clare's Bird Poems." *Wellsian: The Journal of the H.G. Wells Society* 46 (2023): 7–23.

Hodgson, Andrew, and Erin Lafford. "An Index of Significant Publications on John Clare, 2019–2020." *John Clare Society Journal* 42 (2023): 119–122.

Keegan, Bridget. "To an Hour-Glass." *John Clare Society Journal* 42 (2023): 23–24.

Kövesi, Simon. "A Length of Road: Interview with Robert Hamberger." *John Clare Society Journal* 42 (2023): 87–96.

Lafford, Erin. "The Wild-Flower Nosegay." *John Clare Society Journal* 42 (2023): 18–20.

Lafford, Erin, and Matthew Ward. "Funny Feelings in Nature." *European Romantic Review* 34, no. 3 (2023): 329–340.

Mason, Emma. "Langley Bush." *John Clare Society Journal* 42 (2023): 13–14.

McEathron, Scott. "The Last of March." *John Clare Society Journal* 42 (2023): 15–17.

McKusick, Jim. "To the Ivy." *John Clare Society Journal* 42 (2023): 25–26.

Pedlar, Valerie. "To an Infant Daughter." *John Clare Society Journal* 42 (2023): 11–12.

Peters, Jens. "John Clare's Reception in Germany in the Nineteenth Century." *John Clare Society Journal* 42 (2023): 97–118.

Ridgwell, Stephen. "'Come Prime Your Guns': Fellowship, Protest, and Performance in John Clare's Robin Hood Ballads and 'The Poachers'." *John Clare Society Journal* 42 (2023): 69–86.

Stafford, Fiona. "Winter." *John Clare Society Journal* 42 (2023): 27–28.

Wilson, Nic. "John Clare's Contemporaries: The Anonymous Versifier." *John Clare Society Journal* 42 (2023): 35–46.

Zimmerman, Sara. "Written in Autumn." *John Clare Society Journal* 42 (2023): 21–22.





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.

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For further information, please visit: www.johnclare.org