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# Clough and His Discontents: *Amours de Voyage* and the English Hexameter

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Dactylic hexameter, the chief meter of classical poetry, was imitated in English by the Elizabethans, then all but disappeared from English poetry until it enjoyed a sudden reflorescence in the nineteenth century.[1] The Victorian hexameter revival produced, among numerous translations and original poems, at least one acknowledged masterpiece, Arthur Hugh Clough's *Amours de Voyage*.[2] Clough's poem takes the form of a series of letters written by English travellers in Italy in 1848; the chief letter-writer is Claude, a dilettantish, rather snobbish young gentleman who falls in with a wealthy but middle-class family named Trevellyn. Claude's attitude towards the Trevellyns, especially towards the eldest daughter Mary, consists of equal parts attraction and repulsion, and this coexistence of opposing impulses forms a central motif in *Amours de Voyage*. In the first part of this essay I discuss this motif, and in the second I show how it is reflected in the poem's chosen meter. Finally I suggest that the dual nature of the English dactylic hexameter, its liability to display two conflicting tendencies at once, is not unique; the same duality in some degree typifies all meter, and it can help us understand the uneasy relationship that always exists between the meter and the meaning of a poem.

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[1] The standard account of Renaissance metrical experiments is Derek Attridge, *Well-weighed syllables: Elizabethan verse in classical metres* (Cambridge, 1974). For a good account of the Victorian revival, see Yopie Prins, "Victorian meters," in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. Joseph Bristow (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 89-113, specifically the section entitled "The hexameter mania," pp. 100-106, and also Kenneth Haynes, *English Literature and Ancient Languages* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 131-133.

[2] John Goode writes, "The claim that must be made for *Amours de Voyage* is not just that it is a masterpiece, but a major masterpiece"; see "*Amours de Voyage*: The Aqueous Poem," in *The Major Victorian Poets: Reconsiderations*, ed. Isobel Armstrong (London, 1969), pp. 275-297, on p. 276.

A modern reader may be struck with a sense of familiarity upon coming across the following lines in Canto III of *Amours de Voyage*:

> But for assurance within of a limitless ocean divine, o'er
> Whose great tranquil depths unconscious the wind-tost surface
> Breaks into ripples of trouble that come and change and endure not,—
> But that in this, of a truth, we have our being, and know it,
> Think you we men could submit to live and move as we do here?[3]

The "unconscious" oceanic feeling described here by the protagonist, Claude, correlates very closely with that described by Freud at the opening of *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Freud begins his treatise by relating a friend's claim to have traced "the true source of religious sentiments":

> This, he says, consists in a peculiar feeling, which he himself is never without, which he finds confirmed by many others, and which he may suppose is present in millions of people. It is a feeling which he would like to call a sensation of "eternity," a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded—as it were, "oceanic." … One may, he thinks, rightly call oneself religious on the ground of this oceanic feeling alone, even if one rejects every belief and every illusion.[4]

Freud does not detect any such feeling in himself and denies that it can be the source of religious feeling, but he admits its existence in others, and he even postulates its origin: it

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[3] Canto III, ll. 125-9. All quotations from *Amours de Voyage* refer to *The Poems of Arthur Hugh Clough*, ed. F. L. Mulhauser, 2nd edition (Oxford, 1974), hereafter cited parenthetically.
[4] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, tr. and ed. James Strachey (New York and London, 1961), pp. 10-11; hereafter cited parenthetically.

represents the remnant of the sense of unboundedness experienced by infants, before they learn to distinguish their finite selves from the world around them (Freud 13-15).

If all humans begin life with this oceanic sense, and millions maintain a trace of it into adulthood, it is not surprising that Claude should feel it too. But the parallel seems uncanny because of another echo between the two works. Freud is at pains to explain how such an infantile perception, long since outgrown by the conscious mind, can continue to operate on the adult. But nothing, he says, is more common: when one frame of mind is supplanted by a contradictory one, the first does not cease to exist, since "in mental life nothing which has once been formed can perish" (16). To illustrate the coexistence of two or more conflicting mental states, Freud launches into an extended simile comparing the mind to Rome:

> Now let us, by a flight of imagination, suppose that Rome is not a human habitation but a psychical entity with a similarly long and copious past—an entity, that is to say, in which nothing that has once come into existence will have passed away and all the earlier phases of development continue to exist alongside the latest one. This would mean that … [w]here the Coliseum now stands we could at the same time admire Nero's vanished Golden House. On the Piazza of the Pantheon we should find not only the Pantheon of to-day, as it was bequeathed to us by Hadrian, but, on the same site, the original edifice erected by Agrippa; indeed, the same piece of ground would be supporting the church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva and the ancient temple over which it was built.
>
> (18)

Freud finally dismisses his analogy as an idle game, since such superimposition can only be pictured as "juxtaposition," which is not what he means to convey (19). But in fact Claude, at the beginning of *Amours de Voyage*, does perceive Rome as a city of superimposition. As Matthew Reynolds observes, it is "precisely the coexistence of the residues of different ages and beliefs which leaves Claude nonplussed."[5] Claude's first letters from Rome are filled with complaints about this heterogeneity:

> 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!
>
> * * *
>
> Somehow a tyrannous sense of a superincumbent oppression
> Still, wherever I go, accompanies ever, and makes me
> Feel like a tree (shall I say?) buried under a ruin of brick-work.
>
> * * *
>
> Ye gods! what do I want with this rubbish of ages departed,
> Things that Nature abhors, the experiments that she has failed in?
>
> (*Amours* I, 22-4; 36-8; 41-2)

Claude seems to live out Freud's fantasy – visiting Rome and seeing contradictory ages at once, the imperial capital existing simultaneously with the Christian city, like different stages of a child's evolution: "Overlaid of course with infinite gauds and gewgaws, / Innocent, playful follies, the toys and trinkets of childhood, / Forced on maturer years" (I, 79-81). The earlier stage continues to show through, however much later ages may have

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[5] Matthew Reynolds, *The Realms of Verse 1830-1870: English Poetry in a Time of Nation-Building* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 141-2.

tried to suppress it: “No, great Dome of Agrippa, thou art not Christian! canst not, / Strip and replaster and daub and do what they will with thee, be so!” (I, 152-3).

What then? There is no likelihood that Freud ever read or heard of Clough’s poem; and even if a direct influence could somehow be demonstrated, the question still remains, what then? These imagistic parallels are significant because they point us toward a much broader equivalence between the poem and the treatise. Freud’s surprising contention is that civilization represents not a natural tendency towards improvement in humankind, but an unnatural imposition. The aggressive, selfish instinct remains, like the infantile oceanic feeling in the adult, or the pagan Pantheon, but it is overlaid with civilization, grudgingly admitted for the sake of self-preservation. Like the Jesuit “gewgaws” on the Pantheon, though, civilized behavior remains unintegrated, coexisting with but never truly altering the instinctive substratum. “It is impossible to overlook the extent to which civilization is built up upon a renunciation of instinct, how much it presupposes precisely the non-satisfaction … of powerful instincts. This ‘cultural frustration’ dominates the large field of social relationships between human beings” (Freud 51-2).

“Cultural frustration” is a good description of Claude’s experience in *Amours de Voyage*. Claude depends upon the trappings of civilization, including “social relationships between human beings,” even while he instinctively rejects them. This frustration is typical of what Reynolds calls Clough’s “antisocial verses,” in which “a possible step into community of feeling and obligation with other people … is suspended

by the thought that to take it would be to betray one's true self."[6] Suspended, yet not overruled. Claude cynically declares that all of his well-bred chivalrous behavior would give way to the instinct of self-preservation if his life were threatened – "one doesn't die for good manners" (*Amours* II, 69). But even he doubts whether this is true, and we later learn that with expected gallantry he makes himself useful to English ladies caught in the siege of Rome. In one of the poem's most extraordinary scenes, Claude describes his excitement at seeing a man killed by an angry mob. But he is able to enjoy this primitive bloodlust only as a tourist-spectacle, like a gazer with a guidebook ("Murray") at an overcrowded museum: "Passing away from the place with Murray under my arm, and / Stooping, I saw through the legs of the people the legs of a body" (II, 196-7). Social and anti-social, civilized behavior and primitive impulse, confront each other throughout the poem.

"This is Hamlet's dilemma," as more than one critic has pointed out.[7] But Claude differs from Hamlet and his Victorian heirs (the speaker of Tennyson's *Maud*, for instance) in that these opposing claims seem rather to coexist than to clash.[8] They do leave Claude feeling discontent – "unsatisfied ever" (I, 283)[9] – but he takes pride in his

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[6] *The Realms of Verse*, 128-9. Reynolds's reading of Claude and mine are complementary, though with different emphases. Reynolds's chapter focuses on the "disjunction … between selves and others" (132), and more broadly on the relation between public and private.

[7] E. Warwick Slinn, *The Discourse of Self in Victorian Poetry* (Charlottesville, 1991), p. 105. The parallel with Hamlet was drawn already by the poem's first reviewers.

[8] *Amours de Voyage* therefore seems to me to embody what Isobel Armstrong calls the Victorian double poem – "two concurrent poems in the same words"; see *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, poetics, and politics* (New York and London, 1993), p. 12. In her chapter on Clough, however, Armstrong claims that *Amours* represents a "dispersal of the Victorian double poem into the self-reflexive poem" and compares it to "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (199-200). But where Prufrock clearly exemplifies what Matthew Arnold called the "dialogue of the mind with itself," Claude seems rather to possess what Arnold called "The Buried Life" – a second, simultaneous existence parallel but not necessarily conflicting with his primary one.

[9] These words appear, not in one of Claude's letters, but in one of the indeterminately-voiced stanzas of elegiac couplets that begin and end each canto. For an account of the different readings the elegiac stanzas

discontent. Claude is happiest when he can be simultaneously civilized ("Murray under my arm") and not ("Stooping" to see the legs of a dead body), and this is most clearly expressed in his relationship with Mary Trevellyn. He allows himself to become attached to Mary only because she does not demand any attachment. Claude pictures himself as one of those who, "discontented indeed," "Manage to hold on our way without, like others around us, / Seizing the nearest arm to comfort, help, and support us" (II, 309-12). Mary allows him to maintain this sense of relying only upon himself and his selfish instincts, and so paradoxically an attachment is formed. Their relationship, Claude says, is based on mere "coexistence," or (a word he invokes repeatedly) "juxtaposition" (I, 170; 225-6).[10] It thus reproduces the uneasy relationship of instinct and civilization in Freud's model. Mary, Claude explains admiringly, "Never … consents to / Step from ideas and fancies and loving sensations to those vain / Conscious understandings that vex the minds of man-kind" (II, 257-9). The moment the demand for a "conscious understanding" begins to threaten Claude's unconscious, anti-social impulse, he flees; he cannot allow a "permitted flirtation" to overwhelm his instinctive isolationism (III, 278).

Mary, for her part, responds in kind: we begin to suspect that these two are suited for each other when she admits that "he rather repels me. / There! I think him agreeable, but also a little repulsive" (II, 329-30). Discontent, or uneasy coexistence, is the ideal order in Clough's very civilized poem, and Mary as much as Claude revels in it. This is an epistolary poem, but she would no more think of writing to him (beside a brief clue in a guest-book) than he would to her. The "lovers" enjoy keeping their social attraction no

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have received, see Suzanne Bailey, "'A Garland of Fragments': Modes of Reflexivity in Clough's *Amours de Voyage*," *Victorian Poetry* 31 (1993): 157-70, pp. 160-1.

[10] On this word and its repercussions, see Robert Micklus, "A Voyage of Juxtapositions: The Dynamic World of *Amours de Voyage*," *Victorian Poetry* 18 (1980): 407-14.

more explicit than their instinctive repulsion. Mary might, as her sister Georgina points out, force the moment to its crisis whenever she wished, but instead she "Lets him go on as he likes, and neither will help nor dismiss him" (II, 234). It is not that Mary and Claude fail to see eye to eye, but that they prefer to sit back to back.

The coexistence or superimposition of contradictory impulses, visible in the poem's setting and characters, is most notable in its meter. The Latin dactylic hexameter was understood by the Victorians as consisting of two rhythms superimposed on one another, and in what follows I show that the same tension exists, though for different reasons, in nineteenth-century English imitations. I then suggest that such superimposition is not restricted to this prosodic oddity but is a significant attribute of meter more generally.

There is an obvious sense in which the meter of *Amours de Voyage* represents a superimposition like that of the different ages which coexist in Rome. The dactylic hexameter is the vestige of a dead language, and it fits awkwardly with English. The reader is conscious of a sophisticated but anachronistic rhythm overlaid upon the idiomatic vernacular of Clough's modern-day travellers. Clough highlights this juxtaposition: complaining about the "incongruous things of past incompatible ages" in Rome, Claude says vulgarly, but in the meter of Virgil, "*Rubbishy* seems the word that most exactly would suit it" (I, 22; 20). The dual effect of the English hexameter is more complex than this, but the immediate incongruity that it presents should not be ignored. Not only *Amours*, but all the major poems of the hexameter revival explicitly play on the sometimes jarring juxtaposition of cultures.

The five most important hexameter poems in English of the mid-nineteenth century all concern displaced people. The first was Robert Southey's *A Vision of Judgement* (1821), the laureate's tribute to George III, which pictures the late king's arrival in heaven. The next, and the first truly popular hexameter poem in English, was Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *Evangeline* (1847), whose heroes are doubly exiled: having transplanted from France to Acadia, they are then evicted by the English and wander across North America. The hexameters of *Evangeline*, as Clough admitted, gave rise to his own *The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich* (1848), which concerns a group of Oxford students who choose to study for their exams in Scotland, where they temporarily and self-consciously adopt native dress and customs; the poem ends with its hero and heroine emigrating to New Zealand. *The Bothie* was followed closely by *Amours de Voyage* (mostly written in 1849, though not published until 1858), with its Englishmen in Italy. Finally, Longfellow produced *The Courtship of Miles Standish* (1859), once again set in the New World, this time in the early days of the Plymouth colony.

In most of these works, the hexameter sits doubly uncomfortably. As the meter of ancient epic, and therefore of wandering and of nation-founding, the hexameter is broadly appropriate to Longfellow's poems. As the meter of the classically educated, it is appropriate to *The Bothie* and its pretentious undergraduate protagonists. But in these cases both the language (English) and the meter represent the same cultural source (Europe or Oxford), whereas the new world of each poem (Acadia, Massachusetts, Scotland) has no formal correlative. Nor, more understandably, does the brave new world of Southey's *Vision*, unless one assumes that the dactylic hexameter is the native meter of heaven; but Southey protests in his Preface that he does not believe it to be

superior to blank verse.[11] A poet is under no obligation, of course, to make form mimetic, to ensure that the language and the meter of a poem correlate exactly to the characters and setting, respectively; I return to the question of non-mimetic verse in the last section of this essay. But *Amours* does stand out from the rest of the group in that the inappropriateness of its meter is so appropriate. The hexameter is yet another example of the chronic juxtaposition upon which the poem is based: when in Rome, the English write as the Romans do (or did). The other four works, even *The Bothie*, could bear transposition into another, non-classical meter much better than *Amours de Voyage*.

But dactylic hexameter is essential to the poem not only because it represents the imposition of a learned Roman meter onto natural English pronunciation, but because the hexameter both in Latin and English specifically depends upon the coexistence of conflicting impulses. Dactylic hexameter is no more native to Latin than to English, but was imported from Greek. The earliest Latin poetry, what Victorian grammars called "Saturnian verse," was accentual. Only later did Greek meters, based entirely on quantity instead of on accent, become standard for classical Latin verse. But in the case of meters composed of feet (as opposed to strophic or isosyllabic lyric measures), Latin added to the Greek system of quantitative scansion its own natural tendency to mark verse by stress: the first syllable of every foot of a Latin hexameter receives "metrical stress," referred to by grammar-books as "ictus." This stress does not, however, always coincide with the natural stress of the Latin word, with the result that two different stress-patterns exist simultaneously in a Latin hexameter. First there is the rhythm of the Latin words, the prose-rhythm that any native speaker would instinctively pronounce; on top of that exists the verse rhythm, derived from Greek, stressing the beginning of each foot. In the

[11] Robert Southey, *A Vision of Judgement* (London, 1821), pp. xiii-xiv.

first line of the *Aeneid*, "Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris," the Latin prose-pronunciation calls for the middle two words to be stressed on their first syllable (cáno, Tróiae), while the verse emphasizes the second syllable (canó, Troiáe).

This, at least, is the most likely case. As has been repeatedly pointed out, by Victorian as much as by present-day theorists, we cannot know how the Romans, or any given Romans at any period, would have pronounced their poetry.[12] But it is clear that Victorian classicists at least were aware of two possible rhythms in the hexameter line. George Saintsbury, for instance, declares of the first line of the *Aeneid*, "I pronounce … *cano* like 'canoe' with 'o' instead of 'oo' sound" – in other words, emphasizing the metrical stress or ictus. On the other hand, Saintsbury recognizes that C. S. Calverley, "an admirable classical scholar," "had been taught to read" by pronouncing the prose accent – "*cayno*."[13] Not only scholars but even schoolboys would have been aware of the double nature of the Latin hexameter. In the section on "Conflict of Accent and Ictus," one standard Victorian grammar notes: "The extent to which this conflict was felt by the Romans themselves is a matter of uncertainty, but it seems likely that the dominant accent of a word was not as sharp as in modern pronunciation, and consequently the conflict would not be serious."[14] But this disclaimer actually reinforces the conflict it is

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[12] See Attridge, *Well-weighed syllables*, pp. 13-18. Attridge asserts, "The possibility of holding in the mind two such different patterns, and experiencing their clash or coincidence as an expressive aspect of the verse, has not been demonstrated" (16). I am less skeptical than Attridge on this point.

[13] George Saintsbury, *A History of English Prosody: From the Twelfth Century to the Present Day*, 3 vols. (1912; repr. New York, 1961), 3:416-17. All subsequent references are also to volume 3 and are cited parenthetically.

[14] B. L. Gildersleeve and Gonzalez Lodge, *Latin Grammar* (1867; repr. Bristol, 1997), p. 461. Even though Gildersleeve and Lodge postdates Clough's schooldays, I refer to it because of its ready availability; earlier grammars show similar concerns. When earlier in the century T. W. C. Edwards re-edited the Eton Latin grammar (the standard grammar-school textbook), he added a preface specifically addressing the coexistence of accent and quantity: "A strict observation of Quantity, I can firmly maintain, is not by any means incompatible with the strictest observance of Accent." See *The Eton Latin Grammar*, ed. T. W. C. Edwards (London, 1830), p. vii.

meant to smooth over: "modern" pronunciation, apparently, is very aware of two things going on at once in a Latin hexameter.

Clough, Southey, Longfellow were not necessarily imitating the Latin hexameter rather than the Greek (which shows no such duality), nor did they directly or consciously try to reproduce the double tendency of the Latin. My point is that the Latin hexameter, which was at least in part a model for their own, would have had to their ears two rhythms not so much interfering with each other as counterposed. It involves not merely a rhythmical variation on a notional metrical pattern, such as one finds in iambic pentameter, but the coexistence of two different, fully-expressed patterns of stress. The prose rhythm, varying from line to line and as it were instinctive, sometimes coincides and sometimes stands at odds with the imported verse rhythm, with its more regularly recurring stresses. To Clough's mind, this conflict is not just incidental but essential to the Latin hexameter: "Why is it that Virgil, and the other good versifiers, so constantly prefer that form of verse in which this awkwardness most appears? … I shall venture to assert, that in the Latin language the system of accentuation … enjoined … the separation, in general, of the colloquial and the metrical accent."[15] A similar "awkwardness" or duality occurs in English hexameters as well.

All the major English hexameter poems, beginning with Southey's, are written in "accentual" hexameters: that is, the dactyls and trochees are defined by stress and not by quantity. (The poems also uniformly replace the classical spondee with a trochee, an alteration which as Southey pointed out "is rendered necessary by the nature of [English]

[15] *Selected Prose Works of Arthur Hugh Clough*, ed. Buckner B. Trawick (University, Alabama, 1964), p. 183. The comment appears in the second of two letters that Clough contributed to *Putnam's Monthly* (New York) in July and August, 1853, and singed "Parepidemus." The pseudonym is Greek for "expatriate": at the time he wrote his letters Clough, like Claude, was living abroad (in Cambridge, Massachusetts).

pronounciation."[16]) Some Victorian theorists attempted, as the Elizabethans had, to define rules of quantity for English verse and to compose in patterns of long and short syllables, but these experiments met with little success; Saintsbury in his magisterial treatise on English prosody claimed that they "violate every principle of English quantity and English verse at once" (398). Towards the accentual hexameter of Southey, Clough, and Longfellow, Saintsbury was more lenient: "I acknowledge that … the average English accentual kind seems to me to be in *form* a fairly adequate equivalent" of the classical hexameter (399). Yet he finds that these works nevertheless fail as poetry, and that they consistently fail in one of two directions.

On the one hand, Saintsbury complains that the hexameter has too much bounce or rhythm, something facile or jog-trot to the ear; the terms he repeatedly invokes are "rickety" and "slipshod." To this overly simple rhythm he attributes the huge popularity of Longfellow's *Evangeline*, which was one of the best-selling poems ever published in English: "Its marked singsong is a quality which undoubtedly appeals more to untrained ears than … the subtle and elusive music of blank verse" (406). On the other hand, *Evangeline* sometimes seems to Saintsbury to have no claim to be metrical at all: "Yet again, if you try (I have tried in many places) you will find not the slightest difficulty in reading line after line, and even batch after batch, as prose" (407). The same is true of Clough's *Bothie*, which at its best is "prose – quite beautiful prose of the modern descriptive type, but prose" (408). And just as almost any hexametrical line could easily be read as prose, so most prose can be scanned, if forced, as a hexameter: "In fact English prose has by no means … shown any objection to 'dropping into hexameter'" (407). Saintsbury subtly illustrates this point in criticizing a line from *Amours de Voyage*:

[16] Southey, p. xii.

Again—

> Mr. Claude, you know, is behaving a great deal better.
>
> It would not be bad fun to write that once in a letter:
>
> but as you can do it as fast as you write mere prose stuff
>
> —really the purest prose—why should you do it at all?

(409)

I have reproduced the lineation of Saintsbury's prose because it seems to me purposeful. His first clause scans regularly as an accentual hexameter (Ít would not bé bad fún to wríte that ónce in a létter), a coincidence which he emphasizes by rhyming his hexameter with Clough's. The next two lines then form an elegiac couplet, hexameter followed by pentameter, as easily scanned as any in *Amours de Voyage*.[17] Saintsbury's point is well taken. Any sentence that starts with a stress and ends on a downbeat can be scanned as dactylic hexameters (this one, for instance). And if prose resolves itself so easily into hexameters, hexameters likewise constantly risk devolving into prose.

Yet these two objections are contradictory: are hexameters exceedingly metrical, or exceedingly prosaic? Saintsbury was not the only one to detect both tendencies. J. M. Robertson, writing in 1897, agreed with Swinburne's estimate "that Clough meant his hexameters to be regarded as 'graduated prose' and not as poetry." An anonymous reply the following year countered that Clough's verse is not prose but "doggerel," a word that points in quite the opposite direction, towards Saintsbury's "slipshod" metrical facility.[18]

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[17] Saintsbury's second "hexameter" scans with a disyllabic fifth foot ("write mere"), but that is typical of Clough's hexameters as well. Clough warns his reader in a "Note" to the *Bothie* that "spondaic lines, so called, are almost the rule" (*Poems*, p. 592).

[18] Robertson's comment and the anonymous response are found in *Clough: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Michael Thorpe (New York, 1972), pp. 348, 367 respectively. Saintsbury excepted for praise among English hexameter poems only Charles Kingsley's *Andromeda*, "which is not rickety, which is not

As Yopie Prins points out, these two tendencies are sometimes associated respectively with the two major hexametrists: "While the American popular prosody of Longfellow seems too smooth, the manipulation of meter by Clough is too rough, and too much like prose."[19] But often both accusations are levelled at the same poem. How to explain this double effect?

The most complete and learned analysis of Clough's hexameters is that of Joseph Patrick Phelan, who places the scansion of *The Bothie* in the context of prosodic debates of the 1840s in which Clough participated. Phelan suggests that Clough's hexameters constitute not a "mere imitation of the classical hexameter" but a "radical" metrical experiment.[20] The first essential element he notes is a strong medial caesura: "Perhaps the most important aspect of *Evangeline* from the metrical point of view is its demonstration of the centrality of the caesura to the accentual hexameter.… [Longfellow's] hexameters literally cannot be read as poetry without the caesura" (176-7). The caesura is important because it counts metrically, as does the line ending; Phelan suggests that "Clough regarded both the caesura and the line-end pause as suppressed feet" (180). As a result, "The hexameter becomes a group of six feet plus two isochronous pauses; or, to rewrite the equation in terms of feet alone, a group of eight feet

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slipshod," and yet which on the other hand "does not lend itself to prose reading as most of the accentualist hexameters do" (Saintsbury 418).

[19] "Victorian meters," p. 102. Prins refers to Saintsbury, though as we have seen Sainstbury considers *Evangeline* too to be frequently prosaic. The distinction she notes, however, applies very well to the estimate of Matthew Arnold, who in his lectures *On Translating Homer* censures Clough's hexameters as "excessively, needlessly rough," while those of *Evangeline* are too "tenderly elegant." See *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold, Vol. 1: On the Classical Tradition*, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor, 1970), p. 151.

[20] Joseph Patrick Phelan, "Radical Metre: The English Hexameter in Clough's *Bothie of Toper-na-Fuosich*," *Review of English Studies* 50 (1999): 166-187, p. 168; hereafter cited parenthetically. Phelan uses the original title of Clough's poem; "Toper-na-Fuosich" was changed to "Tober-na-Vuolich" after the first edition.

any two of which are usually (though not invariably) suppressed. The hexameter turns out, paradoxically, to be an eight-foot line" (181).

This description can be applied not only to *The Bothie* but to all English poems in dactylic hexameter, and it is indeed "radical," though in a different sense from that intended by Phelan. What Phelan describes in the last quotation, and what Clough often produces when writing his hexameters, is the most basic and most popular verse-form in English. As Derek Attridge outlines in *The Rhythms of English Poetry*, a four-beat line, in which the beats are separated by a varying number of unstressed syllables or "offbeats," but usually either one or two, is the base-line of all the most popular forms of poetry, including nursery rhymes, ballads, and advertising jingles.[21] The fact that in the hexameter every fourth "foot" is in Phelan's term "suppressed" (in Attridge's term, it is a "virtual beat") makes no difference: three beats plus a pause is just as common a metrical pattern as four fully expressed beats; it is the pattern of "Hickory dickory dock," of every other line of a ballad, of the first, second, and fifth lines of a limerick. Matthew Arnold, in suggesting a proper meter for the translation of Homer, recommended the English hexameter but rejected ballad meter; yet the difference is sometimes nonexistent. "Hickory dickory dock! There once was a man from Nantucket" is as regular and easily-scanned an English hexameter as Longfellow's "This is the forest primeval. The murmuring pines and the hemlocks."

Hence the dual effect of the hexameter noted by Saintsbury and others. When the hexameter has no caesura, or is enjambed, or else has an overabundance of pauses, it has a tendency to become prosaic – metrical only by courtesy of an erudite imposition. When it is too regularly divided and endstopped, it falls into the pulsing rhythm of basic English

[21] Derek Attridge, *The Rhythms of English Poetry* (New York and London, 1982), pp. 76-84.

four-beat stress verse.[22] These are the Scylla and Charybdis between which every English hexameter steers. On one side sits the Victorian pedant, ready to accept any piece of English prose and twist it by force into a line of classical verse. On the other side sits the old man from Nantucket (whom we might also call "metrical instinct"), grinning and waiting only for a slight pause in order to jump in and turn what should be narrative verse into an endless, rhymeless limerick which is all beginning and no resolution. Clough's lines frequently slip into this sing-song pattern – for instance, when Claude is acting the deliberate Philistine.

> What do I find in the Forum?
>
> An archway and two or three pillars.
>
> Well, but St. Peter's? Alas,
>
> Bernini has filled it with sculpture!
>
> No one can cavil, I grant,
>
> At the size of the great Coliseum.

(*Amours* I, 43-45 [relineated])

The hexameter is at its best when these two tendencies coexist and neither is allowed to dominate. By interspersing lines that contain a medial caesura with ones that lack it, the poet can retain the metrical impulse of the former while also establishing an extended line more appropriate to narrative. So Saintsbury observes: "An English hexameter, to be good even of its bad kind, wants … to combine the old middle crease [of Old English verse] with the continuous arrangement of the classical verse" (Saintsbury 402). Saintsbury denies that this can be done, and "In default you get

[22] "The artist's problem is in part the *avoidance* of the ever-tempting elementary forms, which his readers, consciously or unconsciously, will be only too ready to find" (Attridge, *Rhythms*, p. 80).

slippery slovenly things that tickle the vulgar ear" – i.e. four-beat ballad lines – "or jolting gangs of accent that seem to be running a sort of donkey-race of cacophony" – i.e. tortured prose (402). But in *Amours de Voyage*, once again, the coexistence of these two impulses – an instinctive beat on the one hand, a highly sophisticated but almost factitiously imposed pattern on the other – is perfectly appropriate. The famous scene of mob-violence begins with the excited tattoo of the four-beat line (three beats and a pause), before Clough's more skeptical superego intervenes:

> So, I have seen a man killed! An experience that, among others!
> Yes, I suppose I have; although I can hardly be certain,
> And in a court of justice could never declare I had seen it.
> But a man was killed, I am told, in a place where I saw
> Something; a man was killed, I am told, and I saw something.
>
> (*Amours* II, 162-166)

The simple instinctive rhythm of the opening exclamations ("Só, I have séen a man kílled! [´] || An expérience thát, among óthers! [´]") is dispelled by the continuous verse of the third line. It is then briefly reestablished ("Bút a mán was kílled [´]"), only for the civilized hexameter to take over again with the plethora of caesuras and the enjambment at the end of the sentence.

The duality that is so starkly exemplified by the English hexameter and that makes it so apt to *Amours de Voyage*, its suspension of a polished, consciously-perceived pattern over an elemental, drum-beat rhythm, is typical in varying degrees of all meter. Meter is at once the most intellectual or even pedantic aspect of verse – the only one that can be said with certainty to be true or false, for instance – and also the most instinctive

and immediate. For a Victorian schoolboy this would have held particularly true of classical meters: they were, of course, acquired with much study; but they were also literally beaten in, until they became second nature. But dactylic hexameter is merely an extreme case of a common phenomenon: a reader responds to meter both intellectually and viscerally, and the responses may sometimes coincide and sometimes conflict. The duality is just as clearly exemplified by the other major prosodical oddity of the Victorian period, sprung rhythm. Hopkins claimed that "Sprung Rhythm is the most natural of things," because "it is the rhythm of common speech and of written prose," while at the same time it "is found in nursery rhymes, weather saws, and so on."[23] This is the same coexistence of prose and doggerel that Saintsbury and others detected in the hexameter, and it explains why Hopkins, though he considered that his poems should "read themselves" (i.e. that the rhythms should be instinctively understood when read aloud), nevertheless provided extensive diacritical markings to guide his readers. All meters give rise to some extent to two simultaneous effects, one more conscious, the other more instinctive. And this suggests an aspect of meter which is not always sufficiently taken into account: its dual and sometimes contradictory relationship to the poem as a whole.

Meter is usually considered to play a supporting role in poetry: it provides an echo to the sense. But in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth suggests a larger and far different function. He introduces his observation almost as an aside:

> But I might point out various causes why, when the style is manly, and the subject of some importance, words metrically arranged will long continue to impart such

[23] *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. W. H. Gardner and N. H. MacKenzie, 4th edn. (Oxford and New York, 1970), pp. 48-49.

> a pleasure to mankind as he who is sensible of the extent of that pleasure will be desirous to impart. The end of Poetry is to produce excitement in coexistence with an overbalance of pleasure.… But if the words by which this excitement is produced are in themselves powerful, or the images and feelings have an undue proportion of pain connected with them, there is some danger that the excitement may be carried beyond its proper bounds. Now the co-presence of something regular, something to which the mind has been accustomed when in an unexcited or a less excited state, cannot but have great efficacy in tempering and restraining the passion by an intertexture of ordinary feeling. This may be illustrated by appealing to the Reader's own experience of the reluctance with which he comes to the re-perusal of the distressful parts of Clarissa Harlowe, or the Gamester. While Shakespeare's writings, in the most pathetic scenes, never act upon us as pathetic beyond the bounds of pleasure – an effect which is in a great degree to be ascribed to small, but continual and regular impulses of pleasurable surprise from the metrical arrangement.—On the other hand (what it must be allowed will much more frequently happen) if the Poet's words should be incommensurate with the passion, and inadequate to raise the Reader to a height of desirable excitement, then, (unless the Poet's choice of his metre has been grossly injudicious) in the feelings of pleasure which the Reader has been accustomed to connect with metre in general, and in the feeling, whether chearful or melancholy, which he has been accustomed to connect with that particular movement of metre, there will be found something which will greatly contribute to impart passion to the words, and to effect the complex end which the poet proposes to himself.[24]

[24] I quote from the original 1800 version of the Preface, in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W.

There are two points being made here. The second of these is familiar: meter helps words to "effect" their "end"; what is low it raises and supports. Sound is distinct from sense, but both point in the same direction. Wordsworth's rhetoric ("On the other hand") seems to suggest a straightforward parallel or complementarity between this and his previous assertion, as if he were simply suggesting that meter can make passion more passionate and calmness calmer. But in fact his two assertions contradict each other. Wordsworth's one hand knows not what the other hand is doing, and that is what is so surprising about the first claim that he makes – that meter sometimes achieves an effect not only independent from but entirely at odds with meaning. If we enjoy verse tragedy, it is because we are receiving two different messages simultaneously. Shakespeare's "most pathetic scenes" arouse our passions with one hand while tempering them with the other; or rather, a verse tragedy excites our passions with its voice and restrains them with its feet.

Wordsworth admits that such contradiction between meter and prose-meaning is less common than its opposite – although since it characterizes all of Shakepearean tragedy, it constitutes rather more than a curiosity. The second scenario, he writes, is "much more frequent." So frequent that critics rarely think of meter in any other way: we tend to assume that poetry is written in verse, not prose, in order to reinforce or at most to supplement its prose meaning. Not that criticism assumes all meter to be mimetic, in the manner of Pope's examples from "An Essay on Criticism." The Formalist notion of "defamiliarization," for instance, is amimetic; but even according to that model, verse slows down the reading process and heightens the reader's attention, and so intensifies the semantic value of the words. "Disautomatization facilitates a greater perceptiveness;

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J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (Oxford, 1974), 1:146-8.

… the poet disrupts normal stereotyped linguistic habits in order more effectively to convey his own fresh and unique message."[25] Such implications are hard to avoid: my own reading in this essay, although it is meant to show that the meter of *Amours de Voyage* conveys two contradictory impressions at once, suggests that this contradiction itself reinforces the major motifs of the poem. Or if one thinks of a poem in which the meter seems clearly subversive – Thomas Hardy's "The Voice," for instance, an elegy composed in a jaunty dactylic rhythm – the ironic choice of meter turns out to be in keeping with the bitter irony of the situation, where the speaker discovers happy associations after they are no longer appropriate. Wordsworth's theory is not unique or unprecedented, particularly as it applies to tragedy. But his criticism remains surprising in suggesting to what extent meter acts as a wholly independent and even contradictory impulse within a poem.[26]

The temptation would be to map the dual forces of meter and prose-meaning neatly onto Freud's pair of instinct and civilization – meter assuming the role of the irreducible, primitive impulse that is never quite repressed. But Wordsworth's example suggests the opposite: it is the words of a tragedy that elicit an instinctively passionate response, while the meter civilizes it. There is no simple one-to-one correspondence between the two pairs (meter/words; instinct/civilization): I have been arguing that meter

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[25] Seymour Chatman, *A Theory of Meter* (The Hague, 1965), p. 211. Although we associate defamiliarization (or in Chatman's version "disautomatization") with Russian Formalism, the notion that meter serves as a dissociative frame appears in earlier criticism, notably in Wordsworth. In a later version of the passage I have quoted from the Preface, Wordsworth describes "the tendency of metre to divest language, in a certain degree, of its reality, and thus to throw a sort of half-consciousness of unsubstantial existence over the whole composition" (Wordsworth, p. 147).

[26] The twentieth-century critic who most strenuously follows up Wordsworth's claims about the conflict of meter and matter is, as Chatman (see previous note) points out, John Crowe Ransom; see especially the final chapter of Ransom's *The New Criticism* (Norfolk, Conn, 1941). "It is not the business of the meters to be expressive of the meaning," writes Ransom; rather, "The composition of a poem is an operation in which the argument fights to displace the meter, and meter fights to displace the argument" (259, 295). Ransom goes beyond Wordsworth in that there is no "other hand": he does not concede that meter can ever enhance meaning except by forcing it into unusual shapes.

itself includes both of the latter notions and often suggests them simultaneously. The importance of an unusual meter such as the English hexameter, the reason it is worth close study even if only a handful of successful poems employ it – again, sprung rhythm provides a similar instance – is that it makes the reader particularly aware of this duality. Long passages of *Amours de Voyage* can be read unproblematically: they fall easily into halves and are scanned instinctively as four-beat ballad verse. But the reading is then interrupted by lines that must be scanned consciously and deliberately, using rules learned out of a textbook; and something of the same alternation occurs, at a less blatant level, whenever one reads a metrical composition. Only in most cases, the two perceptions do not alternate but coexist: meter is simultaneously natural and imposed; it both helps and hinders the words that carry it.[27]

The same coexistence of opposing impulses, Freud says, lies at the heart of civilization's discontents. For Claude, on the other hand, this coexistence is a source of pleasure, as we have seen. Near the end of the poem, Claude pictures a final reunion with the woman he has impulsively chased away and then self-consciously followed yet failed to find.

> I shall behold thee again (is it so?) at a new visitation,
> O ill genius thou! I shall, at my life's dissolution,
> (When the pulses are weak, and the feeble light of the reason
> Flickers, an unfed flame retiring slow from the socket),

[27] "The reader of any subtlety at all," John Hollander says, " will often talk about a poem as if he felt that there were two sequences of events going on at once." But Hollander then attributes this duality to the interplay of meter and rhythm, that is "assumed norm" and "actual instance"; see *Vision and Resonance: Two Senses of Poetic Form* (New York, 1975), p. 139. The English hexameter, however, reveals that metrical duality is more conflicted: it involves not just a variation or counterpoint, but an essential self-contradiction, a simultaneous attraction and repulsion.

Low on a sick-bed laid, hear one, as it were, at the doorway,

And, looking up, see thee, standing by, looking emptily at me.

(*Amours* V, 104-9)

This artificial, melodramatic scene is filled with sophisticated literary allusions. (It is not clear whether the allusions belong to Claude, as author of the letter, or to Clough as author of the poem.) The dying lover whose life slowly burns to the socket is a figure from Wordsworth's *Excursion* (I, 500-2), which Percy Shelley had memorably quoted in his preface to *Alastor*. Above all, the whole scene is a conscious pastiche of the end of Longfellow's *Evangeline*, in which Evangeline, having like Claude followed her lover Gabriel in vain across the land, finally discovers him on the point of death. It is appropriate that this scene of reconciliation, filled with literary allusions, asks to be scanned as highly-wrought hexameters: the heavy punctuation, together with the one enjambment, prevents it from slipping into a four-beat pattern. But in the lines that follow, Claude's anti-social instinct intrudes even into his fantasy, and the meter changes its tune.

I shall entreat thee then, though now I dare to refuse thee,—

Pale and pitiful now, but terrible then to the dying.—

Well, I will see thee again, and while I can, will repel thee.

(V, 110-12)

As Claude falls back upon the repulsion that lies at the heart of his attraction, his hexameters split and reveal the native beat that undergirds their classical superstructure – and reveal at the same time the duality, the mixture of attraction and resistance, that underlies all meter.