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From the New Editor

Seth T. Reno
Auburn University at Montgomery

I am pleased to take over the newsletter editorship from Stephanie Kuduk Weiner, who is now Vice President of JCSNA. Stephanie did an amazing job with the Newsletter these past six years, and I hope I can continue her excellent work. I would like to thank Stephanie for her advice and support, as well as James McKusick for his invitation to serve as the new editor.

In this eighteenth volume of the Newsletter, I have continued the design and structure of recent volumes. This year’s Newsletter contains “Musings” poems by American poet Barbara Wiedemann, a report on the panel at the MLA convention, a call for papers, a book review, a list of recent academic writings, and some images from botanist Anna Atkins’s Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions (1843-53).

In future volumes, I hope to continue the “musings” tradition and to help publicize and promote scholarly and creative work on Clare. So, please send me your musings, citations, references, essays, and notes, in whatever form. I can be reached at sreno@aum.edu. I hope you enjoy the volume!
Call for Papers

The John Clare Society of North America invites proposals for its guaranteed session at the Modern Language Association Convention in New York City, 4-7 January 2018.

Title of session: “John Clare: Encounters.” Scholarship on any aspect of “encounter” (mental or physical, human or animal), ecology, and/or interrelation in Clare’s life and work.

Please submit an abstract and short bio by email to Dr. Erica McAlpine by 10 March 2017 (erica.mcalpine@ell.ox.ac.uk).

Note: All MLA program participants must be members of the Modern Language Association by 1 April 2017. For further information on the convention, go to www.mla.org/convention.

Book Review

by Stephanie Kuduk Weiner


“I could not wait till I got back without reading it and as I did not like to let any body see me reading on the road of a working day I clumb over the wall into Burghly Park and nestled in a lawn at the wall side the Scenery around me was uncommonly beautiful at that time of the year and what with reading the book and beholding the beautys of artful nature in the park I got into a strain of descriptive rhyming on my journey home this was ‘the morning walk’ the first thing I commited to paper” (John Clare by Himself, p. 11).

This is how Clare describes his experience of reading the first book he ever bought, a copy of James Thomson’s The Seasons, and of writing down the first poem he ever rendered in pen and ink. As he becomes an author of his own text and a reader of his own books, he also becomes a trespasser. Indeed, “one might say that his whole life would become a sort of trespass,” write Goodridge and Thornton: “Clare writes repeatedly of his own confrontations with physical and metaphysical boundaries, and he deploys in his writings a large and motley army of boundary-breakers, trespassers, and other free spirits” (pp. 16, 18).

Goodridge and Thornton track Clare’s representations of trespass across poems about humans and animals who move into and across private property, about enclosure, about gypsies and Scottish drovers, about the artful artlessness of unimproved spots, and about what they call “the politics of landscape” (p. 37). Taken together, these poems chart Clare’s wide-ranging explorations of the “ideology and psychology of human boundedness and freedom,” from his earliest pieces to the poems he wrote from the asylum (p. 37).

This lovely and accessible book, a revised and expanded version of an essay included in John Clare in Context (Cambridge University Press, 1994), makes a quiet methodological claim for interpreting Clare’s corpus as a unified body of work. “Clare’s power derives,” the authors write, “from a deeply metaphorical understanding of the world [that] ties his poems together in an intricate web” (p. 7). “This web of ideas and images gives the poems a wonderful coherence and effectiveness,” as these “complex and understated patterns” build themselves up within and across poems (p. 7).

John Clare: The Trespasser is an illuminating study, worthy of a place on any shelf.

Stephanie Kuduk Weiner is Professor of English at Wesleyan University. She is the author of Clare’s Lyric: John Clare and Three Modern Poets (Oxford UP, 2014), as well as a number of articles on nineteenth-century British literature.
The John Clare Society of North America