

Arthur Hugh Clough's Pedigree

Gregory Tate

gpt4@st-andrews.ac.uk

In a lecture on John Dryden which he delivered as professor of English at University College London in the 1850s, Arthur Hugh Clough sets out to contextualize Dryden's writing by recounting the names and dates of several other seventeenth-century poets, playwrights, and philosophers. But he also acknowledges that historical proximity does not straightforwardly equate to intellectual affinity:

In view of the strange contrast of juxtaposition and the intricacies of multitude which we have before us, one is hurried by the mere appetite of order into precarious theories of mental affiliation, and urged to hazard what is most hazardous, a pedigree of opinion.¹

Lecturers in English literature may sympathize with Clough's dilemma. On the one hand, he finds it hard to resist filling his lecture with the readily available data of dates, and then using those dates (whether of birth, death, or publication) to construct an argument about a specific writer or a whole literary period. On the other hand, he worries that this kind of argument is prompted by a 'mere appetite of order', and that any sweeping assessment of the 'mental affiliation' between a particular generation of writers, or of the 'pedigree of opinion' that connects one generation to another, is at best a 'precarious' oversimplification. A solution perhaps resides in 'juxtaposition', a keyword in Clough's prose and poetry, by which he means an interaction between people or things based not on any intrinsic similarity but on chance. In this lecture he uses it to imply that, rather than imposing uniform generational patterns on groups of writers, literary historians might do better to attend to the 'strange contrast' that exists between different writers of the same generation.

Clough, then, was himself interested in the kind of generational questions being discussed in this pair of roundtables. One reason for this interest may be that, as someone who spent much of his life as a student and teacher (at Rugby School, the University of

¹ Arthur Hugh Clough, 'Dryden and his Times', in *Selected Prose Works of Arthur Hugh Clough*, ed. by Buckner B. Trawick (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1964), pp. 85-106 (p. 92).

Oxford, and UCL), Clough was self-consciously aware of his location within an educational cohort, and of his relation to other cohorts and generations. There is no evidence within his writings that he felt a particular connection to the rest of the cohort of writers born in 1819, or even that he was aware of their contemporaneity. But the aim of this essay is to show, briefly, that he shared with several of them a preoccupation with examining the relations between an individual, his or her generation, and the processes of historical change that distinguished and demarcated one generation from another. My argument is not that he or they are unique: this sort of historical thinking was an important facet of British culture throughout the nineteenth century. But I think that a study of the 1819 cohort can help to focus and clarify our understanding of Victorian historicism. Using Clough's notion of 'juxtaposition' to examine his fluctuating views on history, and their relation to the views of his contemporaries, I want to suggest that this or any cohort can be studied as a cross-section of Victorian debate, highlighting through contrast the diversity of opinions held by people who happened to be born in the same year. The historicism of Clough and his coevals, in short, can help scholars and readers in the twenty-first century to historicize the Victorians more discriminatingly.

The cohort of 1819 articulate a range of contrasting historicisms. Charles Kingsley, for example, wrote to Clough in 1860 to congratulate him on his revised edition of Dryden's translation of Plutarch's *Lives*. Biography, Kingsley assures Clough, is the exemplary form of historical writing, because it allows readers 'to see, as Plutarch makes us see, the men themselves'. Each 'will be sufficiently moulded by his time, to let us see what the time was like; and will differ sufficiently from any man a century before or after, to let us see what progress man has made', but by studying the lives of particular individuals 'we shall keep clear of the modern fallacy' that 'great men don't make their circumstances at all, but are merely, like the mob, made by them.'²

Clough probably demurred at this confident assertion of the autonomy of 'great men'. In an 1844 letter to his friend J. P. Gell he embraces what Kingsley sees as the 'modern fallacy' of historical determinism, placing himself in a subordinate position to the broader intellectual trends that characterize his times. 'I can feel faith in what is being carried on by my generation', he writes, and 'I am content to be an operative—to dress intellectual leather, cut it out to pattern and stitch it and cobble it into boots and shoes for the benefit of the work which is being guided by wiser heads.' The faith that he feels is in his generation's

² Charles Kingsley to Clough, 6 August 1860, in *The Correspondence of Arthur Hugh Clough*, ed. by Frederick L. Mulhauser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), vol. 2, pp. 577-8.

questioning of faith: ‘the work’ discussed in this letter is the critical examination of the doctrines and historical foundations of Christianity, a project which led Clough, who no longer felt able to subscribe honestly to the thirty-nine articles of the Church of England, to resign his Oxford fellowship in 1848. In his 1844 letter he is undecided about the relevance of Christianity to his generation:

Whether the Spirit of the Age, whose lacquey and flunkey I submit to be, will prove to be this kind or that kind I can’t the least say. Sometimes I have doubts whether it won’t turn out to be no [Christianity] at all.³

In contrast to Kingsley, Clough insists that he is the ‘operative’ or ‘flunkey’, rather than the maker, of his historical circumstances; his doubts are an expression of ‘the Spirit of the Age’. And it is eminently possible, today, to agree with this self-definition, and to identify him as a figure who, in his personal transition from resolute childhood faith to religious scepticism, is illustrative of a wider trend within his generation, and within Victorian culture.

That is exactly how some Victorian commentators understood Clough’s significance after his death in 1861. The philosopher Henry Sidgwick, for example, reviewing Clough’s *Poems and Prose Remains*, claims that ‘he was in a very literal sense before his age. His point of view and habit of mind are less singular in the year 1869 than they were in 1859, and much less than they were in 1849.’ This is because ‘we are growing’, according to Sidgwick, ‘more sceptical in the proper sense of the word: we suspend our judgment much more than our predecessors, and much more contentedly’.⁴ Clough’s questioning and critical ‘habit of mind’ prefigures the scepticism, or intellectual liberalism, which has since emerged as the prevailing attitude of mid-Victorian Britain. Sidgwick’s sketch of historical change has some affinities with Kingsley’s, because it assigns, to the representative writer if not to the ‘great man’, an active and constitutive part in the progress of opinion from one generation to the next.

Clough, perhaps unsurprisingly, was less certain about writers’ influence on posterity. In the first of his ‘Letters of Parepidemus’, a series of short essays that he wrote while living in the USA in 1852-3, he sets out to defend the relevance of classical education and literary work to the self-conscious modernity of the nineteenth century. He suggests, half-heartedly,

³ Clough to J. P. Gell, 24 November 1844, in *Correspondence*, vol. 1, pp. 140-41.

⁴ Henry Sidgwick, ‘The Poems and Prose Remains of Arthur Hugh Clough’, in *Clough: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Michael Thorpe (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 268-92 (p. 269).

that the value of contemporary literature may consist primarily in its historical awareness, its reimagining and preservation of the literature of the past: 'writers (that is, or should be, the more instructed readers) of each new century, may successively restore each successive generation to connection with the teachers of the past. Such is a possible function for a writer.' But he then undermines this tentative proposition, observing that

Each new age and each new year has its new direction; and we go to the well-informed of the season before ours, to be put by them in the direction which, because right for their time, is therefore not quite right for ours.⁵

In an accelerating narrative of cultural change, Clough argues that not just 'each new century' and 'each new age', but 'each new year', brings with it a tendency or point of view which is distinct from that of its predecessors. This narrative implies that writers are inescapably cut off from the future, and that they are always lagging behind in their efforts to restore the connection between the present and the past, because each effort at literary expression is addressed to a new cohort of readers, who inevitably find it 'not quite right' for their purposes. Clough sets out a view of cultural history, strikingly similar to twentieth and twenty-first-century diagnoses of a 'generation gap', as a succession of incompatible generations, whose differing concerns and perspectives preclude successful communication.

In his closet drama *Dipsychus and the Spirit*, however, Clough allows one of his speakers to express the belief that a 'pedigree of opinion', linking generations throughout history, may be transmitted in other artistic forms if not in writing. The poem is set in Venice; in one scene the Spirit praises two of Andrea Palladio's neoclassical churches which, as J. P. Phelan points out, were dismissed by Clough's contemporary John Ruskin in *The Stones of Venice*, but which were generally 'counted among the city's architectural glories'.⁶

St Giorgio and the Redemptore!
This Gothic is a worn-out story;
No building, trivial, gay or solemn
Can spare the shapely Grecian column:
'Tis not these centuries four for nought

⁵ Clough, 'Letters of Parepidemus, Number One', in *Selected Prose Works*, pp. 172-9 (pp. 173-4).

⁶ J. P. Phelan, 'The Textual Evolution of Clough's *Dipsychus and the Spirit*', *Review of English Studies*, 46 (1995), 230-39 (p. 233).

Our European world of thought
 Has made familiar to its home
 The Classic mind of Greece and Rome;
 In all new work that dare look forth
 To more than antiquarian worth
 Palladio's pediments and bases
 Or something such will find their places:
 Maturer optics don't delight
 In childish dim religious light,
 In evanescent vague effects
 That shirk, not face, one's intellects;
 They love not fancies fast betrayed,
 And artful tricks of light and shade,
 But pure form nakedly displayed,
 And all things absolutely made.

The Doge's palace, though, from hence,
 In spite of Ruskin's d—d pretence,
 The tide now level with the quay,
*Is certainly a thing to see.*⁷

The Spirit argues that 'the Classic mind of Greece and Rome' has bequeathed to the nineteenth century a 'maturer optics', an educated and sophisticated visual imagination that admires the 'pure form nakedly displayed' in Palladio's churches. This praise of neoclassical architecture forms part of the Spirit's efforts to persuade Dipsychus, his introspective and 'double-minded' interlocutor, to embrace a more worldly approach to life. In the same scene, he exhorts Dipsychus to stop his self-questioning and to enjoy the material and sensual pleasures of 'this world': 'Being common sense it can't be sin / To take it as we find it'.⁸ As Phelan notes, the lines on the Venetian churches present 'the childish dim religious light' of

⁷ Clough, *Dipsychus and the Spirit*, I, 5, 126-49, in *Selected Poems*, ed. by Jim McCue (London: Penguin, 1991); Clough's italics.

⁸ Clough, *Dipsychus and the Spirit*, I, 5, 75 and 79-80, in *Selected Poems*.

Gothic architecture as being ‘complicit with the desire to evade reality which characterizes Dipsychus and his generation’.⁹

That generation’s most vocal advocate of the Gothic was, of course, Ruskin. But the Spirit agrees, grudgingly, with Ruskin’s praise of the Doge’s palace, and this agreement indicates that their architectural opinions may be more similar than he cares to admit. Just as the Spirit defines neoclassicism as the mature expression of centuries of thinking about architectural form, so Ruskin identifies the Gothic as a particular stage of a cultural tradition that is founded on the careful study of physical reality. The naturalism of the Gothic, he writes in *The Stones of Venice*, emerges from

the history of rural and thoughtful life, influenced by habitual tenderness, and devoted to subtle inquiry; and every discriminating and delicate touch of the chisel, as it rounds the petal or guides the branch, is a prophecy of the development of the entire body of the natural sciences.¹⁰

Despite their differences, both Ruskin and the Spirit suggest that their preferred architectural style embodies the kind of ‘pedigree of opinion’, the organic preservation and development of thought across generations, of which Clough is sceptical in his essays and lectures.

He reiterates this scepticism in *Amours de Voyage*, the epistolary poem that he started to write while visiting Rome in 1849. Claude, the poem’s protagonist, tells his correspondent Eustace that

Rome disappoints me much; I hardly as yet understand, but
Rubbishy seems the word that most exactly would suit it.
 All the foolish destructions, and all the sillier savings,
 All the incongruous things of past incompatible ages,
 Seem to be treasured up here to make fools of present and future.
 Would to Heaven the old Goths had made a cleaner sweep of it!
 Would to Heaven some new ones would come and destroy me these churches!¹¹

⁹ Phelan, ‘Textual Evolution’, p. 234.

¹⁰ John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, in *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, ed. by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1904), vol. 10, p. 237.

¹¹ Clough, *Amours de Voyage*, I, 19-25, in *Selected Poems*; Clough’s italics.

The epithet ‘rubbishy’, conspicuous enough in itself, is highlighted by Claude to emphasize his distance from the conventional and unthinking admirers of Roman architecture. The self-consciousness of his language may suggest that he is motivated by intellectual snobbery, but his disappointment with Rome may also stem, as Matthew Reynolds argues, from ‘a principled refusal to accept an idealist explanation of history as organic development.’¹² Reynolds notes that another of Clough’s contemporaries, George Eliot, describes a similar response to Rome in one of her characters: Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch* sees it as a city of ‘stupendous fragmentariness’, a ‘vast wreck of ambitious ideals, sensuous and spiritual, mixed confusedly with the signs of breathing forgetfulness and degradation’. But the novel’s narrator suggests that this confusion may be resolved by a kind of knowledge that is withheld from or rejected by Dorothea and Claude, ‘a knowledge which breathes a growing soul into all historic shapes, and traces out the suppressed transitions which unite all contrasts’.¹³

Venice and Rome, with their overdetermined historical associations, are sites which elicit and encapsulate the range of competing historicisms set out by the writers of 1819. Ruskin, Clough’s Spirit, and the narrative voice of *Middlemarch* embrace idealist and organicist models of historical progress. Claude and Dorothea, however, are unconvinced that the past constitutes the foundation or soul of the present. Instead, for Claude, ‘the incongruous things of past incompatible ages’, the fragmentary structures dating from widely separated moments in Rome’s history, are baffling; it is impossible to make sense of this historical heterogeneity, or to connect it meaningfully to the present and the future. *Amours de Voyage* is written in an anglicized form of the dactylic hexameter, the meter of Greek and Latin epic verse, and while Clough’s use of this meter is not consistently or exclusively directed to the satirical purposes of mock-epic, Erik Gray observes that it arguably ‘represents a superimposition like that of the different ages which coexist in Rome. The dactylic hexameter is the vestige of a dead language, and its fits awkwardly with English.’¹⁴ The recognition of historical incompatibility which Rome prompts in Claude is embodied in the form of Clough’s verse.

Claude wishes that the incongruous vestiges of Rome’s architectural heritage were destroyed; the present might be better served, he suggests, not by an organic connection to the past but by a radical rupture with it. This fantasy is informed by Clough’s sympathy with

¹² Matthew Reynolds, *The Realms of Verse 1830-1870: English Poetry in a Time of Nation-Building* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 142.

¹³ George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. by Rosemary Ashton (London: Penguin, 1994), pp. 192-3.

¹⁴ Erik Gray, ‘Clough and his Discontents: *Amours de Voyage* and the English Hexameter’, *Literary Imagination*, 6 (2004), 195-210 (p. 199).

the revolutions that broke out across Europe in 1848, and particularly with the republican government of Rome, which was besieged and removed from power by the French army in 1849. Clough stayed in Rome throughout the siege, and he had visited revolutionary Paris in 1848. His support for the revolutions was not unequivocal, but his friend Matthew Arnold referred to him as ‘Citizen Clough’, and I think that the view of history which he sets out in *Amours de Voyage*, and which might be described as a sort of revolutionary presentism, demonstrates his genuine interest in radical politics.¹⁵ Clough’s visits to Europe and his writing in *Amours de Voyage* both indicate a determination to witness the contemporary, to attend to the present rather than the past. As Stephanie Kuduk Weiner points out, Clough’s poem ‘everywhere declares its allegiance to the here and now of Europe, in its concern with the immediate and the everyday’.¹⁶ This is especially evident in the final stanza, which is spoken not by Claude but by an unidentified voice that addresses the poem itself:

*So go forth to the world, to the good report and the evil!
Go, little book! thy tale, is not evil and good?
Go, and if strangers revile, pass quietly by without answer.
Go, and if curious friends ask of thy rearing and age,
Say, ‘I am flitting about many years from brain unto brain of
Feeble and restless youths born to inglorious days;
But’, so finish the word, ‘I was writ in a Roman chamber,
When from Janiculum heights thundered the cannon of France.’¹⁷*

The ‘curious friends’ invoked in this stanza are preoccupied, as is Clough himself, with questions about the pedigree, the ‘rearing and age’, of nineteenth-century literature. The stanza answers these questions by arguing, in effect, that *Amours de Voyage* has no antecedents: the poem emerges from and specifically addresses the present, both in the sense that it expresses the doubts and questions of a generation of seemingly ‘feeble and restless youths’ and in the sense that it witnesses the violent political upheavals of its time. ‘Each new year has its new direction’, as Clough puts it in his ‘Letters of Parepidemus’. His assessment of the gap between generations is, in some of his writings, rueful or apologetic, but at the end

¹⁵ Clough to Thomas Arnold, 16 July 1848, in *Correspondence*, vol. 1, p. 216.

¹⁶ Stephanie Kuduk Weiner, *Republican Politics and English Poetry, 1789-1874* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 118.

¹⁷ Clough, *Amours de Voyage*, V, 217-24, in *Selected Poems*; Clough’s italics.

of *Amours de Voyage* he defiantly interprets the events of 1849 as the starting-point of a new, and revolutionary, literary pedigree. The poem uses the literary forms of the past to highlight the disjunction between past and present, to critique totalizing narratives of organic historical progress, and to record the psychological and political concerns of Clough and his generation.