The Premature Belatedness of Victorianism's Boyhood: Clough and the Rugby Magazine, 1835-1837

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This paper takes up a very simple idea that is now, by 11.30 ish on the Saturday of this conference, perhaps a truism. We commonly read the 1890s as the decade of a new generation, fashioning an identity through belatedness, a felt disjunction from the monolithic stolidity of their parents, decentering the cultural inheritance through the parodic and the ironic, yet exploiting or expressing an exhilarating shiftiness in relating identity to gender or class. Even the strong silent types of Kiplingesque imperialism are linked to the major generational trope through the flexible concepts of repression or displacement. Yet younger writers from the other side of the Victorian frame, the 1830s, evidently share many of the same intergenerational and situational anxieties. I want to suggest some of the similarities and differences through the story of a short-lived literary magazine produced in the mid-1830s in the major forcing-house of Victorian identity, Dr. Arnold’s Rugby.

This kind of cultural history is always, consciously or unconsciously, colored by touchstones—the phrases, mottos, slogans we joyously pirate in our favorite teaching riffs but which we often repress in what we call original scholarship. Behind this paper lurk three touchstones. The first, from Michael Wolff, is about the centrality to Victorian studies of the periodical publication mode: “the basic unit for the study of Victorian culture,” Professor Wolff wrote in 1966, well before most of his fellow English professors caught up with the death of the author, “the basic unit for the study of Victorian culture is the individual issue of a Victorian
periodical” (Wolff, 43). The second, from the prologue to Arthur Hugh Clough’s neglected masterpiece *Dipsychus*, drafted in 1850, is about the sequencing in adolescent development: “Oh, for goodness’ sake, my dear boy,” Clough makes his elderly uncle protest, a century before Piaget and Kohlberg,

don’t go into the theory of it . . . you know very well I don’t understand all those new words. But . . . I quite agree consciences are often much too tender in your generation--schoolboys’ consciences too! . . . It’s all Arnold’s doing; he spoilt the public schools. . . . the old schools . . . did not disqualify the country’s youth for after-life. (Clough, *Poems*, 292-293).

My third touchstone, from David Newsome, concerns changes in the Victorian concept of manliness. Writing in 1961, decades before the current academic discourse of masculinity, Newsome noticed a shift in the mid-Victorian period between two paradigms of manliness:

Whereas Coleridge had regarded manliness as something essentially adult,

Kingsley and Hughes . . . found its converse in effeminacy. . . . When Arnold exhorted his boys to be manly, he meant that they were to put away childish things;

but when Hughes portrayed Tom Brown as the paragon of manliness, he was expressing admiration for the sort of boy ‘who’s got nothing odd about him’”

(Newsome, 198).

Clough’s *Rugby Magazine* (1835-1837) has received comment from biographers, Clough’s literary critics, and Rugby’s institutional historians, but its eight issues have been largely neglected as cultural documents, textual evidence, not just of Dr. Arnold’s influence, but of the culture of Victorianism’s boyhood.

The British school magazine is really a post-Arnoldian phenomenon, by several decades.
The Rosenbergs’ avowedly-selective roll-call in the New Cambridge Bibliography listed The Marlburian (from 1865), The Wykehamist and The Reptonian (from 1866), The Wellingtonian and The Haileyburyian (from 1868), The Malvernian and The Harrovian (from 1869, though the latter had a rocky first few years), The Cheltonian (1874), and The Salopian (from 1876). Edited by senior boys, under a master’s watchful eye, the classic late Victorian school magazine soon settled to a predictable role as chronicler or annalist—records of school achievements and prizes, athletic news, news of alumni and their successes. Where literary items were admitted, these were often prize essays on set topics or jocular light verse, often penned by one of the masters. Though the target readership must have been parents and old boys, current students provided a subscription-base that was in effect compulsory.1

By contrast the few early 19th century magazines published from various spublic schools were all unofficial, student-initiated, overwhelmingly literary in content, short-lived, and virtually silent about organized sport. P. G. Wodehouse in an early essay, noting how much of Hughes’s Tom Brown Schooldays (1857) was foreign to his late Victorian schoolboy readers, posited two different authors for the two halves of the novel, and he was picking up on both a well-documented generational shift in Victorian schools and also a cultural tension within Arnold’s Rugby, between the small circle of Arnold’s ambitious literary sixth-formers and the larger school populace of more ordinary Tom Browns, Easts and Flashmen (Wodehouse; Scott, “School and

1 Parenthetically, one might note that where a future literary figure did contribute to a school magazine, whether official or counter-cultural, the relevant issues can now command very high prices. Three issues of the Rugby School Phoenix and four of The Vulture (both 1904-1905), containing early poems by Rupert Brooke, were recently on offer in London for $2500, while for the 1925 volume of The Leys Fortnightly, with three early stories and two poems by Malcolm Lowry, the recent asking price in New York was a cool $5000. The moral is hang on to high school and college magazines: you must back a winner one day.
The *Rugby Magazine*, however, was however, by no means original or the first of its kind. When it was founded in 1835, it was consciously modeled on the *Etonian* of 1820-1821, described by the DNB as "the most famous of school journals," and numbering among its contributors along with Praed and H. N. Coleridge two poets later known to the Rugby magazinists, John Moultrie and Sidney Walker. Harrow had followed a few years later with six numbers of the *Harrowian* (1828). So in part the founding of the *Rugby Magazine* was an assertion of equality and ambition by a provincial school that was still rather socially, if not academically, ambiguous.

The *Rugby Magazine* came at a time of transition, when the first cadre Dr. Arnold had nurtured from arrival at Rugby were just leaving for the universities. Its contributors in the early numbers in fact included these recent alumni as well as current Rugbeians like Clough. Some of the more prominent ex-Rugbeians doubted the new generation were up to what was needed. Arthur Stanley, already at Balliol, described the venture to his Cambridge co-eval Charles Vaughan as "singularly audacious, so much so that I would rather not have it tried" (Prothero and Bradley, I, 139). In the event he himself contributed for the second number his often-cited essay "School a Little World" (RM, I:2, 95-105). An elaborate editorial oversight committee, the Magazine Levy, was established to rate submissions, generating reams of anxious correspondence ("There is no prose at all ready at Cambridge. . . I thought of trying some remarks on Lycidas. . . we have no room to admit articles for encouraging").² Dr. Arnold himself, to whom the second

² All the comments in the parentheses come from unpublished sections of A.H. Clough's letter to A.P. Stanley, A.P. Stanley, Nov. 17 [1835]; from the MS in the Temple Reading Room, Rugby School. While the bulk of the letter was reprinted by Mulhauser (pp. 28-30), from the life
number was wisely dedicated, quickly recognized the magazine’s public relations potential: “I have just seen ... the second number of the Rugby Magazine,” he wrote to an old boy on September 30 1835, “I have an unmixed pleasure in its going on” (Stanley, I, 436). “Have you seen our Rugby Magazine,” he wrote on October 12 to Mr. Justice Coleridge. “I delight in the spirit of it, and ... I think also it is likely to do good to the school” (Stanley, I, 439). Dr. Arnold’s goal is echoed with a very adult astringency in the editorial preface to the magazine’s second number: “We desire that our School should possess some work which, by circulating more or less in the common literature of the day, may remind the general reader of an Institution which, if not pressed by personal considerations, he would now be little likely to notice” [RM, I:2, iv].

Adding to the general air of let’s-pretend adultness was the convention of contributor anonymity. Though the majority of contributions bore initials, they were not the initials of the contributors’ own names, and most regular contributors kept several sets of initials going simultaneously. Clough, for instance, contributes as Z and A.V. as well as under the familiar T.Y.C. (for Two Years Old Colt, or Tom Yankee Clough, in somewhat vague tribute to his South Carolinian childhood). Clough’s future collaborator Thomas Burbidge, son of the Leicester town clerk, wrote not only as M.V.B, H.B., and M.L., but under the aristocratic initials F. D’A. Just before the third number appeared, one of the school’s Trustees asked if he could have the names of the contributors, and apparently Clough then got their agreement to make a list. They were never publicly unmasked, however, though Clough sent a key to the early contributors in a letter to his sister Ann Jemima (Mulhauser, I, 34), and the printed index in the magazine’s final number of W.G.Ward, Mulhauser had not apparently seen the manuscript and omits all but one paragraph about the magazine.
is keyed to the initials they used. J.N. Simpkinson's marked file, formerly in the Temple Reading Room at Rugby, was apparently deacquisitioned as a tatty duplicate in 1966, while by the time I first went hunting for another two-volume set that had been reported in 1942 as in Rugby's Hodgson Library and as carrying authoritative (partial) "keys to the initials," pencilled in each volume, only one volume could be found. The best key I've come across is a marked file in the Birmingham Free Library. Putting all these sources together, Wellesley-like, one can get plausible attributions for all but eleven of the Rugby Magazine's 205 separate contributions. There were twenty contributors in all. Clough and Burbidge between them had written nearly half the items in the magazine, with Clough contributing 42 items and Burbidge 54.

The imagined readership for the magazine was not limited to the School itself. In addition to their local printers and booksellers, Thomas Combe, of Leicester and then Rugby, the wrappers listed co-publishers in Oxford, Cambridge, London and Edinburgh. Not many later school magazines have appeared under imprints as prominent as William Pickering and William Blackwood. After the enthusiasm of the first number, which actually had to be reprinted, there were never enough sales. Shortly after the second number came out, Clough wrote to J.P. Gell in Cambridge: "there are not more than 130 copies sold here." In March 1836, Clough was arguing they should call a halt after four numbers, or one volume, because after four months, total sales of number 3 had only reached 220 copies, "and first I want to know what great intrinsic value two

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4 Letter of Clough to J.P. Gell, October 24 1835; Bodleian MS Eng. Lett. c. 189 [CAKL 23].
vols. possess over one” (Mulhauser, I, 41). Despite the best efforts of the Levy to drum up subscribers in assigned circulation districts 5 --Clough himself wrote rather hopefully to ask his incipiently-bankrupt parents in South Carolina to solicit South Carolinian subscribers--, losses were such that as late as 1840 the individual Levy members owed Combe five pounds each (Mulhauser, I, 17; I, 100).

What is most surprising about the Rugby Magazine, when contrasted with its late-Victorian counterparts, is not the sales, but the contents. It was in the editors' phrase “a Literary Miscellany” (RM: I:2, v), and the contents are almost entirely what would now be called creative writing, poetry or short sketches, with the odd informal essay or bit of creative non-fiction thrown in. There is no school news, only a few stories or poems directly relating to school life, and almost none of the adolescent Evangelical piety that Clough’s biographers have inferred from the prayer for the magazine published by Howard Foster Lowry from Clough’s still-unedited Rugby notebooks (Lowry, 12). A typical issue will have some twenty-five items, and only two or three ‘serious’ pieces. A letter of Clough’s to A.P. Stanley indicates his general editorial approach: “I only wish there was more light prose, . . . if we cannot get light prose, we must have an abundance of poetry” (as fn. 2 above).

The poetry ranged from the sentimental, even the mawkish, to the playful and parodic. A fair proportion of it is heterosexual love poetry in the contemporary sub-Romantic album or literary annual mode, but often treated self-mockingly. What kind of adolescent later in the century, one asks, at an all-male school, could have penned Burbidge’s extraordinarily-detached lines about about the opportunities for teenage love offered in the Rugby neighborhood, and what

5 Letter of Clough to J. N. Simpkinson, Dec. 3 1835; MS in Bodleian Library.
late-Victorian headmaster would have let them be printed?

So if love, young sybil, in life’s sweet prime
    Her rapturous secrets proffer,
Forewarned of old, we’ll be wise in time,
    And close with her largest offer.
Later, be sure, like the Roman of yore,
    Eager and glad to buy them,
We shall pay the same for a smaller store,
    Though we’ve no time left to try them!
Then drink life’s cup, while it yet foams up,
    With its blissful hues ideal,
And love, sweet dream, though it only seem,

Clough’s own poetic contributions include quite moving and personal pieces, like his verses recalling a childhood summer on the storm-prone coastal islands near Charleston, South Carolina, as well as experiments in most of the current poetic styles of the literary annuals, but his ghost-story poem, “The Legend of Dead Man’s Corner,” neatly mocks its own scariness, his poem on writing poems is about not writing poems, and his verses on school history archly subvert the very institutional mythologizing that later writers such as Thomas Hughes would make synonymous with Rugby School:

In the days when twenty fellows
    Drank out of one large mug,
And pewter were the dishes,
    And a tin can was the jug;--
In the days when shoes and boots were
    Three times a week japanned,
And we sate on stools, not sofas,--
    There were giants in the land! (RM, 2:4, 389).

The clue to the magazine’s characteristic tonal range, and to its underlying model, lies in the editorial composite articles featured in most issues, under a catch-all title like “Scraps from my portfolio,” where the members of the Levy, typically facing a printer’s deadline, discuss (and
Rugby Magazine

incidentally print) the poems or stories they don’t quite understand or don’t want to print. Sometimes they will print only extracts or the opening of an item before interrupting it (though we perhaps suspect the rest of it was never written). By the final issue, the lone editor, Clayton/Clough, is left musing by himself over the disjecta membra from which he must assemble the final pages, shuffling articles “in the manner of a person about to deal out a pack of cards,” before watching, “with the calm superiority which a substantial name must always feel over a ghostly initial,” his phantom ex-contributors vanish, “so many of whom had been created by himself” (RM, II:4, 392). At first I thought this neat device of a committee-based composite article was a straight crib from the opening number of the Etonian, but the Levy’s references to their own magazine as “Maga” suggest that both sets of schoolboy editors were in fact imitating the generic subversion of Blackwood’s and Wilson’s “Noctes.” By the time of the Rugby Magazine, there is also the influence of Maga’s rival, the early Fraser’s Magazine, with Maginn’s wild satire, which had recently printed the equally-self-parodying Sartor Resartus by Dr. Arnold’s admired friend Thomas Carlyle. Dr. Arnold’s sixth-formers exploited the same parodic playfulness with which Blackwood’s and Fraser’s together undercut the voiced authority of the Edinburgh, Quarterly, and Westminster. Both the stand-alone contributions and the pot-pourri editorial collages of the Rugby Magazine reveal the adolescence of Victorianism to be more conflicted than and quite distinctive from either (Dr.) Arnoldism’s liberal assurance or Tom-Hughesian heartiness.

The most surprising single article I found on this rereading was a fine and appreciative
essay on the sonnets of Shakespeare in the second number, again by Burbidge. What is surprising is that Burbidge discusses the sonnets as poems of male love, feelings, he says, that "the custom of society has bound--almost until they have died in captivity," and then goes on to explain what he's talking about by reference to "our schoolboy attachments," especially that between "a younger boy" and an older friend, even though among adults "the ban of custom" checks "the growth and the expression" of "such attachment" (RM, I:2, 148). Burbidge's meaning is if intensely expressed also vague enough in detail, and in any case the essay is hardly a typical contribution, but what is certain is that no headmaster in the closing years of Victoria's reign would have permitted any such discussion in his school magazine. Indeed, few late Victorian headmasters would have permitted even the Rugby Magazine's heterosexual poetry. Instead of the Victorian period broadening from more to more, one seems to find the hegemony of cultural crackdown.

Did the contributors to the Rugby Magazine recognize the imaginative and conceptual freedom that they had created for themselves? Clough wrote two different retrospective judgments for the end of the magazine. His prose "Address of Leave-taking" in the last number begins with nice ambiguity "Our pleasant play is ended," but the final "Stanzas" now attributed to him recognize also that in a few years the magazine will be despised or forgotten by all except its contributors, who will sentimentalize it:

They may o'erlook who will, and they despise
    But we cannot be such; for we shall listen
With other ears . .

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6 I cannot type this line without recalling J.I.M. Stewart's tart and too-little-known comment on the sonnets, that "Few subjects outside the realm of sacred theology have proved themselves so well adapted to demonstrating the imbecility of the human mind."
When he was asked four years later by a new generation of Arnold’s sixth formers to contribute to a successor-magazine, *The Rugbaean*, he warned, sardonically, I think, rather than sadly, that schoolboy achievement is a delusion, that “each day now must be more brief,” “that strength of limb and might of mind / Alike their limit now must find” (Clough, *Poems*, p. 480; cf. Scott, “Longest Day”).

I’ve only scratched the surface, but I hope that my general point is clear enough. Early Victorian boyhood, the boyhood of Victorianism, was much more self-conscious, much more playful, much more self-subverting, much more self-indulgently doom-ridden, much more detached about gender roles and social categorization, much more acutely aware of its own secondariness and belatedness and insecurity, than we usually admit. And these traits, so often associated with the closing of the Victorian period, appeared right at what we have traditionally thought the center of early Victorian earnestness, Dr. Arnold’s Rugby.
References


Patrick Scott is Professor of English at the University of South Carolina, where he also currently serves as Associate University Librarian for Special Collections. His publications on Arthur Hugh Clough, starting in 1967, include editions of *Amours de Voyage* and *The Bothie*, and the standard bibliographical study. He is the 1998-2000 president of the Victorians Institute.