

Volume Twenty-Six, February 2025

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 Toronto, 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 one of my favorite poems by Mary Oliver, "When I Am Among the Trees," which I often turn to in times of uncertainty. The trees, she writes, give up a simple model of what it means to be alive: "Around me the trees stir in their leaves / and call out, 'Stay awhile.' / The light flows from their branches. / And they call again, 'It's simple,' they say, / 'and you too have come / into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled / with light, and to shine.'"

Seth T. Reno (sreno@aum.edu)

Seth Reno is 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 open access 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

Out of the Ashes Come Saplings

After the fires—

fires started by lightning strikes
or a careless camper,
fires worsened by drought,

some blazes left to burn and smolder
some combated by chemical-dropping DC-10s
some attacked by smokejumpers

After the fires—

fires that caused road closures and evacuations
fires that burned houses and towns—
the Dixie fire consuming 900,000 acres,
leveling the town of Greenville,

the Camp Fire destroying Paradise,
the Mt. Adams fire, the Stehekin fire
and so many others
too numerous to mention—

fires that causes devastation

After the fires—

first bare ground blackened trunks erosion

Within a season sprout the fire follower flowers—
fireweed with tall purple blossoms vibrant against charred
pines
red poppies and paintbrush, yellow arnica, white fire lilies
the startling green grasses and ferns—

all born of fire.

After the fires—

the knobcone pines of Oregon
the sequoias of California
release their seeds the blazes necessary.

In a hundred years a mature forest
if drought persists then a meadow.

After the fires—

renewal and regeneration

when nature's given a chance.

Near the Bristlecone Pine Forest in the White Mountains

Near the bristlecone pines,
the world's oldest living organisms,
some around before the pyramids,
I camp alone but for my dog.

When night falls and the wind lessens
when the insects cease foraging
and the birds still,
silence reigns.

And then you hear your body
your inhaling and exhaling
your swallowing your heart beating.

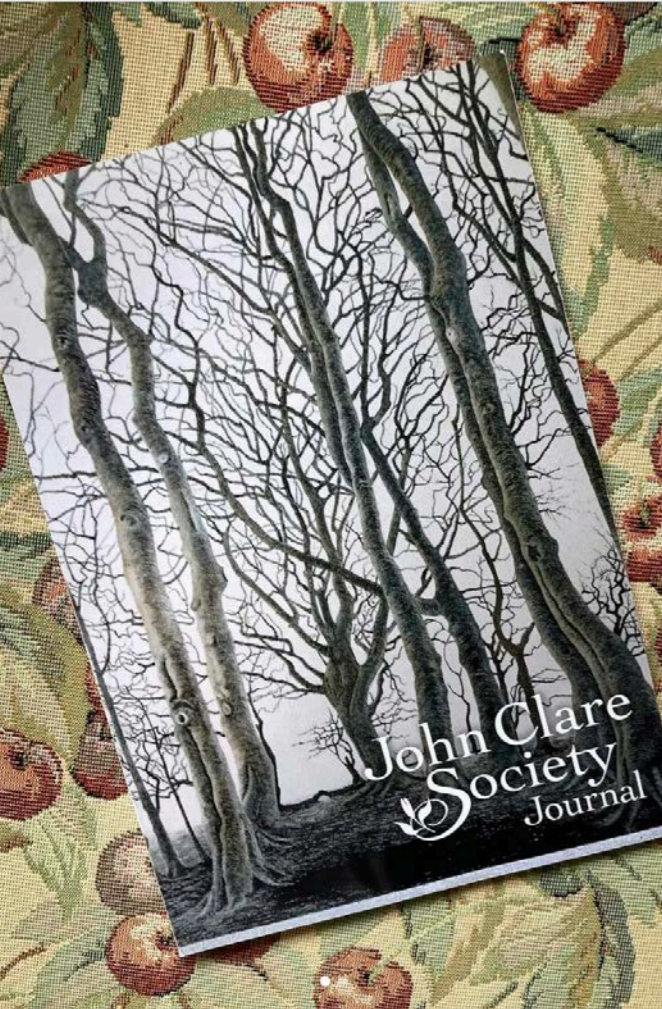
And if it's truly quiet, you hear something else,
the sound of blood coursing
through your arteries your veins.
the "forbidden blood song."*

So very quiet it must be to hear this
never in a city or town,
never in our tech-driven life.

But after a while you're grateful
for the distant storm the rising wind
for the small unseen animal
gnawing on something unknown.
You're grateful for life beyond yours.

* Caity Weaver, "I wanted to hear the forbidden blood song,"
NYT 11/23/22

Barbara Wiedemann is an American poet and Professor Emerita at Auburn University Montgomery. She is author of four chapbooks published by Finishing Line Press: *Desert Meditations* (2018), *Death of a Pope and Other Poems* (2013), *Sometime in October* (2010), and *Half-Life of Love* (2008). Her new book of poetry, *Following the Snow Leopard* (Kelsay Books), will be available this fall. Some of the poems in that book were first published in this newsletter. Wiedemann's poems also appear in journals such as *Southern Women's Review*, *California Quarterly*, *Feminist Studies*, *Kerf*, and *Riverwind*.



Proceedings of the John Clare Panel at the 2025 MLA Convention

by James McKusick

This year's session for the John Clare Society of North America at the MLA Convention in New Orleans was entitled "John Clare and Change." The session was organized by Erica McAlpine and chaired by James McKusick. The session featured **Cassandra Falke** (Arctic University of Norway), **Olivia Rosane** (independent scholar), and **Simon Kövesi** (University of Glasgow). The session was very well-attended, and lively discussion ensued.

In "Unreturning Seasons: The Lyric Present after Habitat Loss," Falke investigated the ways that habitat loss, especially the loss of ancient woodland indicator species and woodland biodiversity, impacts the temporality of Clare's lyrics. As Jonathan Culler argues, the use of "unmarked nonprogressive present tense with occurrences" signals a unique lyric temporality that readers inhabit in the "iterable now of lyric enunciation." Clare is a master of this "iterable now," making impossible but tempting requests that readers "stoop" and "seek" the wonders he finds right now, before his speaker moves onward to show us something else. The "now" and "here" of Clare's poems often include seasonal change as a scale of temporality between the abstract eternity of lyric possibility and the specific time-boundedness of a reader's life in the present day. However, in cases where Clare describes species that only thrive in ancient or long-established woodlands, today's readers experience the poem's now as a lost possibility removed from the cyclical eternity of seasons relegated to a linear historical past. Throughout his poetic career, Clare leans in toward and sits among specific species of flower, bug, and tree, taking comfort in their seasonal revivification. Falke's presentation focused mainly on Clare's sonnet "Wood Anemone" and the sixteen-line "Summer."



In “Settled Science and ‘Unsettled Homes’: On John Clare’s Swallows,” Rosane examined Clare’s poem “On Seeing Two Swallows Late in October” in the context of late eighteenth-century theories of bird migration. Clare’s predecessors and influencers Gilbert White and Charlotte Smith were both uncertain regarding whether swallows migrated southward or hibernated locally in the winter. Unlike White and Smith, Clare accepts the migration of swallows as settled science, and yet his acceptance of their migration is an “unsettled” one, as Clare wishes the swallows would “cheat the surly winter” and remain resident in England. Rosane argued that, by responding to the migration of swallows, Clare is able to express his own poems—depict the nest and the flight, the right to abode and the right to roam—as positively interdependent. Yet by focusing on swallows, whose flight had been so contested by natural historians in the recent past, Clare is able to complicate that positivity with a more uncanny, existential quandary about the impermanence of both staying and going.

In “How Should We Edit John Clare? Copyright, the Politics of Language, and Textual Criticism,” Simon Kövesi celebrated the definitive Oxford English Texts edition that Clare studies has as its foundational, scholarly bedrock. But he worries about the lingering effect of this edition’s copyright claim, and how—even after that claim has been fully rescinded—it was used to authorize one editorial methodology, which remains the dominant presentational style today. This editorial approach was often referred to as textual primitivism, but is more accurately called a “diplomatic transcript” methodology. Kövesi maintains that we are now in a new world, where future editors can freely transcribe from the manuscripts, and that Clare studies is urgently in need of contrasting selections of the works, and contrasting presentational styles. Offering an editorial history of an 1836 sonnet—commonly called “The

Mouse’s Nest”—Kövesi showed how challenging editing Clare can be, since it offers up so many options: whether it be through varied interpretations of handwritten text; adding titles to untitled poems; “correcting” orthography; adding, removing, or modernizing punctuation; maintaining or standardizing Clare’s grammar; whether we set line indentation for rhyme scheme or add paragraphing of prose; whether we maintain Clare’s frequent use of the ampersand or convert to “and.” Kövesi focused on the editorial presentation of the odd word “sexpools,” which appears in the last line of this sonnet—taking us from the sole manuscript copy, through a variety of printed editions, to Jonathan Bate’s 2003 “polished” text. Kövesi showed how various editors have deployed versions of Clare’s positions over language to authorize their editorial choices. And he ended with a few provocations: Do we need a version of Clare to authorize our editing? Must we devise a homogenizing style to apply to all Clare’s texts? What audiences are we serving with new editions? Where do we go next in editing Clare?

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James McKusick serves as executive director of the JCSNA 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.

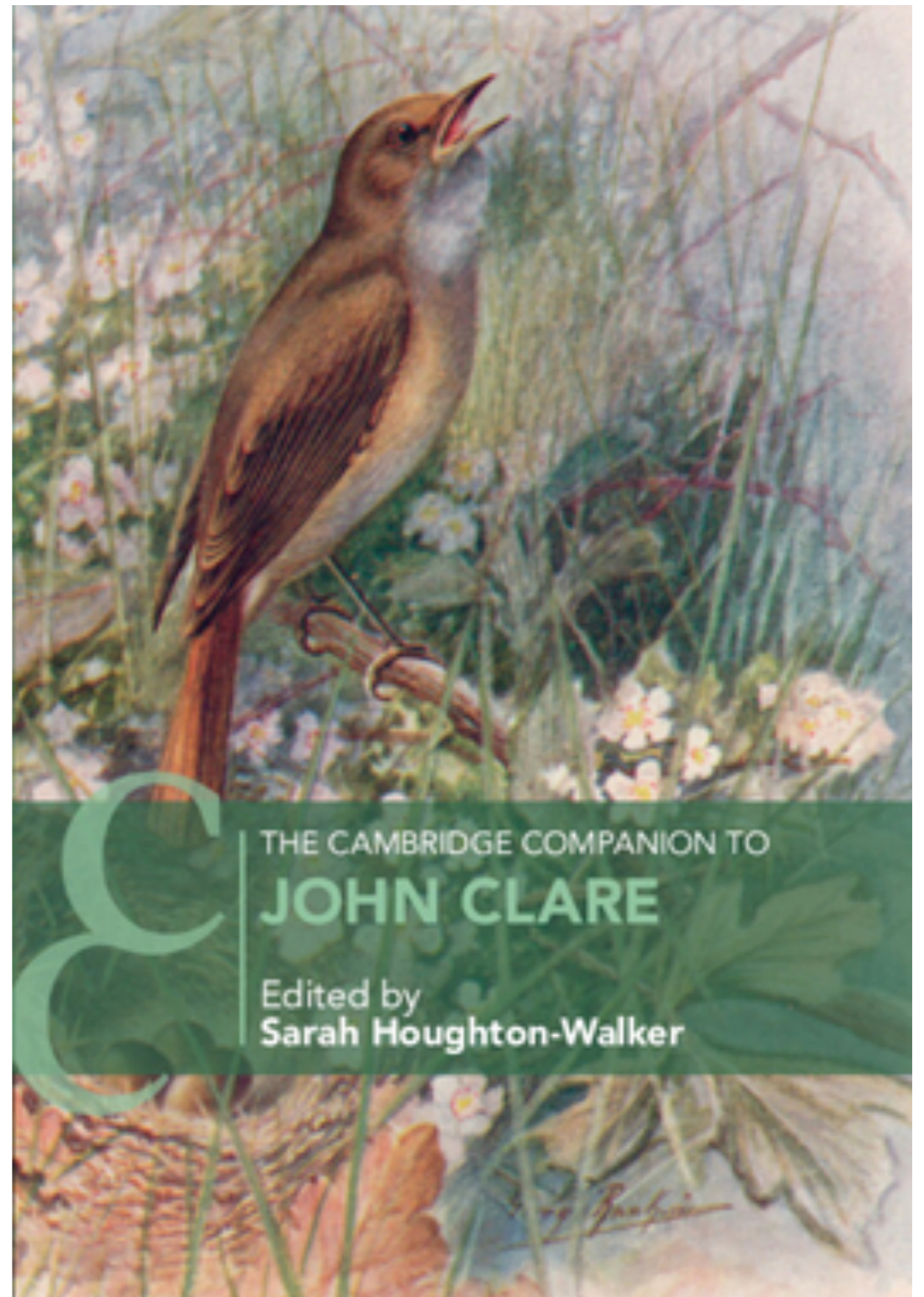
Call For Papers MLA 2025: The JCSNA invites paper proposals for its guaranteed panel at the MLA Convention in Toronto, 8–11 January 2026. Scholarship on any aspect of Clare’s writings, his life and times, or the work of his contemporaries is welcome.

Abstract (250-300 words) and short bio by 15 March 2025 to Erica McAlpine at erica.mcalpine@ell.ox.ac.uk

New Book Spotlight

Sarah Houghton-Walker's new collection contains seventeen essays by an international group of renowned Clare scholars.

The fascinations of John Clare's life are manifold. A laboring-class poet and naturalist, he was lionised in the early 1820s but spent his final decades incarcerated in asylums. In this Companion, leading scholars illuminate Clare's rich life and writing, situating each within a range of critical contexts. Essays rooted in discourses as diverse as ecocriticism, aesthetics, religion, health, and time are accompanied by explorations of the construction of the idea (including the self-identity) of Clare through writing and images. The collection also traces influences upon Clare, and considers the ways in which he has influenced subsequent poets in turn. The volume includes a chronology and an invaluable guide to further reading, and provides students with a firm grounding in Clare's writings and his critical reception: this is an indispensable guide to the poet and his work.



Recent Academic Writings

Betz, Laura Wells. “John Clare’s Sonnets as Nests.” *John Clare Society Journal* 43 (2024): 5–22.

Emig, Rainer. “John Clare—Romantiker und Ecocritic?” In *Romantische Ökologin: Vielfältige Naturen um 1800*. Edited by Roland Borgards, et al. Metzler Verlag, 2023. 248–262.

Goodridge, John. “Remembering E.P. Thompson on his Centenary.” *John Clare Society Journal* 43 (2024): 41–44.

Haskins, Lola. “Poems.” *John Clare Society Journal* 43 (2024): 45–58.

Hodgson, Andrew, and Erin Lafford. “An Index of Significant Publications on John Clare, 2022–2023.” *John Clare Society Journal* 43 (2024): 63–64.

Houghton-Walker, Sarah, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to John Clare*. Cambridge University Press, 2024.

Kövesi, Simon. “John Clare out of Copyright.” *John Clare Society Journal* 43 (2024): 59–62.

MacKenney, Francesca. “‘Autumn’: John Clare and the Altered Fenland.” *Studies in Romanticism* 63, no. 1 (2024): 1–23.

Maggie, Morgan. “Wings that They Might Flit: The Naturalist Poet Discovers a World in Motion.” Dissertation, Catholic University of America, 2023.

Menely, Tobias. “Rewilding with Romanticism.” *Studies in Romanticism* 62, no. 1 (2023): 9–18.

_____. “Habitat: Worlds of Wildlife.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Animals*. Edited by Derek Ryan. Cambridge University Press, 2023. 185–199.

Milthorpe, Brian. “John Clare’s Peepshow: The Clarean Camera and the Medium of Peasant Poetry.” *The Wordsworth Circle* 55, no. 2 (2024): 257–282.

Mueller, Julia Laurel. “Towards the Condition of Birdsong.” *ELH* 91, no. 2 (2024): 727–757.

Spencer, Jane. “Romantic: Animals Bonds and Animal Death.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Animals*. Edited by Derek Ryan. Cambridge University Press, 2023. 75–93.

Stafford, Fiona. “Drained.” *John Clare Society Journal* 43 (2024): 29–40.

Stroe, Mihai. “John Clare and the Horizon of Nature’s Mystery.” In *Post Green: Literature, Culture, and the Environment*. Edited by Murali Sivaramakrishnan and Animesh Roy. Lexington Books, 2024. 135–150.

Tagnani, David. “‘The Enemy of All’: Anthropophobia in John Clare’s ‘Summer Evening.’” *John Clare Society Journal* 43 (2024): 23–28.





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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