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Book Ownership and Authorial Identity: Reconstructing the (Im)Personal Library of Arthur Hugh Clough

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1. Introduction—Authors & their Personal Libraries

One traditional way for scholars to explore and to document the mental world of their subjects has been through their personal libraries. To the historical philologist and source scholar, the examination of the author’s own copy of a book, especially when corroborative evidence of the author reading the title is available in inscriptions, marginalia, notebooks, journals or letters, has long seemed among the most secure ways to turn the fleeting verbal echoes of influence or kinship into the security of documented annotation. Likewise, where an author’s personal library survives essentially intact, systematic cataloguing and analysis allow an overview of the author’s thought world and the weighting of different interests and influences at differing phases of the author’s development. It all seems so obvious, so old hat. But, faced with X’s copy of a book by Y, most scholars find the approach irresistible, reverting almost unthinkingly to the kind of author-centred interpretative agenda they might in other circumstances disparage. In this paper, I want, first, briefly to argue primarily with reference to Tennyson but also from my recent experience in special collections acquisitions that, like most traditional scholarly approaches, the study of an author’s books or personal library is ripe both for sceptical reappraisal and resuscitation, and then, also briefly, to apply such reappraisal to some long-untapped evidence about Clough’s books and reading.

Using book ownership to represent someone’s mind is certainly not a new idea, nor,
despite the taint of footnote-happy philology, is it intrinsically anti-literary. Chaucer characterizes
the Clerk of Oxenforde through the books he owns, Shakespeare represents Prospero through
the "dukedom large enough" of his personal library, and, from George Eliot's Dr. Casaubon to E.
M. Forster's Leonard Bast to Charles Frazier's Ada Monroe, novelists have depicted their
characters through their books.\footnote{It seems intuitively right to apply the same general insight to
studying the authors themselves.}

Nor has the approach been neglected by Victorianists. Even if the libraries themselves do
not survive for most Victorian authors, inventories frequently do, most often in the form of the
sale or auction catalogues when a library was being sold off.\footnote{Or pietas of family or friends may
have led to a separate catalogue at an early date, as for Scott with the Bannatyne Club's
Catalogue of the Library at Abbotsford (1838) or for Carlyle with the room-by-room lists of
books in the guide to the Carlyles' Chelsea home (1896).} Where the library itself survives, there
may be a modern catalogue, as with Nancy Campbell's catalogue of the various Tennyson family
libraries or William Baker's study and catalogue of the George Eliot-George Henry Lewes books
in Dr. Williams's library.\footnote{Sometimes the catalogue has been much enhanced by the research and
annotation provided by a modern scholarly editor, as in Philip Kelley's great reconstruction of the
Browning libraries, or William Baker's books on the George Eliot-George Henry Lewes and the
Wilkie Collins libraries, and such catalogues may list, not only surviving books now dispersed
among many different libraries and private owners, but also entries for books that do not survive,
but that are known from other sources once to have been in the author's possession.}\footnote{Campbell's
catalogue of the books that survive from Somersby Rectory, for instance, is much less extensive
than the list previously reconstructed from the auction record by G. Moore in a still-unpublished
Nottingham M.A. thesis.}

From there, of course, it is a hop-and-a-skip to the study, not of an author's library, but of
his or her reading, where the reassuringly empirical basis of the study dissolves into echo and inference. Victorianists were quick to follow Livingston Lowes on the treacherous Road to Xanadu, and use such reconstruction of an author's reading as the basis for genetic and interpretative study. Baker's claims for the Wilkie Collins library are modest: "the surviving volumes," he judges, "reveal much about the man, the writer, his friendships, his associations, and the sources for his creative inspiration."7 Lowes was after bigger fish, even if the fish were fishier. He was, he wrote, "concerned with what . . . we call 'sources' only insofar as they give us the crude substance which has undergone imaginative transformation."8 Lowes's book, published in 1927, soon inspired what remains the best study of Tennyson's early reading, William D. Paden's *Tennyson in Egypt* (1942). Paden had to rely on Lowesian inference, because the actual books from Somersby Rectory were then inaccessible (indeed they would remain inaccessible for another twenty-five years), but his comments echo Lowes's impatience with mere history: "although this essay embodies the results of many hours of source-hunting," Paden writes, "it is essentially an attempt to consider the personality of Tennyson in his youth."9

2. The First Impact of the Tennyson Centre and the Availability of Tennyson's Books

It was through work on Tennyson that I myself first got interested in this kind of research, in the summer of 1967, shortly after Sir Charles Tennyson had persuaded his cousin Harry that Tennyson’s books should be taken out of the Hammersmith Depository and made available in the newly-founded Tennyson Research Centre, in the tower of Lincoln City Library. The books came from several distinct owners, and several different locations--Somersby Rectory for the library of Tennyson's father, Grasby Vicarage for the library of his older brother Charles, and, for the greatest number, Farringford and Aldworth, the two houses Tennyson owned and bequeathed to his ennobled heirs. Books that Tennyson or Charles had inherited from their father were classified
as belonging to the sons. In due course, it was realized that only the more serious books had been
removed from Farringford before it was sold for a hotel, and that the sensation novels to which
the poet became addicted had been left behind to divert hotel guests on rainy days; the novels, or
those that survived, eventually came to Lincoln, but the terms of acquisition required they be
treated as a separate collection.

When I first went to Lincoln to the Tennyson Center, there was no published catalogue,
but the books had been arranged alphabetically on shelves, with sections for each owner, and it
was exhilaratingly easy to check for factual support or refutation of earlier scholarly conjectures
about, say, the range of Celtic sources that Tennyson had had available when he began work on
the *Idylls*. A subsequent comment by the late Cecil Lang in his introduction to Nancie
Campbell’s catalogue captures how the reemergence of Tennyson’s library then appeared:

The vexed and moot question of exactly what Arthurian sources Tennyson knew
has probably been settled. It could not have been done without this library, and
with this catalogue the idle speculation of the last half century—keen though
some of it has been—would have been spared.11

Even then, however, I was sceptical enough to note the limitations of library research, that “the
absence of a work from the Lincoln collection is no evidence that Tennyson had not studied it, or
even possessed it,” and that “there is not usually any indication of the date at which a book came
into his possession” (p. 4). Only occasionally can one hope to pin down Tennyson’s reading
through his pencilled marginalia, as in the rather surprising evidence for his careful reading of
Keble’s *Christian Year*, and on this specific case at least one recent scholar has recently disputed
the conclusions I drew.12 A few years later, I was collaborating with an elderly emeritus from
Florida, a former graduate student of Livingston Lowes as it happened, who’d had a heart attack
halfway through writing a short essay about the Tennyson Centre books and needed help finishing
it up, when I began to recognize that an author’s library was not only significant for its specifics, and that it was possible to read an author’s library as a whole, as a map of the author’s mental world, and that it was a map that would change over time, like the geology of *In Memoriam*.\(^{13}\)

3. Authorial Copies in USC’s Special Collections, and the James Dickey Library

What has led me to revisit this topic now is my current second job as a rare books librarian. Like most rare book rooms, my department has its share of association copies from famous authors. One of the easiest ways to communicate the importance of a library’s archival role is to put in a student’s or scholar’s own hands one of Robert Burns’s books with Burns’s marginalia, or the copy of his *French Revolution* that Thomas Carlyle inscribed to Jane Welsh, or F. Scott Fitzgerald’s first edition of *Ulysses*, inscribed by Joyce and annotated by Fitzgerald, or Joseph Heller’s copy of *Henry IV, Part I*, with its heavy annotation of Falstaff’s speech on war and honour, during the Battle of Shrewsbury. Each of these represents a larger group of books owned by that author. We even have individual books bearing the ownership signatures of Alfred Tennyson (in a Latin textbook from Louth school) and, more interestingly, of Arthur Hugh Clough (in the English edition of Emerson’s *Essays*).\(^{14}\) Such books are often hard for scholars to track down: Clough’s Emerson, for instance, is part of our Emerson collection, and it is our Fitzgerald Collection, not Emory’s Sylvia Plath collection, that has Plath’s annotated copy of *The Great Gatsby*. Few on-line library catalogues are easily traceable for provenance or inscription, especially through the major bibliographical search-engines.

Overshadowing these individual volumes is the largest of our special collections, the personal library of the poet and novelist James Dickey, purchased from his estate in 1997. Dickey acquired and accumulated books avidly throughout his life—the books he had his mother mail out to him in the Pacific in World War II, the books he bought on the GI Bill at Vanderbilt, the desk-
copies he scrounged as an instructor at Rice, the wide range of new publications he purchased in the 50's to differentiate himself from his advertising colleagues, the post-war French philosophy he acquired in Paris, the books sent to him for blurbs or reviews when he went to the Library of Congress, the books pressed on him by aspirant writers as he barnstormed the country's campuses in his heyday, the fat biographies with which he surrounded himself in his last years. He taught by bringing in a battered suitcase of ten, fifteen or twenty favorite volumes, and reading aloud from bookmarked passages. He spent his last year or more tied to an oxygen tank, alone in the house much of the time, with his armchair surrounded by tottering piles of books, ostensibly for current reading but serving equally as safely-staged talking-points for sychopantic visitors and would-be Boswell or as more precarious endtables for his casual meals. His house had seven rooms lined floor to ceiling, for an estimated total of over 15,000 volumes, not counting what we subsequently acquired from his condominium at the coast.

Surely this, one thinks, is a library that maps the growth of the poet's mind. It's full of fascinating things (in the 1940's, for instance, he read all the 'wrong' British poets from the New Apocalypse, and only bought the right ones later), yet even it is not in fact complete. Under the terms of purchase, each of Dickey's children has the right to remove 100 volumes of his or her choice, and the first child to do so turned up with a bookdealer and a price-guide. Moreover, Dickey's holdings of major Southern writers, such as his old mentor Robert Penn Warren, were largely stolen in the early 1980's by an unscrupulous visitor, who after enabling a long evening of alcoholic literary reminiscence, inveagled an invitation to stay the night and absconded in the early hours with a car-load of first editions, limited fine-printings, and inscribed copies. The absence of a book from the collection is certainly not evidence that Dickey didn't read it, even read it repeatedly. And equally, given his ambition in his twenties to remake the Buckhead boy as cosmopolitan man-of-letters, and the amount of material later sent to him free from authors or...
publishers, the presence of a book is not evidence he read it, let alone of its importance to him. He seldom annotated his books, and the continued survival of the acidic paper scraps he sometimes used as bookmarks depends on no future library cataloger or reshelver ever doing, even by accident, what he or she has always been trained to do.

The survival in a single place of so much of James Dickey's personal library should clearly be exciting and provocative to future Dickey scholars, and it does give an impressive sense of the successive persons he wanted to be or thought he was or was thought to be by others, but it does not provide the kind of instant certainties about the author's identity that older researchers might have assumed or that an academic library booster might want to assert.

4. The Problem of Arthur High Clough's Missing Library

Which brings me to the problem of the Clough library. Clough was among the most bookish poets even of a bookish age. He worked and wrote during the mid-Victorian decades when changes in book production technologies led to dramatic changes in the cost and shape of personal libraries. Moreover he was in many ways a representative early Victorian reader of his class and gender—early classical education, teenage romantic literary enthusiasms, scratching the itch of religious developments, a growing interest in political and social issues. He ought in principle to be someone the reconstruction of whose library holds more general interest for students of Victorian culture and thought, even beyond the specific questions it might answer for the scholarly researcher into Clough's own poetry.

But his library does not survive. Unlike Tennyson or Dickey, Clough never owned a house, he died in 1861 when still in his early forties, and he left no stalwart son or literary executor to manage his reputation for posterity. His widow Blanche took an active role in keeping his poetry in print, securing British publication of the collection of his poetry he had
prepared for the American market, and expanding it incrementally through to the 1869 edition. But after his death she lived largely with her own relatives, and even though she preserved his letters and poetic manuscripts, she kept few of his books or other personal effects. Indeed, oral reports are that she discouraged too curious an interest in him: “she never spoke of AHC--or even mentioned him--to their children after he died. He was simply censored out of their existence.”

The few books she did keep, passed down to her daughter Blanche Athena and thence to her great-niece Katherine Duff, included copies of Clough’s own Bothie and Ambarvalia, Johnson’s Lives in full calf (a school prize from Rugby), Arnold’s Empedocles on Etna inscribed by Arnold to Clough (presumably the copy Clough used to write his essay “Recent English Poetry”), a copy of Emerson’s *Representative Men* (1850), inscribed to Clough by Emerson, an Italian-English dictionary and a copy of Dante that Clough had had in Rome with him in 1849, when he was writing *Amours de Voyage*, and a few miscellaneous items that had been gifts including Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* (the major influence on Clough’s late verse-tales in *Mari Magno*), a Tauchnitz *Iliad* he’d had on holiday in 1848 when he wrote *The Bothie*, Landor’s *Hellenics* (again inscribed), and a finely-bound 18th century edition of Propertius that Clough had inscribed to her. Blanche could have chosen worse in the books she kept, but it’s still slim pickings, and one suspects that she valued the books she kept chiefly for their bindings or inscriptions.

5. Reconstructing Clough’s Reading from Other Sources

So most scholars have turned for evidence to Clough’s mention of books and reading in his poetry, his prose articles, his extensive published correspondence, and more recently in his published diaries. Each of these sources of evidence gives abundant leads, but each has its own problems as an index of actual reading. To take them in reverse order:

The journals date from quite specific periods of Clough’s life—his schooldays at Rugby, his
undergraduate years in Oxford, and, in much more summary form, the years when he was a fellow
of Oriel. The Rugby diaries have still never been published, and the fullest entries in the published
Oxford diaries, the undergraduate years, are largely preoccupied as far as reading goes with
charting his exam preparation of classical texts and with his ambivalent engagement with
Tractarianism—neither a topic with much appeal in current literary studies.¹⁷

Clough’s published prose essays include weekly set-pieces for Balliol on assigned topics,
where the references to specific authors seem almost incidental, and lecture-scripts from his
literature survey-course as part-time Professor of English at University College, London, where
the choice of authors for comment was at least in part dictated not by his personal taste but by the
ten-conventional teaching canon.¹⁸ And, in any case, the only edition of Clough’s prose is
selective, picking out for reprinting essays likely to be of interest to literary critics in the 1960’s; it
includes for instance none of Clough’s seventy-seven essays for the Dictionary of Greek and
Roman Biography.

Much more useful are the references to books and reading in Frederick Mulhauser’s two­
volume edition of Clough’s Correspondence, published in 1957.¹⁹ Mulhauser, though still
selective (he prints only about a third of the over 900 letters he had encountered), is not skewed
towards or against any particular period of Clough’s life (though he is lighter for the 1850’s after
Clough’s marriage, and he doesn’t attempt to include any of Clough’s official correspondence
from the Education Department, which must surely mention books). The biggest deliberate
omission is of Clough’s correspondence with Matthew Arnold, which had already been edited in
the separate volume edited by Howard Foster Lowry in 1932.²⁰ But Lowry had found only one
letter of Clough’s to Arnold, so that a Clough researcher is left like the reader of a Browning
dramatic monologue, trying to reconstruct the silent voice in a one-sided conversation; given that
Arnold was one of Clough’s most literary and most combative correspondents, we might assume
that Clough’s missing letters might have given been a valuable clues to the reading he most cared about.

One thing that the Mulhauser edition does do is give some sense of how Clough’s reading attitudes changed over time. To take just three examples: in April 1838, he writes from Oxford to his Rugby friend J. P. Gell in Cambridge, “Have you read [Richard Hurrell] Froude’s Remains? If not, pray do. I think his and [Henry] Martyn’s Journals are the most instructive books I ever read each in their way” (Correspondence, I, 69); in November 1852, sailing across the Atlantic with Thackeray and Lowell, he writes to his fiancée, “I am reading Esmond,” but by early January he wrote again, “I liked Esmond—but I don’t know it’s much, or much in it” (Correspondence, II, 327, 361); and in early December, 1859, he writes to Charles Eliot Norton, “By the way, are your people reading Darwin on Species, published by Murray?” and then gives himself away by adding “it is a very remarkable book, I believe” (Correspondence, II, 574). In fact, increasing numbers of the book references in his letters are not to the books he has read, but to those he has not read. And when we do read in the later letters of what he is reading, some at least seems to have little bearing on his own writing. For instance, in October 1858, he writes, again to Norton, “Another continuous study with me is Barth’s Africa, which is really worth reading . . . The China book by the Times Commissioner is worth reading, at least in the early 1st half” (Correspondence, II, 556), or again three weeks later, “I have finished Carlyle” [i.e. the most recent two volumes of Frederick the Great] . . . I shall now return to Dr. Barth, whom I left near the Lake Tschad, perhaps first however transacting Clark’s Peloponnessus, which seems easy reading” (Correspondence, II, 559). And he was also reading other African explorers, Speke and Livingstone, at the same period. Why, one wonders.

The most problematic way to pin down Clough’s reading is through the allusions in his poetry. Where there are specific references, epigraphs, or other direct quotations, it may seem
simple enough, though in fact neither of the standard Clarendon editions provides annotation. All the scattered prior annotations to specific lines in two of Clough’s major poems were included with what I could discover myself collated in my Queensland editions of *Amours de Voyage* and *The Bothie*, and most have since been reproduced in other selections. But an allusion is not really evidence that Clough has read a poem or author, so much as evidence that he’s heard of it or him, and probably that he thinks his reader has heard too. And many of Clough’s poetic references to specific authors, like the references in his later letters, express impatience at the world of books, rather than reverence or eagerness.

6. Two Manuscript Inventories of Clough’s Library

It was therefore with relief that I first learnt that much harder evidence had survived about the books in Clough’s personal library. In 1859, when he became ill, and began the long periods of sick leave from the Education Department that only ended in 1861 with his death, he went for health cures to Malvern, Hastings, the Pyrenees, and Italy, and Blanche and his children went home to her family in Derbyshire, and twice houses they had leased had to be sublet furnished, necessitating an inventory of contents. Among the items inventoried were the books. Two separate and overlapping inventories survive in the Clough papers in the Bodleian, and they seem to have gone unnoticed, or at least unexploited, by other Cloughians. I have been working off and on to type my original transcripts and card index into a data base, so that I can see what kinds of searching, sorting and annotation might prove worthwhile.

What is most apparent is the huge disparity between the books on Clough’s shelves and the literary intertexts which even the most historically-minded of Clough scholars brings to bear in the interpretation of his work. There is a mismatch even with items that we know from this letters he had read. The inventory does not, for instance, list a copy of Richard Hurrell Froude’s
Remains, nor of Barth’s Travels, or of books by Speke or Livingstone. It does not include any volumes of Carlyle’s Frederick the Great; no Sartor Resartus, which we know from the Oxford diaries that he read I early 1841; the only Carlyle titles listed are Past and Present (which one might have expected), and the Life of John Sterling (which one ought to have expected but which few current Victorianists have read).

Or take a simple instance of possible poetic influence. The inventory lists, for the front room, top shelf, item 24, a four-volume set of the poetry of Sir Walter Scott. Few Victorianists have read Scott’s poetry, so we have little idea whether or not it might be relevant to Clough’s Scottish-based narrative poem The Bothie, or even to his early, more Romantic verse for the Rugby Magazine. Or to take five successive index cards from the N’s, covering twenty-two volumes: a seven-volume Church History by Neander, his friend Francis Newman’s Hebrew Monarchy, five volumes of John Henry Newman’s Parochial Sermons (1 missing), 4 volumes of Newman’s Sermons (unspecific), and five volumes of Niebuhr’s Roman History. Before we can guess if Clough read these, and I think he did, or how he read them, and what they meant to him, we’d have to know them ourselves much better than any of us are ever likely to do. And all six of those examples concern works in English, when a high proportion of the books on Clough’s shelves were his professional library as a classical scholar, works in Latin or Greek or German, while some of his non-professional books were in French or Italian.

It is not my purpose to depress us all with the scale or difficulty of such literary-historical investigation. I want simply to point out the contrast between the books Clough himself owned and the books brought to bear on his work in modern Clough criticism. To look once more at the opening entries for the letter N: in the index to Walter Houghton’s influential critical book on Clough, in 1963, the Newman brothers both make an appearance, but Neander and Niebuhr have been replaced by the New Statesman, the New York Times Book Review, and Harold Nicolson.
Older biographically-oriented Clough scholars might do a bit better--Chorley, Timko, and Biswas all got Niebuhr, though they all missed Neander--but more recent critics are even further away from Clough's own book-culture. The index to Warwick Slinn's *Discourse of the Self* has only two N entries, to Nietzsche and Christopher Norris.

Or if one indexes one's intertexts with a D: a critic of the 1930's, Goldie Levy, references Dakyns, Dana, and Dumas; a critic of the 1960's, Wendell Harris, references Darwin, Dickens, and Emily Dickinson; a recent critic, Slinn, gives is multiple index entries for de Man and Derrida. But Clough's library list has six separate entries for editions of Demosthenes. Of course, we are talking about different kinds of study, different kinds of intertext, but I still find the contrasts thought-provoking.

7. Conclusion: Kinds of Reading and the Interpretation of Authorial Libraries

Perhaps the most useful perspective on these questions was given by Francis Bacon in the early seventeenth century:

Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed or digested; that is, some books are to be read only in parts; others to be read, but not curiously; and some few to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention.

Some books may also be read by deputy... but that would only be in the... meaner sort of books.

There are many different ways of reading the books on our shelves and different motives and explanations for acquiring, or retaining, any particular volume. Much of what we experience of a book in practice comes from outside its covers--if not from our deputy the book reviewer, then from chance conversation or readerly expectation. And the significance of possessing a book, of its presence in or absence from an individual's personal library, was greatly changed by the
changes in book production, price, and availability, during the Victorian period. To put it crudely, books became more plentiful, motives for possessing them more varied, and possession became less predictably significant. In many ways, owning a book meant a different thing to a mid- or late-Victorian than it had meant to previous generations, and it would mean something different again by the second half of the twentieth century, the decades of the Dickey library. I retain a strong sense that the survival or reconstruction of an author's library provides valuable evidence both in the interpretation of his work and in the mapping of his cultural world. I have become increasingly sceptical, however, that we are likely to make full or continuing use of this evidence.

NOTES


12. Patrick Scott, "Rewriting the Book of Nature: Tennyson, Keble, and The Christian Year," *Victorians Institute Journal*, 16 (1989), 141-156; but cf. Marian Shaw, “In Memoriam and The Christian Year,” in *John Keble in Context*, ed. Kirstie Blair (2004), 158-174: “The handwriting on the inside cover is not that of the young Tennyson but of the older, even elderly, Tennyson... nothing about these unobtrusive marks [by individual titles and poems] looks in the least as if they have been done by Tennyson, who always scored very firmly... as far as physical evidence is concerned, there is, then, none to suggest a direct influence or link between The Christian Year and In Memoriam” (p. 159).


15. Letter from Robin Biswas to Patrick Scott, January 25, 1996, reporting the late Katherine Duff’s conversations with her aunt Blanche Athena Clough (Clough’s daughter).
16. These items were described by Katherine Duff's friend and executrix, Hermia Oliver, in a more general article "The Shore Smith Family Library: Arthur Hugh Clough and Florence Nightingale," *Book Collector* (Winter 1979), 521-529.


