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Patrick G. Scott
University of South Carolina - Columbia

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DIVERGENT COMPOSITION PATTERNS AND EDITORIAL PROBLEMS
IN CLOUGH'S POETRY

Patrick Scott, University of South Carolina

A late nineteenth-century reviewer once wrote of Clough's poetry:

He never said his last word. Indeed, no word of his seems to have been said quite as he would have chosen to say it, had time and tide allowed.¹

That reviewer was more than half right in his judgment, for Clough was one of those poets who himself prepared only a small proportion of his poetry for publication -- only two of his five longer poems, for instance. He rewrote his unpublished poems compulsively, and even those he did see into print he continually marked up with revisions. He died comparatively young (aged forty-two), and his assiduous widow mined his notebooks for the more obviously publishable of his drafts. Fortunately, he, and she, kept much of the material that wasn't "finished" or published, and there has survived, in the Bodleian, at Balliol,

and in the Houghton Library at Harvard, an extraordinary range of Clough's poetic drafts and notebooks. These have formed, for me at least, a very useful correction to some of the more simplistic views of the creative process, because they show how inextricably creativity, rewriting, and unfinishedness were mixed up in Clough's characteristic mode of composition.

The interesting point here is that these simplistic views of composition have affected the way Clough's editors have been working. Clough has probably received more editorial attention than any other Victorian poet; until this year, Victorianists enjoyed the anomalous situation of having in print two thorough modern collations of Clough's Amours de Voyage, and none of In Memoriam. Criticism of Clough's revisions began very early; one reviewer commented on the 1862 revision of Clough's Bothie of Topper-na-fuosich, first published in 1848, that:

It is a great mistake for a man at forty to think he can improve a poem written before he was thirty. He may make it more elegant and accurate, but every touch will decrease its freshness and vigour.²

Serious editorial concern dates from 1910, when Humphry Milford of OUP produced an edition collating not just variants from printed texts, but also some of the manuscript revisions. Milford has been followed by the massive Oxford English texts

edition in 1951, since much criticized, by two editions of single works, and by the complete revision of the OET Clough in 1974.³ Yet with all this editorial activity, no one would realistically claim that we have adequate texts of Clough. For instance, Clough's long Venetian Faust-drama, Dipsychus, though no longer bowdlerized of its witty prostitute scene as in the 1869 and 1951 versions, is still read in a text that patches together bits from the last (fourth-stage) manuscript, for the scenes Clough had rewritten to omit the prostitute, with bits from the third stage notebook, for scenes he didn't rewrite or intended to omit. The result is that whole lines are wrongly duplicated between scenes, even in the latest 1974 edition.⁴ In Clough's long Biblical drama, Adam and Eve, two scenes are printed from an incomplete, late fair copy, and others from the sketchiest of notebook drafts, and indeed the structure of the present work, combining the story of the Fall with that of Cain and Abel, cobbles together scenes originally drafted as two distinct dramatic poems which Clough only planned to splice together, never getting going on the necessary detailed revisions. revisions.⁵ I am perhaps beginning to sound like one of those bibliographical preachers of the 50s and 60s, lambasting the sins of literary editors, and certainly this kind of unprincipled textual eclecticism can hardly be blamed on Sir Walter Greg. In fact, I have great admiration for the work the Oxford editors did in 1951 and 1974, both in sorting and collating Clough's very messy drafts, and in the increased accuracy they brought to transcription. The problem lies in the

assumptions the editors made about poetic composition and revision.

The 1951 Oxford editors, as you will have inferred, aimed to print the author's final intention; indeed, they shared the very common editorial aim of giving not just the author's latest version of each whole work, but the latest revision of each scene, stanza, line or single word. This we may label the classic view of the revision process, revision as perfecting, where each detailed change is assumed to be one more skillful chip of the craftsman's chisel, as the poem approximates to its ideal state. However qualified, this classic view of the creative process is surely implicit in any application of Greg's copytext theory, as indeed it is implicit in the New Critical theory of literature as well-wrought urn.

The Oxford policy was first seriously attacked in 1962, by R.M. Gollin. Professor Gollin argued, essentially on moral grounds, for preferring the earlier texts:

The manuscripts, and even the texts published in Clough's life-time (he wrote), often reflect two distinct stages of writing. In the first stage, Clough wrote his poem as it required itself to be written, a poem reflecting the thoughts and feelings he had at the time; in the second, Clough wrote out and revised to make the poem respectably presentable to the Victorian tastes and judgments he increasingly accepted after his marriage.⁶

Gollin, of course, wants to print the "lusty, irreverent" early text. We might call this the romantic view of textual editing, where poems spring full-grown onto the page trailing clouds of glory, where sincere, unblotted papers are only spoiled by revision to meet socially-derived expectations.

Of course, no copytext theory would deny Gollin's freedom, as a meta-editorial decision, to establish a text for any stage of a Clough poem he chooses. It's his implicit idea about the writing process that is interesting. Gollin's two-stage analysis assumes that the early stage of a Clough work is a coherent, stable editable text, and that Clough's revisions, though ideologically unsatisfactory to Gollin, constitute a separable, linear process. These assumptions just won't hold up, and since I believe that some such covertly-romantic distinction between healthfully organic creation and traitorously audience-conscious revision lies behind much recent questioning of classic copytext theory, we need to frame some third general view.

Gollin's two-stage analysis, revision-as-shades-of-the-social-prisonhouse, doesn't, any more than the classic idea of craftsmanly revision, fit with Clough's actual composing process, because it doesn't allow for the part that revision plays within composition. In practice, Clough was just much more complicated than Gollin allows; for example, he cut out sexual and scatological references from his poem during the original drafting process of The Bothie, long before he ever met the wife Gollin

blames for such excisions.⁷ I should argue that all that is best and most characteristic in Clough's poetry has its origins in such self-contradictions, not in some initial epiphanic coherent vision. That is, creative and critical or editorial selves will be there in even his earliest drafts.

Clough himself described the process of composition as a series of dissatisfactions and self-repudiations. As he wrote in Dipsychus:

don't be sure
 Emotions are so slippery . . . pace up and down
 A long half-hour
 with talking to yourself
 Make waiters wonder
 sleep a bit; write verse,
 Burnt in disgust, then ill-restored, and left
 Half-made, in pencil scrawl illegible.⁸

Clough's poetic drafts are just like that, a chaos of contradictory intentions, from which sometimes comes worthwhile tension, sometimes simply fuzziness or incoherence. In a short poem of 1851, Clough actually defines poetry in terms of this chronic self-disownment:

If to write, rewrite, and write again,
 Bite now the lip and now the pen,
 Gnash in a fury the teeth, and tear

Innocent paper or it may be hair,
 In endless chases to pursue
 That swift escaping word that would do,
 Inside and out turn a phrase, o'er and o'er,
 Till all the little sense goes it had before --
 If it be these things make one a poet,
 I am one -- Come and all the world may know it.⁹

That might be thought compatible with the classic model of revision, but it actually suggests a very different one. In an essay for Putnam's Monthly Magazine in 1853, Clough clarifies his position; poetry is "weaving and unweaving, learning and unlearning," a continual dissent from the half-selves of even one's best drafts.¹⁰ The real difficulty with the "romantic" editorial position is that too many contradictory intentions can be discerned even in quite early drafts, and certainly contradictions are intermingled in the revision process.¹¹ We need to have in mind some working distinctions about the kinds of intention that inhere in any particular draft, and the kinds of revision associated with different attitudes to composing. I call Clough's kind of revision divergent.

An example of his writing process may make this term clearer. The short lyric, "Why should I say I see the things I see not," began in 1845 as a single image, comparing true love to a divine music, heard in the soul and different from the coarse music danced to by the surrounding crowd.¹² When Clough rewrote the poem

in 1846 or 1847, he used the same music image for religious inspiration, though his redrafting left undecided serious and banteringly-ironic versions of several lines. A very fully developed draft on those lines was then appropriated to a new tenor by adding a stanza making the unheard music poetic inspiration.¹³ Then Clough wrote a more general and idealistic conclusion, and then he cut the poetic stanza, and so left the poem to refer once more to problems of religious belief. This was the rather broken-backed and allusive text he included in his Ambarvalia collection in 1849. No linear view of text development, neither a romantic urge to restore the poem's "original" sexual content, nor a classical one to stick with the latest of Clough's improvisations, really does justice to the meaning the poem must have had for him, or to the dramatic instabilities of text and intention that have left their vestiges in the published text. Only a knowledge of the poem's history, the multiple awarenesses the poet himself had during revision, can explain the work.

So what is my third model for dealing with revision? For the sake of logical simplicity, one may divide poetic revisions into two classes only: convergent revisions, on the classic model, where the author is in however many stages homing in on a single idea of the poem; and divergent revision, where he, however temporarily, repudiates a previous intention, as for instance when he takes a previously unironic line ironically, or when he appropriates a developed image to some new tenor.

My two terms of course echo the way manuscript editors have traditionally described divergent transmission lines, but I also have in mind the psychological creativity debate of the 1950s. While the 50s psychological writers stressed too exclusively the virtues of unstructured, divergent thinking, and pop-psychologists still tout that emphasis, the consensus now, if I read it right, seems to be that the greatest creativity comes from those who have a strong psychological urge to produce structure and convergence in the long-term but who risk entertaining divergences as they develop their ideas.

What this means for the genetic study of literature, and for textual editing, is that the most creative texts will be those with most divergences in the composition process, though one must allow that the divergences could with an iron-willed author all have been in the head, not on the page. Only in works, or passages of works, where the author has a very firm generic intention can poetic drafting be a convergent process. Both poetic drafting and revision, one might summarize, involve the dialectic of creative, divergent improvisations and a succession of possible, "editorial", convergences. Much creativity will be associated, as in Clough's case, with chronically unstable ideas of the work being written. Indeed, linked to my two kinds of revision are two kinds of textual development, that of stable text with convergent revision, that of unstable text with divergent revision. We may, for convenience, label this third view of the

composition and revision process as the convergent-divergent view, or writing as the entertainment of divergent possibility.

What are the implications of this for textual editing? In practice, in the debates of the late 60s and 70s over copytext theory, the more orthodox Gregites have nearly always offered enough qualifications and exceptions to take account of almost any problem in the editing of an even intermittently stable text.¹⁴ It would be perfectly possible with copytext theory as currently elaborated to take account of all Gollia's objections to the Oxford edition, by choosing to establish an earlier text-stage in each poem's history, if all the poems had been drafted in stable form. Certainly, with all the qualifications now usually made about manuscript accidentals, some version of Greg is a perfectly practical way to edit Clough's developed narrative poems, where the generic intention and narrative requirements encouraged textual stability. But the underlying problem remains, that Greg's was, with all its elegant undogmaticity, a theory of editing, that is of textual stabilisation, not a theory of creativity, where textual convergence cannot realistically be assumed. Greg's copytext theory works well for problems of textual transmission or corruption, it works fairly well for convergent authorial polishings to a text which has reached some stability of intention. What it can't really deal with is that dialogue of the mind with itself that is involved in the development of unstable text, that is, with most poetic drafts of

the period since the romantics. It never set out to deal with such matters. What is now, I think, much more widely recognized that it used to be is the extent to which such divergence can be involved even in the revision of published works. Unless editors are simply to become human xerox-machines, excessively diplomatic and mindless reproducers of single versions or manuscripts, their very job requires them to act editorially, to plot a text's development as converging on a single idea, that is text, of each work.¹⁵ But, unlike editors, biographers and critics need not be bound by any such implicit assumptions about the textual variants they encounter. We will, or so I would argue, confront textual materials much more realistically if we recognize that not just a few "discarded ideas," but much of the early drafting of a literary work, is likely to reflect divergence, incoherence, an instability of intention, that any editorial theory, however refined and qualified, must necessarily find alien.

Notes

- ¹ Unsigned review, Wesleyan Methodist Magazine, 116 (1893), 515.
- ² Unsigned review, Church and State Review, 1 (1862), 241.
- ³ For Clough editions 1869-1976, see Scott, Early Editions of Arthur Hugh Clough (New York: Garland, 1977), section B, pp.89-100.
- ⁴ Cf. Scott, Clough's Text Corrections (forthcoming, Charlottesville: Bibliographical Soc. of Univ. of Virginia), ch.7.
- ⁵ Cf. Scott, "The Editorial Problem in Clough's Adam and Eve," Editing the Victorians: Browning Institute Studies, 9 (1981), 79-104.
- ⁶ R.M.Gollin, "The 1951 Edition of Clough's Poems: A Critical Reexamination," Modern Philology, 60 (1962), 124; one of the 1951 editors replied to Gollin in the preface to the 1974 edition.
- ⁷ On Clough and sexuality, cf. Scott, "The Victorianism of Clough," Victorian Poetry, 16 (1978), 32-42, esp.36-39.
- ⁸ Dipsychus, XI, 127-134, in Poems of Arthur Hugh Clough, revised, ed.F.L.Mulhauser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp.276-77.
- ⁹ Poems, pp.319-320.
- ¹⁰ "Letters of Paripedemus. I," Putnam's Monthly Magazine, 2 (July 1853), 72-74.
- ¹¹ This is the problem that Zeller was considering from Goethe in SB, 28 (1975), 232-264, but see also Hershel Parker's discussion of "built-in intention" in Studies in American Fiction,

00 (198-), 181-197, and, drawing on Mailer, in Bulletin of Research in the Humanities (forthcoming).

¹² Poems, pp.22-23; for a fuller discussion, see Clough's Text Corrections, ch.3, section c.

¹³ Cf. John Keble's similar use of the image in British Critic, 24 (1838), 435.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Fredson Bowers in Studies in Bibliography, 31 (1978), 90-161, and G.Thomas Tanselle, in Studies in Bibliography, 28 (1975), 167-229, and 34 (1980), 22-65.

¹⁵ Cf. Morse Peckham, in Proof, I (1971), 122-153, and the editorial consequences of Peckhamism in his recent "marginally emended" reproduction of Browning's Sordello.