

Volume Twenty-Seven, March 2026

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 Los Angeles, 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. It's already warm down here in Alabama, so I've been thinking of these lines by Clare from "Summer Moods":

I love at eventide to walk alone
Down narrow lanes oerhung with dewy thorn
Where from the long grass underneath—the snail
Jet black creeps out & sprouts his timid horn
I love to muse oer meadows newly mown
Where withering grass perfumes the sultry air
Where bees search round with sad & weary drone
In vain for flowers that bloomed but newly there

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 industrial literature from the 18th and 19th centuries, as well as a monograph on the history of the banjo in Alabama from the 19th century to the present.

Musings: Two Poems by Barbara Wiedemann

In Colorado's Powderhorn Wilderness

Sometimes it's enough just to be,
to do nothing but look at trees—
Englemann spruce,
ponderosa pine,
Douglas fir.

Widely spaced these are
their green highlighted by the blue sky
that dark blue that happens at 10,000 feet.

Earlier just before dawn as the sky reddened
I heard the song of coyotes
celebrating the coming day
celebrating a successful night hunting
celebrating their community.

And in my own way I also am celebrating—
my solitude in this remote wilderness
the chill of the air, the light breeze
and my place among the trees.

I am at peace here
on this high grassy plateau
home of elk and moose and deer.

I am at peace here and I breathe deeply.

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Seeing Eternity on an August Day

The road bends and there it is
a mountain of rock and ice and snow

appearing above the hemlocks and firs
against the blue of the sky, so unexpected.

Visible are the cracks in the rock face
visible the crevasses of the glaciers.

Mt. Adams, I think,
In line with Shasta, Hood, and Rainier,

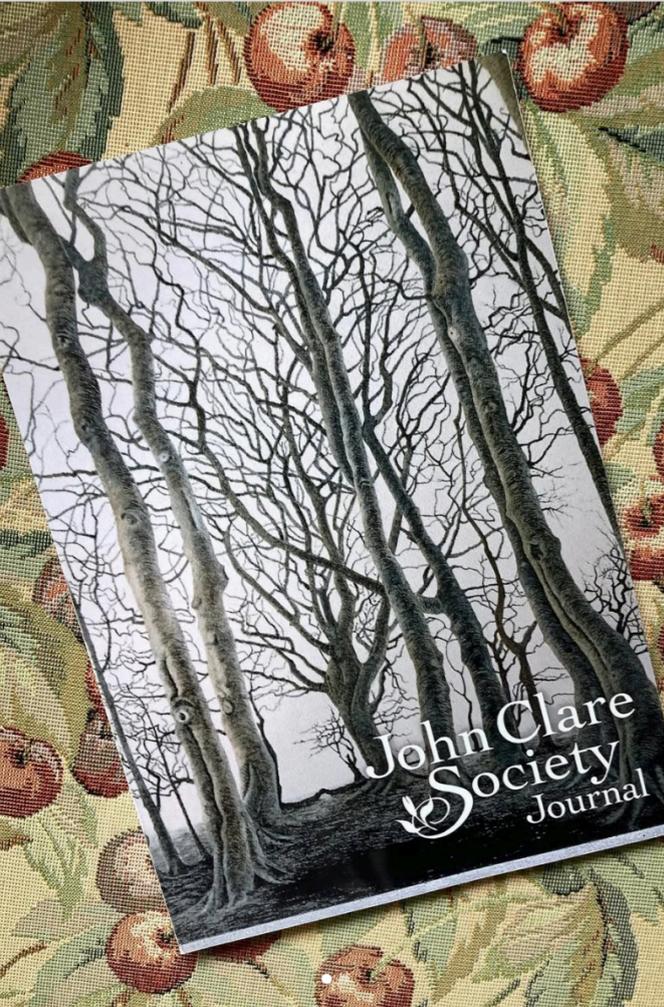
massive and solemn seemingly eternal.

In the presence of so much grandeur
I am insignificant and I am grateful,

grateful to know something so magnificent exists,
so uncaring to our squabbles, our foibles,

grateful for something so much more than I

Barbara Wiedemann is an American poet and Professor Emerita at Auburn University Montgomery. She is author of five chapbooks: *Following the Snow Leopard* (Kelsay Books, 2025), *Desert Meditations* (Finishing Line Press, 2018), *Death of a Pope and Other Poems* (Finishing Line, 2013), *Sometime in October* (Finishing Line, 2010), and *Half-Life of Love* (Finishing Line, 2008). Some of the poems in her newest chapbook 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 2026 MLA Convention

by James McKusick

This year's session for the John Clare Society of North America at the MLA Convention in Toronto was entitled "John Clare: Forms of Contemporary." The session was organized by Erica McAlpine and chaired by James McKusick. The session featured **Vidyan Ravinthiran** (Harvard University), **Laura Betz** (University of Notre Dame), and **Scott Hubbard** (University of South Carolina). The session was well-attended, and lively discussion ensued.

In his presentation, "Contemporaries," Ravinthiran examined the work of several 20th and 21st century poets—Oli Hazzard, Arun Kolatkar, Arvind Mehrotra, Sarah Howe—alongside various Clare poems, positioning these writers as Clare's "contemporaries," whether or not they allude to his work. All of these poets use self-aware couplets to explore the ordering of time into localized and bounded events. The trajectories of distant poets resemble the parallel lines of a couplet that never meet (since rhyme mixes identity with a felt, sonic and visual, difference). Yet between those lines thrums a field of force. The couplet was Clare's most basic, essential style, aligning things with a flourish of connection (the two rhymes), but often with a sense of specifics hurtling apart. Clare subdivides poems into appreciably distinct micro-events that seem both contemporaneous and not: it is not always clear how his couplets connect. This air of lost connections creates new possibilities of allusion and incorporation: a form of aesthetic solidarity. The couplet, as a verse-form, *knows something*. What is at stake in these poems is nothing less than our understanding of *events in time*, and how they repercuss or disappear into the mists of forgetting.



In “‘Homes upon the waste’: Poetic Nesting in John Clare’s Northborough Poems and Beyond,” Betz affirmed that there is a category called the *sonnet-as-nest* within John Clare’s poetry. She elucidated how Clare makes sonnets into nests in both content and form—sometimes physically, by sculpting a tiered, nest-like poetic structure, but also through distinctive techniques of description that immerse or “nest” into their subjects by entering more and more deeply, inwardly, and minutely into the physical makeup of what is being described. Consequently, the sonnet-as-nest is a previously unrecognized formal and stylistic means by which Clare enacts his interest in minuteness and enclosure, and by which he attempts to be “gathered into the fabric of the earth,” in Jonathan Bate’s words. In key poems of the Northborough period, Clare’s sonnet-as-nest adopts not only greater complexity and more variation, but also a highly developed figurative apparatus that connects Clare with animals and other figures in the poem. Throughout these poems, the sonnet-as-nest becomes a locus for rich questions about Clare’s identity as a poet and for key explorations of the idea of home and experiences of enclosure and absorption in nature.

In “‘This Sad Non-Identity’: Apophatic Self-Disclosure in John Clare’s Poetry,” Hubbard investigated how the practice of rigorous self-denial functions as a vehicle for an enhanced agency of the self in the poetry of John Clare. Clare’s shorter poems are marked by striking formulations of identity in negative terms—phrases such as “sad non-identity” and “the nothingness of scorn and noise” speak to Clare’s vision of his poetic and historical self as not only isolated from others, but deeply and existentially alone to the point of non-being. And yet for Clare these moments of self-apophasis do not serve wholly to illustrate despair but rather drive forward his speakers’ solicitations for life and relationship to the other. Clare’s unique application of

rhetorical apophasis provides him with an effective means of confessional disclosure. Hubbard elucidated how Clare lays hold of apophatic trends in contemporaneous Romantic poetry to express his own inner anguish and drive for relation to the other.

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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 2027: The JCSNA invites paper proposals for its guaranteed panel at the MLA Convention in Los Angeles, 7–10 January 2027. Scholarship on any aspect of Clare’s writings, his life and times, and the work of his contemporaries is welcome.

Abstract (250-300 words) and short bio by 15 March 2026 to Erica McAlpine at erica.mcalpine@ell.ox.ac.uk

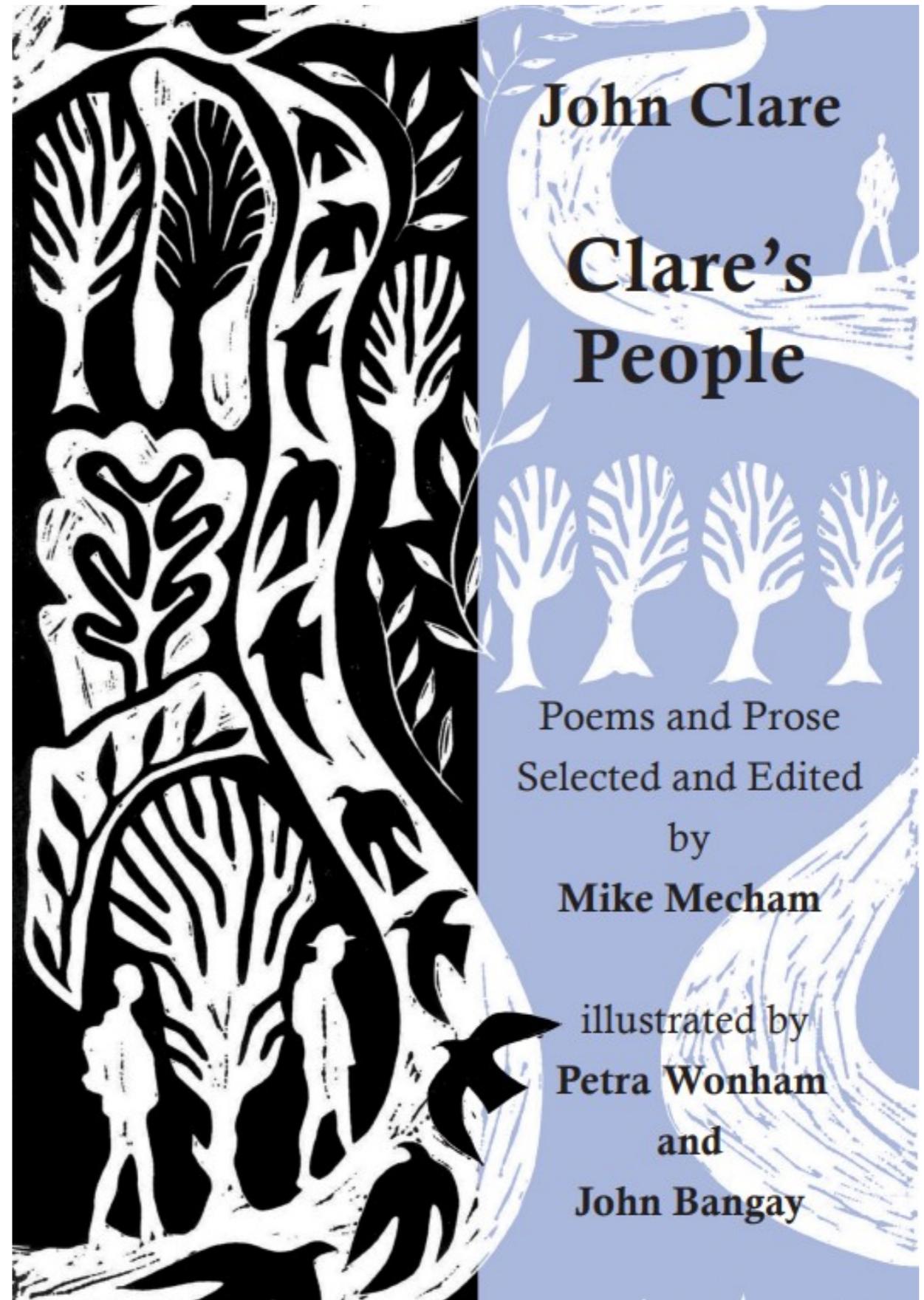
New Book Spotlight

Mike Metham's new book, *Clare's People* (John Clare Society, 2025), offers a new anthology of John Clare's poetry and prose.

The John Clare Society is pleased to announce the publication of a new selection of Clare's poetry and prose edited by Mike Mecham, with illustrations by Petra Wonham and John Bangay.

Justly renowned for poems about the natural world, this anthology broadens our view of Clare's work by exploring the people inhabiting his world, revealing in the process both his deep humanity and sharp social observation.

Copies of *Clare's People* are available from the Publications and Merchandise Officer for £12. (Please visit our [Publications and Merchandise page](#) for more details on how to order.)



Recent Academic Writings

Cope, Jonas. *British Romanticism and Prison Reform*. Rutgers University Press, 2025. (Chapter 5 is on John Clare)

Emlyn, David. “‘And soon the wisper went about the town’: Gossips and Gossiping in John Clare’s Narrative Poetry.” *John Clare Society Journal* 44 (2025): 33–49.

Fiddes, Mark. “I Am! Again.” *John Clare Society Journal* 44 (2025): 31–32.

Hess, Scott. *Landscapes of Genius and the Transatlantic Origins of Environmentalism: Nineteenth-Century British and American Literary Cultures of Nature*. Cambridge University Press, 2025. (Chapter 3 is on John Clare)

Heyes, Robert. “No Sex Please, We’re Editors.” *John Clare Society Journal* 44 (2025): 5–11.

Hickford, Sam, and Challinor Em “John Clare and the Shifting Skylark.” *John Clare Society Journal* 44 (2025): 51–65.

McNally, Catherine. “‘Itching after Rhyme’: The Psychological Function of Itch in John Clare’s Writing.” *John Clare Society Journal* 44 (2025): 13–30.

Mecham, Mike, ed. *Clare’s People: Poems and Prose*. John Clare Society, 2025.

Metcalf, James. *Churchyard Poetics: Landscape, Labour, and the Legacy of Genre*. Oxford University Press, 2025. (Chapter 4 is on John Clare)

Rotzokou, Elena. “Repetition and Clare’s Lyric of Withdrawn Revelation.” *European Romantic Review* 36, no. 1 (2025): 119–141.





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