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Arthur Hugh Clough and Florence Nightingale: A Relationship Reexamined

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This paper is about two Victorian reformers, Arthur Hugh Clough and Florence Nightingale, and their collaboration in the late eighteen-fifties, and about the way that collaboration has long been misunderstood by writers and scholars treating either of them individually. Indeed, among my rejected titles for the paper was “Parallel Lies,” the lies being the parallel misinterpretations retailed by partisans of either partner, rather than by the partners themselves. Sometimes this misunderstanding has been merely the result of a one-sided focus, but the most famous and the most influential treatment of the relationship was also the most wilful in its caricature of the two Victorians involved.

But I have also a second interest in the topic. From my second perspective, based in my university’s main library, this topic illustrates another relationship that is often misunderstood, and sometimes wilfully caricatured, that between different kinds of research material, in print, both Victorian and modern, in digital formats, and in surviving manuscript material. Though I think of myself as a bookman, each of these kinds of material has played a role in this paper. It is, I think, time to become as hermeneutically self-conscious about the sources we use, and the way we are influenced by the differing mediums through which we encounter history, as about the frameworks or theoretical and cultural lenses through which we interpret these sources.

For far too many Victorianists, the Clough-Nightingale relationship is still coloured by
Lytton Strachey’s mocking account in his *Eminent Victorians* (1918). In Strachey’s account, Clough recurs as a weak secondary figure. In the sixth-form at Dr. Arnold’s Rugby, Clough is featured as “this earnest adolescent, with the weak ankles and the solemn face” who “fell completely under” Arnold’s “sway,” and was ruined for life (Strachey, 195-196). After he marries and settles in London, according to Strachey, Clough:

fell immediately under the influence of Miss Nightingale . . . could he be of any use? Certainly he could. There were a great number of miscellaneous little jobs which there was nobody handy to do. For instance, when Miss Nightingale was travelling, there were the railway tickets to be taken; and there were proof-sheets to be corrected; and there were parcels to be done up in brown paper and carried to the post (Strachey 147).

Strachey uses the parcels as a synecdochic running gag, so that ten pages on Clough’s death is dealt with in just two lines: “Another blow fell on her”, but a blow with the sole consequence that “never more would he tie up her parcels” (157), and forty pages further on, the cameo in the Arnold essay concludes: “it was not surprising . . . that [Clough] should have lost his faith; that he should have spent the rest of his life lamenting that loss, . . . and that he should have eventually succumbed, conscientiously doing up brown paper parcels for Florence Nightingale” (197). Faced with Strachey’s deft caricature, Clough scholars, not unnaturally, have often backed away from examining the relationship at all, lest it overshadow their valiant and recurrent attempts to revalue Clough’s earlier poetry. On the other side, Nightingale scholars, rightly wanting to stress their subject’s strength and independence, her effectiveness and controlling influence, in the cause of reform, have been equally reluctant to dwell on a relationship in which Nightingale might well
seem selfish and exploitative. From both sides therefore, in the effort to exorcize the Stracheyan spell, the tendency has been to minimize, marginalize, or downplay the Clough-Nightingale relationship, bracketing it off as a mere postscript to Clough’s life and as a minor, brief, and subordinate, interlude in Nightingale’s.

But the story deserves better than that, from both sides. The relationship was, in many respects, much more equal than has generally been assumed, but to see it clearly, we need a stronger sense of Clough’s pre-Nightingale life, of who he was, and what he brought to the relationship.
Through his career, Clough had been involved in and identified with Victorian reform activity. As a young university teacher in the hungry 40's, he had worked with the homeless and unemployed through the Oxford MediCity Society. In his role as an Oxford tutor, he had written against conspicuous consumption during the Irish famine. Almost uniquely among Victorian poets, he had read extensively in contemporary economic theory, and had written a series of newspaper articles condemning laissez-faire. He had been directly involved in the movement for University reform. He had been in Paris during the Revolution of 1848, and in Rome in 1849 during Garibaldi’s defense of the Roman Republic against the besieging armies of France. Indeed, during the revolutions of 1848, on the fourth of July, one of his Oxford friends or students printed up a fake wall-poster headed “Liberty! Equality! Fraternity!,” proclaiming:

The cry of reform has been too long unheard. Our infatuated rulers refused to listen to it. The term of their tyranny is at last accomplished. The Vice-Chancellor has fled . . . The University is no more. A Republican Athenaeum will henceforth diffuse light & civilization . . . A Provisional Government has been established . . .

Leading the names among the “undersigned Citizens” said to “have nobly devoted themselves to the task of Administration” was “Citizen Clough, President of the Executive Committee.” Even in the 1840's, then, Clough was widely recognized as an advanced champion of reform, and a stalwart critic of entrenched authority and custom, and recognized in just those circles that would be themselves hold increasing influence in the decade that followed.

Moreover, Clough was also recognized even in the 1840's as holding advanced views on traditional family relationships and traditional gender roles, in a way that parallels Nightingale’s
own writings from the same period. He had written about this, semi-satirically no doubt, in his first long poem, *The Bothie of Toper-na-Fuosich*, published in 1848, where Oxford undergraduates on a summer reading party in Scotland debate the relative merits of modern fine ladies and practical highland lassies, with the strongest voice on this as on other topics that of the radical Philip Hewson:

Oh, if our highborn girls knew only the grace, the attraction,

Labour, and labour alone, can add to the beauty of women,

Better a daisy in earth than a dahlia cut and gathered,

Better a cowslip with root than a prize carnation without it.

*Bothie* (1848), II. 26-27, 81-82.

Like the debate, the subsequent story takes the side of the highland lassies, and Philip’s eventual bride Elspeth Mackaye makes the argument explicit, first on role of female learning (“I will read your books . . . I will read to myself when I choose it,” VIII.111, 124), and then on the rejection of upper-class gender roles (“Philip, she said, I will not be a lady./ We will do work together,” VIII.136-137). Both in *The Bothie*, and in his early poem “Duty” (first published in *Ambarvalia*, 1849), Clough identifies the pressure to accept family expectations and conventional family roles as negative for men and women alike, rather as Nightingale would in “Cassandra”:

Duty—that’s to say complying

With whate’er’s expected here;

On your unknown cousin dying,

Straight be ready with the tear;

Upon etiquette relying,
Unto Usage naught denying . . .
Go to church--the world require you,
To balls--the world require you too,
And marry--papa and mamma desire you,
And your sisters and schoolfellows do . . .
Life at very birth destroyed,
Atrophy, exinanition!
Duty! ------
Yea, by duty’s prime condition,
Pure nonentity of duty! (Poems, 1974, p. 27).

Nor was it all talk. On a more personal level, in the 1840’s, Clough had mentored his sister Ann Jemima Clough, later first Principal of Newnham College, Cambridge, in her first steps towards professional training for a teaching career, and supported her for a period of study at the Borough Road Training College, as shocking a choice for a young lady of their social class as a Nightingale apprenticeship for an upper-class nursing recruit in the 1860’s.

In 1848, Clough himself followed these reformist views to their logical next step, by stepping away from the traditionalist constraints of his Oxford fellowship and moving to London, first as principal of the non-sectarian University Hall, and then from the mid-1850’s (after a false start in America) as a civil servant in the Education Office of the Privy Council, where he was involved in some of the most-far-reaching of Victorian central-government reform initiatives, both in day-to-day correspondence and as a travelling researcher investigating military education abroad.
So when in 1857, some six or seven years after he and Florence Nightingale first met, and three years after his marriage to Blanche Smith, Nightingale’s cousin, he became involved with Nightingale’s post-Crimean medical and military reform projects, Clough was by no means a negligible ally for the pressure group she called her Cabinet. Indeed, in some ways, he was a particularly significant recruit, much more so than the medical experts and politicians. He had himself struggled as she had done to reject conventional roles and to find a task in life that fitted his talents. As an undergraduate, he had felt drawn, as she had been, to the religious imperatives of Tractarianism, though not, as she briefly was, to Rome itself. In such essays of the early 1850’s as his “Notes on the Religious Tradition,” he had tried to sketch out a new, post-credal, religious belief, as Nightingale was also doing at the same time, in the first 90-page version of her Suggestions for Thought and her novel-essay “Cassandra.” They shared common experiences from long before they first met, as for instance, in both visiting Italy and Rome during the short-lived Roman Republic, and during the siege, in 1849, Clough had already encountered, through his friendship with Margaret Fuller, the potential value, and the role conflicts, of the lady nurse-superintendent in a wartime hospital. There is the intriguing possibility that Clough’s aunt Martha was the Miss Martha Clough, bereaved fiancee of Lord Panmure’s brother Col. Maule who had been killed in the first months of the Crimean, who had gone out to Scutari in 1855, escaped from Nightingale’s authority to nurse with the 79th Highlanders, fell ill, and died on the voyage home. Nightingale had denounced her as a “mad freak,” representing the worst in upper-class English women (Gill, p. 392), but nonetheless took charge after her death in erecting a memorial cross and managing the release of the news to the British newspapers. Clough and Nightingale were close in age (he was born in 1819, she in 1820), and through Clough’s marriage he shared
with Nightingale a common extended family and social network.

The years when Clough worked with Nightingale, from 1857 to 1861, were much her most productive, both in the extent and range of her published writing, and also in the effectiveness of her influence as a reformer. Of course, he was not her only collaborator: in terms of direct political influence, there was Sidney Herbert, as Secretary of State for War, and in terms of medical knowledge of medical matters, there were Drs. Sutherland, Farr, McNeill, and Clark. For household management and day to day support, Nightingale had, till she struck in 1860, her aunt Mai, who was also Clough’s mother-in-law. But Clough, the published author and reviewer, the classicist-turned-civil servant, could play a different role.

To a much greater extent than any of the others, he combined a strong belief in progress and reform with the cultural knowledge of an insider. Except at periods of unusual stress, his government job took him to the Council Office from 11 in the morning till about three or four in the afternoon. He regularly brought work home, and for some months in 1858 he travelled in France and Germany in connection with plans for reforming the education of British military officers. Till 1857, he devoted a significant portion of his time to completing his major work of the 1850’s, the five-volume Plutarch translation, and even after the manuscript was completed, he had 1500 pages of proofs to correct before its final publication, in Boston and London, in 1859, as well as other literary projects, including preparing his poem *Amours de Voyage* for publication in 1858 in James Russell Lowell’s new *Atlantic Monthly*, and preparing a one-volume Plutarch selection for Longmans, for use in schools. During these years, too, he and Blanche had two young children, with at least one miscarriage, and just before his death, in November 1861, they had a third child.
Nonetheless in 1857 he brought his skills as a civil servant and administrator to Nightingale's aid. The two letters excerpted on the handout illustrate graphically the close parallel between Clough's government work and his work for Nightingale. He wrote on her behalf, as he wrote on before of Robert Lowe, his political chief at the Education Office, and his job was the same, to decide what she or Lowe would have written, and to do it for them. When there began to be murmurings in the newspapers about Nightingale's slowness in making use of the Nightingale Fund, the charitable endowment that had been raised by public donation when she returned from the Crimea, it was Clough who was appointed secretary to the fund, with Sidney Herbert as chairman, to defuse criticism and establish its long-term influence in nursing education.

Moreover, just as he served as secretary to the government commission on military education, he managed the production, the practical editing, the proof-reading, the cross-referencing, of some of her most important and voluminous writing projects: *Notes on Matters affecting the health, efficiency and hospital administration of the British Army* (London: Harrison, 1858), octavo, 830 pages, but pagination irregular, in fourteen sections, each with its own preface and appendices and notes; *Subsidiary Notes as to the Introduction of Female Nursing into Military Hospitals in peace and war* (London: Harrison, 1858), folio, 194 pages, in four different pagination series; and *Suggestions for Thought to the Searchers After Truth among the Artizans of England* (London: Eyre and Spottiswode, 1860), in three volumes, with varying titles, totalling 876 pages. This of course in addition to several separately-published redactions from the longer works (such as her *Appendix* to the Royal Commission Report of 1858, her graphic folio *Mortality of the British Army*, also 1858, and her *Sanitary History of the British Army*, 1859), as well as a number of significant shorter books, including her classic *Notes on*
Nursing (London: Harrison, 1860), 79 pages, and New York: Appleton, 1860, 140 pages, and a series of at least thirteen articles and pamphlets in 1858-59 on the construction of hospitals, that would eventually become Nightingale’s Notes on Hospitals (London: Longmans, 1863), 187 pages. The correspondence about these works, both in Clough’s papers in the Bodleian and Nightingale’s in the British Library, confirm what one might deduce from the bibliographical complexity of these works, that from a production point of view, Nightingale was a very difficult author, making constant changes and additions. Not for nothing were most of her major works what we would call privately published, produced by a printer at the author’s cost and risk. For at least two years, Clough was the primary manager for this nightmare of book production. Those brown paper parcels were proofs, and revises, and addenda, and appendices, and advance pre-production page proofs for distribution to potentially-influential allies.

And, unlike the browbeaten and downtrodden Sidney Herbert, but like his mother-in-law, who after three years helping Nightingale, decided in 1860 that she again wanted to make her life with her husband her priority, Clough had not succumbed to Nightingale. He worked with her from choice. Once her major works on military reform were completed, and reforms were under way with Sidney Herbert at the War Office, he reined back, recognizing the strain such overwork had put on his health, vacationing with his wife and young children, and renewing literary contacts, visiting the Tennyson’s a renewing correspondence with his American friends, particularly Lowell and Charles Eliot Norton.

Nightingale herself recognized the special contribution he made to her team of collaborators, and also felt a special responsibility for the sacrifice it entailed for her cousin, Clough’s wife. In 1858, when she had thought herself to be dying, she made a will, now in the
British Library, bequeathing to him to bulk of her personal estate. Of course, she outlived him by nearly fifty years, and that will was superseded, but even after her death, Clough's son, also Arthur Hugh, is listed among her executors. On hearing of Clough's death, from heart disease, in November 1861, Nightingale wrote to Sir John McNeill:

He had seemed so much better . . . He was a man of a rare mind and temper. The more so because he would gladly do 'plain work.' To me, seeing the inanities and blundering harasses which were the uses to which we put him, he seemed like a race horse harnessed to a coal truck . . . . He helped me immensely, tho' not officially--by his sound judgment, & constant sympathy. 'Oh, Jonathan, my brother Jonathan, my love to thee was very great--passing the love of women.” (Ever Yours, 228).

Following immediately on the death of Sidney Herbert, Clough's death was, for Nightingale, the end of an era of productive collaboration (“Not one man remains, that I can call a man, of all those whom these five years I have worked with,” 228). A few days later, she wrote to her friend Mary Clark Mohl:

As for Clough, Oh Jonathan, my brother Jonathan my love to thee was very great, passing the love of women . . . . Ezekiel went running about naked, 'for a sign.' I can’t run about naked, because it is not the custom of the country. But I would mount three widows' caps on my head, 'for a sign.' And I would cry, this is for Sidney Herbert, I am his real widow--this for Arthur Clough, I am his true widow . . . And this, the biggest widow's cap of all, is for the loss of all sympathy on the part of my nearest and dearest
[that is, her extended family of Shore-Smith cousins]. (*Ever Yours*, 232).

It is hard not to hear an echo of these responses to Clough’s death also in her comment on the death that same month of Prince Albert:

> How well we could have spared the whole family! . . . What would it have signified if the whole lot had gone, excepting only Albert? . . . What he has done for our country no one knows.

> The Queen has really behaved like a hero . . . She is the only woman in these realms, except perhaps myself, who has a must in her life--who must set aside private griefs and attend to the res publica. (*Ever Yours*, 232).

This is a long way from the Stracheyan caricature of the weak male succumbing to the exploitative monomaniac female reformer.

I have only scratched the surface. The standard edition of Clough’s letters lists over 900 letters, but prints only 300 or so, and those in excerpts; most of Clough’s correspondence with Nightingale in the Bodleian remains unpublished. Nightingale is thought to have written well over fourteen thousand letters in her life-time, and the majority of those remain unpublished. The complex bibliography and production history of the works on which Nightingale and Clough collaborated remains largely unstudied, certainly in terms of modern research techniques in bibliography and book history. I have deliberately eschewed speculation on the psycho-sexual dynamics of this relationship, because I wanted first to explore the facts, and redress some of the more obvious biases, in conventional accounts.

More broadly, even forty years after the theoretical turn away from the author,
commentary on Nightingale’s, as on other works of Victorian reform, seems to remain stubbornly focused on authorship, rather than relationship, and on the personal texts, “Cassandra” and *Suggestions for Thought*, rather than on the negotiated texts of the administrative and investigative works that bear her name. To get a truer picture, either of Clough or of Nightingale, one needs to be conscious of such lingering literary biases. For Clough, such biases have led scholars to avoid, or sometimes to demonize, the role of Nightingale in his career. For Nightingale, the same biases have led to the denial or marginalization of an essential component within her life, the collaborative phase “passing the love of women,” in which Clough was a major partner and which led to Nightingale’s major achievements.