Victorian Poetry, Europe, and the Challenge of Cosmopolitanism

Keirstead, Christopher M.

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My dear Stanley
Ichabod, Ichabod, the glory is departed. Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, driven back by shopkeeping bayonet, hides her red cap in dingiest St. Antoine.

—Clough to Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, Paris, May 19, 1848 (1:207)

Paris is tranquil and dull: the bourgeoisie, which had at first awkwardly shuffled on the blouse, is gradually taking heart to slip on its fine clothes again and perhaps ere long will unbutton the breeches pocket.


St. Peters disappoints me: the stone of which it is made is a poor plastery material. And indeed Rome in general might be called a rubbishy place; the Roman antiquities in general seem to me only interesting as antiquities—not for any beauty. The Arch of Titus (sculptured on which you see the triumphal procession of Titus with the golden candlestick from Jerusalem—this, the guidebook informs me, being the original from which all representations of that said candlestick are taken) is I could almost say the only one really beautiful relic, that I have yet seen.

—Clough to his mother, Ann Perfect Clough. Rome, April 18, 1849 (1:252)
My dear Annie
Perhaps it will amuse you hereafter to have a letter commenced while guns are firing and, I suppose, men falling, dead and wounded. Such is the case on the other side the Tiber while I peacefully write in my distant chamber with only the sound in my ears.

—Clough to his sister, Anne Clough. Rome, April 30, 1849 (1:253)

I found a crowd assembled about 9 p.m. at the north-east corner of the Piazza Colonna, watching these pretty fireworks—Ecco un altro!—One first saw the ‘lightning’—over the Post Office, then came the missive itself, describing its tranquil parabola, then the distant report of the mortar, and finally the near explosion, which occasionally took place in the air. This went on all night.

—Clough to Francis Turner Palgrave. Rome, June 28, 1849 (1:262–63)

Clough’s encounter with Europe was as much an encounter with the post office, and I begin with these passages to convey a broad sense of the kind of Anglo-European space he was crafting for himself—and the role he was performing for recipients back home. Between May 1848 and August 1849, he would spend a total of seven months on the Continent: first in postrevolutionary Paris and then in Italy, as Mazzini’s short-lived Roman Republic confronted troops sent by the new French government on behalf of the Papal States. This second journey begat another, more singular kind of postal performance: the “Epistolary Comi-Tragedy” (2:540) Clough called Amours de Voyage. Epistolary poetry had its precedents, of course, but these were not epistles in the manner of Horace or Alexander Pope. The poem consists primarily of letters sent from Clough’s alter-ego Claude to his friend Eustace in London. Claude reflects at length on politics, religion, and culture while also weighing his possible attraction to another British tourist, Mary Trevellyn, whose own letters, along with those of her sister Georgina, make up the rest of the poem. Apart from the hexameter form it shares with Horace, Amours de Voyage was altogether new and “thoroughly contemporary,” as one critic later described it. With numerous interjections, asides, abbreviations, and even P.S.es, Clough took the already informal nature of the epistolary poem to a new level, making it almost comically “unpoetical.” All that was missing to complete the illusion of reality were address flaps and postmarks, and a number of passages in the poem do in fact echo comments from Clough’s own letters to his family and friends. Claude and Clough both find Rome “rubbishly” (1.20), for instance.

With Amours de Voyage, Clough thus ventures into the broader cultural
and ideological implications of what would seem to be a rather routine and uninteresting fact of daily existence, especially for the traveler—posting a letter. But to be on the spot in Europe was to engage in a kind of postal intervention: to establish lines of communication back home, to discourse on events seen firsthand, and, as often seems the case, to take issue with other travel texts, whether guidebooks—the ubiquitous Murray—or the reports of foreign correspondents in newspapers. The traveling, cosmopolitan self comes into existence only after entry into this postal nexus—after being inscribed and repackaged for perusal back home. As an epistolary, posted poem, *Amours de Voyage* both embodies and resists nineteenth-century distance-closing technologies and the great “coming together” that were supposed to ensue in their wake. At the same time, the poem foregrounds some basic questions about cosmopolitanism, asking what it means to connect to others as friends, lovers, members of churches, citizens of nations, and citizens of modern Europe. Two of the poem’s key words, as we will see, are *affinity*—Claude’s difficult ideal of genuine togetherness—and *juxtaposition*, the merely being side by side that characterizes the random associations of modern mass culture, which brings people together through the speed and efficiency of its postal and transportation networks. *Amours de Voyage* thus espouses what could be called a cosmopolitanism of negation: one that deconstructs false or specious connections—but one that also endeavors to craft modes of affinity *out of* juxtaposition. By means of this new and “thoroughly contemporary” kind of poetic discourse, Clough would attempt to deliver, finally, what the highly touted post of his day could not.

For Prince Albert, as we saw in chapter 1, this exciting new ability to communicate ideas with the “power of lightning” was one of the key factors contributing in his age to the coming “unity of mankind.” While he no doubt had the telegraph primarily in mind, the European-wide reform and modernization of the postal service was just as often invoked in reflections on progress. Thirty years after Albert, for example, Nietzsche speculated that a new race entirely, “European man,” would soon emerge thanks in part to commerce and industry but also, next in importance, to “the post and the book-trade.” Such sentiments were even more common in Great Britain in the decade that followed the implementation of penny postage in January 1839, along with other standardizations that created the postal system as we recognize it today—with self-adhesive stamps, regular addresses, and set times of delivery. The mail indeed now seemed to move with something like the power of lighting, as Elizabeth Barrett remarked in an 1843 letter chastis-
ing her American correspondent, Cornelius Mathews, for his country’s failure to adopt the same cost-saving reforms:

Why will you not as a nation, embrace our great Penny Postage scheme & hold our envelopes in all acceptation? You do not know—cannot guess what a wonderful liberty our Rowland Hill has given to British spirits,—& how we “flash a thought” instead of ‘wafting’ it from our extreme south to our extreme north, paying “a penny for our thought” & for the electricity included—I recommend you our Penny Postage as the most successful rev-
olution since the “glorious three days” of Paris.9

Barrett’s analogy to a revolution-in-waiting alludes, partly tongue-in-cheek, to the kind of wide-eyed progressivism that surrounded postal reform at the time.10 Only partly, however. To mail a letter overseas was, in some sense, to participate in a new kind of global, democratic citizenship. Hill’s Post Office Reform: Its Importance and Practicability (1837) had promised that the penny post would “benefit all sects in politics and religion; and all classes, from the highest to the lowest,” who would now be given “the means of communication with their distant friends and relatives, from which they are at present debarred.”11 After surveying the success of these reforms in 1850, Fraser’s Magazine concluded that there was no better indicator of the “progress of our civilization” than the “great metropolitan heart of communication with the whole world,” the central London Post Office.12 As if to make this point on a smaller if still vaguely revolutionary scale, Clough notes in one letter that the Chartist petition had been forwarded to him in Paris about a month after their ill-fated march on London—although he seemed deflated at having to pay 3 francs postage due (1:211).13

France, in fact, would adopt prepaid postage several months after Clough received the petition—at the behest, fittingly, of the new liberal-minded French government that had otherwise largely disappointed him. Well before then, however, the European postal service—through which Clough’s (and Claude’s) letters would have passed—was still highly regarded, especially in France. In fact, one of the arguments advanced on behalf of penny postage, as postal historian Howard Robinson reveals, was that it would prevent the British postal service from falling behind its more innovative French counterpart.14 Although typically singled out by British travelers for lacking modern efficiencies, Italy was still part of this larger system. Murray’s Handbook for Travellers in Central Italy (1843), for instance, gives no indication that unusual precautions needed to be taken when sending and receiving mail from Rome or to expect long delays.15 Even during the period of
social unrest covered by the poem and Clough’s visit, there is little sense of serious threat to the stream of postal correspondence. Those delays that did occur were due more to Clough’s own uncertain movements from one destination to another rather than a breakdown in the system. At one point, he complains of a “stupid banker” who neglected to forward letters to him in Florence (1:270). He also mentions a letter “sent by private hand” to his sister that may have miscarried: “However it was very short and no great loss” (1:257).16

If Clough personally never indulged in the more millennial postal rhetoric of some of his contemporaries, he was still fundamentally a creature of the post: someone like him—upper middle class, highly literate, often traveling whether in Britain or in Europe—would be one of its primary beneficiaries. In Amours de Voyage, Claude can’t do without the post, and this feeling feeds directly into many of the poem’s other self-questionings, cautionings, and afterthoughts, its scrutiny of what tended to be dismissed as simply being among the “normal” givens in life. As the poem unfolds and its letters begin to accumulate, the effects of the post on notions of individuality and citizenship become increasingly evident. Identity itself, in essence, becomes “a function of delivery,” as cultural theorist Bernard Siegert outlines in Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the Postal System (1999).17 Siegert does much to illuminate why an epistolary poem would have suggested itself to Clough at this particular historical moment. In many ways, it was the perfect literary vehicle for rendering the current state of Europe in all of its political and cultural turmoil—along with his own ambivalent position in its burgeoning networks of communication and mobility. With its promises of democratic empowerment, the mail offered reassurance to people at the same time it served as a way of managing discourse: “The danger emanating from the noise of the people was dispelled as soon as it was intercepted by a network that controlled, redirected, sorted, and calculated it, thus ensuring that its waves were not emitted at unanticipated speeds or in unanticipated directions.”18 Not coincidentally, Siegert’s description sounds a lot like the failure of the Chartists’ march on London: the threat of violence averted, their demands were nonetheless “delivered” to Parliament (and Clough, postage due, in France). The idea that people “were capable of determining their own affairs postally” became entrenched in a way that benefitted the seats of political and economic power.19 Postal reform was thus as counterrevolutionary as it was egalitarian—a suspicion Amours de Voyage shares and dramatizes through Claude’s efforts to establish ironic distance from the conventions of letter writing—to fashion some space of control and textual authority. Like Clough’s own personal letters, the poem asks, if cosmopolitanism is based on
“conversation” facilitated by a global postal network, what kind of conversation is taking place? Who was speaking and to what ends?

Consider again one of the passages quoted at the opening of this chapter—Clough’s speculation on whether his sister Anne will find it “amusing” to receive a letter (reproduced in figure 1) composed in the safety of his hotel while a battle rages just outside the city. On one level, his is a rather routine personal letter meant to reassure a family member that he is safe. However, Clough can’t help commenting on how the political struggle going on around him casts this routine correspondence in a new light: he realizes there’s something odd about what he’s doing. What he discovers, and what *Amours de Voyage* would scrutinize more closely, is how the protection afforded him as a British subject with the means to travel overlaps with his role as correspondent. The letter, as Siegert states, had become fetishized as the “private space of bourgeois freedom,” and Clough inadvertently participates in a celebration of that freedom.20 The postal system promised a kind of mystical fellowship between safe and fully self-actuated individuals. Fraser’s captures something of this feeling when it marvels that “the thoughts of lawyers, lovers, and merchants . . . lie side by side, enjoying inviolable secrecy” at the London Post Office.21 The letter provides the illusion of dialogue across distances, between England and Italy, and across classes. The post could even do its part to close the gender gap—or so it seemed—delivering Anne the sense of proxy citizenship Victorian culture afforded women as sympathetic listeners to the men of their domestic circle (a citizenship, incidentally, she would lay claim to more directly later in life, when she became actively involved in the cause of women’s rights and higher education). *Amours de Voyage*, as we will see, also captures how the letter determines and diffuses political action by dispatching it into a postal network. By composing an epistolary poem, Clough put the post in a new context, turning it into a literary performance that allowed it to be seen, in some sense, for the first time.

More broadly, Clough strategically positions *Amours de Voyage* within Victorian networks of communication and social mobility—forms of what social scientist David Singh Grewal describes, in fact, as “network power” in his recent account of the history of globalization and how it manifests itself in everyday experience. By network power, Grewal does not just mean online networks or other international systems of commerce or communication, but, for instance, the English language and other “languages, points of reference, customs, rules, laws and regulations—that must follow the compression of space for the creation of a global society.”22 As Grewal emphasizes—and as students of nineteenth-century culture already well know—it is incorrect to assume that these forms of power only began to take shape in the twentieth
My dear Annie

Perhaps it will amuse you hereafter to have a letter commenced while guns are firing & I suppose men falling, dead & wounded. Such is the case on the other side the Tiber while I peacefully write in my distant chamber with only the sound in my ear. I wish it were over, for
Thomas Babington Macaulay, for instance, boasts in *The History of England* (1848),

> Of all inventions, the alphabet and the printing press alone excepted, those inventions which abridge distance have done most for the civilisation of our species. Every improvement of the means of locomotion benefits mankind morally and intellectually as well as materially, and not only facilitates the interchange of the various productions of nature and art, but tends to remove national and provincial antipathies, and to bind together all the branches of the great human family. In the seventeenth century the inhabitants of London were, for almost every practical purpose, farther from Reading than they now are from Edinburgh, and farther from Edinburgh than they now are from Vienna.

*Amours de Voyage* concerns itself with what Macaulay misses here—the exercise of cultural power—when he presents these changes as an essentially apolitical, natural advance promoting familial bonds of friendship and understanding. As a means of communicating and bridging gaps, the postal system provided the same kind of quasi-revolutionary progress claimed on behalf of transportation technologies. In Clough’s epistolary travel poem, the post and other means of cultural “mobility” begin to overlap with each other, doing as much to restrict as to facilitate border-crossing and individual autonomy and expression. Claude seems to ask continuously, how much control can I really exercise with respect to my movements, my associations, and my affinities? How willing am I to enter into these networks, speak their languages, and play by their norms? These are the familiar questions raised by globalization in the twenty-first century as well, as Grewal explains: “we clamor for connection to one another using standards that are offered up for universal use. Yet, while we may all come to share these new global standards—to the extent, at least, that we desire access to the activities that they mediate—we may not all have much influence over their establishment in the first place.”

Likewise, Victorian network power of the kind Macaulay describes works mostly to advance those nations and classes already positioned to take advantage of it: their ideas, their goods, and themselves—as passengers, as tourists—flow freely through its infrastructure and interfaces. Claude’s Grand Tour of Europe becomes one of ambivalent entree into globalizing forms of network power and the affiliations they demand.

This dilemma is enacted socially through Claude’s encounter with the middle-class Trevellyns, who seem fully integrated into the technologies and discourses of network power. The postal network of the poem, in some sense,
belongs to them, associated as it is with liberal notions of progress and the facilitation of trade, as do the biased English newspapers Claude detests: hence the Trellynns’ antipathy toward “this dreadful Mazzini” (2.230) and fear of “republican terrors” (2.318). Their letters, such as those sent by Mary’s sister Georgina, are the most “letterly” and display the ease with which they adapt to the norms of the genre:

Dearest Louisa,—Inquire, if you please, about Mr. Claude—.
He has been once at R., and remembers meeting the H.’s.
Harriet L., perhaps, may be able to tell you about him.
It is an awkward youth, but still with very good manners;
Not without prospects, we hear; and, George says, highly connected.
Georgy declares it absurd, but Mamma is alarmed and insists he has
Taken up strange opinions and may be turning a Papist. (1.253–59)

Whereas Claude’s letters, as we will see, show some self-reflexive creativity, becoming meta-letters of a sort, the Trellynns’ remain more systematic and predictable. The way the salutation in this passage fits neatly into the dactylic rhythm of the line comically underscores this rigidity, as would similar phrases later in the poem, like “Dearest Miss Roper” (3.98) or “here is your letter arrived this moment” (3.247). The extensive use of postscripts—as many as four per letter at one point—is another hyper-postal feature of their correspondence and one of the few jokes Clough’s friend Thomas Shairp seemed to enjoy in a poem that otherwise disappointed him: “Post. No. 2. You see I have caught infection from Mary Trellyan’s P.S.S.” (1:276).26

The Trellynns’ adherence to these letterly conventions seems of a piece with their strict observation of the other social forms expected of them. Claude notes at one point how the mother “[q]uotes, which I hate, Childe Harold” (1.209), a subtle reference to Byron’s ubiquitous and mostly sanitized presence in Murray’s guidebook.27 As Georgina’s remarks above reveal, travel merely extends the social networks they left behind in England and within which they attempt to place Claude. She sizes him up as a potential mate for Mary, assessing how well he conforms to set patterns of Protestant, middle-class, masculine English identity. As far as the Trellynns are concerned, Claude is on the margins of good society—polite but awkward, with good connections, but indifferent to those connections. Claude sends the Trellynns mixed signals about his interest in Mary, conveying, as I will argue, some confusion and denial about his own national and class identity. “What can the man be intending?” (2.232), Georgina asks at one point. Claude wants to be able to “opt out” of these class-bound social and
discursive networks but also recognizes the power and protection they afford him—as, for instance—when he realizes that the otherwise embarrassing Murray keeps him safe from angry mobs who might mistake him for a priest: “I was in black myself, and didn’t know what mightn’t happen” (2.193). As for Clough in real life, to opt out of these secure networks involved risk; he was to forego reliable means of professional and economic advancement. The Thirty-Nine Articles of Anglican faith, which Clough refused to swear to in order to keep his fellowship at Oriel College, were not just a system of belief but something that granted one access to power. From this regard, Claude’s snobbery toward the Trellyns—“bankers very likely, not wholly / Pure of the taint of the shop” (1.125–26)—is as much a kind of defense mechanism as anything else. He is right to view them with suspicion, for they embody an unsettling expansion of British cultural and commercial power. The question then becomes how closely he will identify himself with the Trellyns—and whether he has any real choice in the matter. Later in the poem, Claude must decide whether he will join their party and follow them—as a traveling companion and as a potential husband for Mary, who, we will see, shows her own signs of wanting to break free of the networks that restrict her.

*A M O U R S D E V O Y A G E* opens not with Claude’s first letter, but with the first of ten elegiacs that begin and close each of the poem’s five cantos. The “author” of these more melodious, classically intoned parts of the poem is never clearly specified, although it seems Clough may have intended us to imagine that these were Claude’s own attempts at a more traditional kind of Grand Tour poetry, or moments when Clough’s voice and “Claude’s” merge to take on a wider, more omniscient point of view. If distinct along these lines from the poem’s letters, the elegiacs nonetheless engage them in ways that are key to understanding what makes the poem as a whole so revolutionary from a formal angle. The elegiacs are the poem’s “envelope” in a sense, posing questions about Claude’s direction and purpose, as at the beginning of Canto IV: “Eastward, or Northward, or West?” (4.1). Similarly, the opening elegiac for the last canto asks, “are we to turn to / England, which may after all be for its children the best?” (5.7–8). In the following passage taken from the beginning of the poem, Clough lays out some broader conceptual and spatial possibilities for Claude:

*Come, let us go; though withal a voice whisper, ‘The world that we live in, Whithersoever we turn, still is the same narrow crib; ’Tis but to prove limitation, and measure a cord, that we travel;*
Culturally, what is at stake in *Amours de Voyage* could not be stated more directly: Clough queries whether cosmopolitanism can be conceived at all through travel and rerendering the experience in poetry. At the beginning of Canto 2, the poem asks more directly what connections exist between pilgrim, place, and history: “Is it illusion? Or does there a spirit from perfecter ages, / Here, even yet, amid loss, change, and corruption, abide?” (2.1–2). Clough could not raise this question without invoking Romantic precedents such as Samuel Rogers or Byron, whose presence was never very far away thanks to quotations in Murray’s Italian travel guides. The elegiacs sound like Rogers or Murray’s sanitized Byron, but they pose a different, more persistent set of questions than these forbears, leaving the impression of a modern poet trying vainly to assume a more antiquated point of view. At one point, for instance, this modern voice breaks through, with Claude chastising himself for perhaps being just another “dullard and dunce” come south “to pry and to stare” (2.10). Visually, the elegiacs’ italic type-setting, along with the second line indentation, help to create a more cosmetically “poetic” kind of stanza: they are Italy as italics, a fanciful idea of Italy, as if Clough were quoting some voice otherwise foreign to the language of the poem. The elegiacs thus map one kind of Europe, the letters another—a more confusing, accelerated Europe of steamers, trains, newspapers, and posts.

With its opening salutation, “Dear Eustacio,” Claude gives some indication of how he will answer the questions posed in the elegiac opening about his overall purpose in Italy. He writes mainly to be “en rapport”—that is—to have an audience (1.11–12). Like the quasi-Italian persona he creates for his receiver, Clough will perform a highly self-conscious parody of the Englishman abroad and the travel letter as a genre. He complains, for instance, about “the weather, which truly is horrid,” but notes thankfully that Rome “is other than London” and allows one to be “rid, at least for a time of / All one’s friends and relations.” Then, three lines later, he admits, “Yet, in despite of all, we turn like fools to the English” (1.15; 27; 28–29; 32). Claude thrives in his epistolary guise and is full of sharp, critical observations often directed at himself. Even the mostly critical Arnold, as we will see, conceded that there was a high degree of “vigour and abundance” in Claude. Like the salutation quoted above, the closings and signatures to Claude’s letters provide him with additional opportunities for self-parody. Later, sharing with Eustace his doubts about whether he has the courage to “lay down [his] life for the
British female” (2.66), he closes with the remark, “And is all this, my friend, but a weak and ignoble refining, / Wholly unworthy the head or the heart of Your Own Correspondent?” (2.93–94).

Claude’s letters also reveal how the poem’s dactylic hexameters, counted by stress rather than by syllable, work in tandem with its epistolarity. Clough confines Claude metrically but gives him the freedom to play within the form—the line quoted above being a good example—where Claude slips into a more uniform dactylic rhythm to underscore the restraint he is under as a mere “correspondent.” As Erik Gray contends, the English hexameter by its very nature is an awkward hybrid of the colloquial and the highly artificial: “The reader is conscious of a sophisticated but anachronistic rhythm overlaid upon the idiomatic vernacular of Clough’s modern-day travelers.” Shairp complained that, as a result, the poem “has always a feeling of parody” (1:277), although this seems precisely the tone Clough aims for. Amours de Voyage is ironic where it should be assertive. One does not so much “get somewhere” as fulfill the need to finish the “unnaturally” long line for English verse: “As for Hope,—to-morrow I hope to be starting for Naples” (5.203). The persistent interjections and “oaths” also add to this impression, as if Claude can’t help interrupting himself rather than progress smoothly toward a conclusion.

Claude seems constantly on guard against his own observations and unsure of his footing. The poem’s epistolarity and hexameter rhythm underscore just how much his discursive movements, like his physical ones, seem regimented and subject to some unseen but persistent control—networks that guide and direct the “individuals” within them but also invite resistance and agitation.

Claude conveys some of this resistance through his satirical treatment of the conventional, sunny travel letters of the period that cast Rome as the fountainhead of an orderly, progressive European civilization. “Rome is a wonderful place” (1.56), Georgina Trevellyn concludes, while Claude proceeds more to dismantle what he sees before him. Rome’s ruins and its cathedrals, for instance, speak to how religion serves mostly as a vehicle for roughly asserting the most aggressive of national tendencies. Rome has been the site of one theological Gothic invasion after another: “No, the Christian faith, as I, at least, understood it, / Is not here, O Rome, in any of these thy churches” (1.70–71), Claude remarks, later citing the “infinite gauds and gewgaws” forced on churches by “the barbarian will of the rigid and ignorant Spaniard” (1.79, 82). While his comments are typical, perhaps, of offended Protestantism, Claude is just as quick to question his own preprogrammed, cultural default positions. Having set the contemporary reader up for the inevitable praise of Northern European progress and wisdom, he instead undercuts this
assumption in the next letter: “Luther, they say, was unwise; like a half-taught German, he could not / See that old follies were passing most tranquilly out of remembrance; / Leo the Tenth was employing all efforts to clear out abuses” (1.87–89). Luther “must forsooth make a fuss and distend his huge Wittenburg lungs, and / Bring back Theology once yet again in a flood upon Europe” (1.93–94). Protestantism, then, was not a great advance but at best a disruption of more measured reforms, although Claude's somewhat breezy claims on behalf of Leo X seem deliberately overstated. His point, however, is that the whole debate finally falls back upon one's religious and national prejudices. Theology becomes a source of humor as much as anything else in the poem, and the most one can accomplish by revisiting its controversies as a traveler and correspondent is to play along. After taking on Luther, Claude returns to the Spanish in an attack loaded with his signature “oaths,” conveying a mock outrage that again subtly suggests the whole debate is simply a kind of discursive performance for him:

Luther was foolish,—but, O great God! What call you Ignatius?  
O my tolerant soul, be still! But you talk of barbarians,  
Alaric, Attila, Genseric;—why they came, they killed, they  
Ravaged, and went on their way; but these vile tyrannous Spaniards,  
These are here still,—how long, O ye Heavens, in the country of Dante?  
These, that fanaticized Europe, which now can forget them, release not  
This, their choicest of prey, this Italy. (1.102–8)

Different nationalities assert their authority over Italy in a system of alternating hegemonies. At present, “Europe” is a longing, an absence only. “Utter, O some one, the word that shall reconcile Ancient and Modern!” (1.200), Claude declares, but, in the meantime, he can offer only a hardened, irreverent sort of critical scrutiny that questions affiliations religious, national, and international.

Unable to reconcile ancient and modern, Claude, at Eustace’s request, next dwells on the current state of Roman politics: “What do the people say, and what does the government do?—you / Ask” (2.13–14). Claude answers that Rome’s struggle is shaped by the same complex, competing national interests that have always played themselves out in Italy; how else could one account for Republican France’s support for the Pope? And while Eustace grants him a certain authority for being there on the spot, Claude proceeds to undercut that authority, emphasizing how his need to keep himself safe compromises his perception. Overlooking a battle off in the distance, a group of tourists, like their countries of origin, merely stand side by side, their con-
conversation characterized as much by the weather as politics: at “Twelve o’clock, on the Pincian Hill, with lots of English, / Germans, Americans, French,—the Frenchmen, too, are protected,— / So we stand in the sun, but afraid of a probable shower” (2.113–15). Claude also makes a subtle class commentary, noting that even as the French are besieging Rome, its citizens with the means to travel are granted immunity, as if the battle is not really theirs. The lack of anything like interaction or fellow-feeling among tourists mirrors the political restraint of their nations of origin. Not sparing himself, Claude, in his account of what he does after the battle, draws attention to the ways national and class affiliations seem to override all other considerations:

Down I go, and pass through the quiet streets with the knots of National Guards patrolling, and flags hanging out at the windows, English, American, Danish,—and, after offering to help an Irish family moving en masse to the Maison Serny, After endeavoring idly to minister balm to the trembling Quinquagenarian fears of two lone British spinsters, Go to make sure of my dinner before the enemy enter. But by this there are signs of stragglers returning; and voices Talk, though you don’t believe it, of guns and prisoners taken; And on the walls you read the first bulletin of the morning.— This is all that I saw, and all I know of the battle. (2.134–44)

Like these other travelers, Claude flies his flag of neutrality and self-sovereignty, all the while enjoying the protection British citizenship affords him and reserving the right to distance himself from the actions—or nonactions—of his government.31 His earlier criticism of England for not intervening more actively on Italy’s behalf now rings hollow: “my stupid old England,— / You, who a twelvemonth ago said nations must choose for themselves, you / Could not, of course, interfere,—you now, when a nation has chosen” (2.23–25). Like the British Foreign Office, Claude reveals that as an English citizen he just watches, intervening only to assist fellow British citizens when necessary, whose fears he dismisses as exaggerated. All along, Claude’s contact with actual Italians has been minimal and revolves mostly around food: whether making dinner arrangements or asking for milk in his coffee only to be told, “Non c’è latte” due to the siege (2.100).

Claude thus seeks refuge in a kind of discursive, postal existence, one he knows offers self-insight but is impotent as a means of engagement outside of that system. His most important aim, it seems, is to reveal just how impotent he is, as during the scene when he comes the closest to actually participating
in the Roman conflict. Claude excitedly writes, “So I have seen a man killed!,” although he immediately begins to diminish his own reliability, “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. / I was returning home from St. Peter’s; Murray, as usual, / Under my arm” (2.162; 165–68). In truth, Claude mocks his own desperate search for some relevant role to play beyond his consumption of art at St. Peter’s, the reference to Murray reinforcing the idea that the murder for him is simply another “sight” to be seen. He tells Eustace, “You are the first, do you know, to whom I have mentioned the matter. / Whom should I tell it to, else?—these girls?—the Heavens forbid it!— / Quidnuncs at Monaldi-ni’s?—idlers upon the Pincian?” (2.198–200). Claude raises the problem of whom to address his comments to outside of other English tourists hanging out on the streets of Rome or in reading-rooms. He has no reason to speak to the Roman authorities, for Murray has provided all the protection he needs. Overall, the scene brilliantly illustrates the illusion of engaged citizenship offered by the post. By the end of the letter, Claude returns entirely to guide-book speak, noting how Murray directs his movements for the remainder of the day: “So by the narrow streets to the Ponte Rotto, and onwards / Thence, by the Temple of Vesta, away to the great Coliseum, / Which at the full of the moon is an object worthy a visit” (2.214–16). The letter thus fittingly ends with the mechanical reproduction of travel discourse. Claude has been fully situated and contained by textual systems—guidebooks, newspapers, and the post. Writing letters merely offers the frustrating simulation of participation and dialogue with authority, like his attempts to correct the misimpressions left by newspapers: “I / Gnash my teeth when I look in your French or your English papers, / What is the good of that?” (3.61–63). Despite Claude’s realization of the limits of cosmopolitan engagement and his disavowal of the fruits of political activism, he remains troubled by the isolation that presents itself as the only alternative. Claude continues to seek affinities and continues to post letters. Earlier, he had wondered whether human beings are essentially solitary creatures, like so many limpets clinging to rocks: “we open our shells to imbibe our / Nourishment, close them again, and are safe, fulfilling the purpose / Nature intended” (2.43–45). This is an entirely plausible conclusion to reach after Claude has tested and found wanting nearly every circle of community branching out from the self, including his religion, nationality, and internationality—his potential investment in Italy’s struggle. Right to the end of the poem, he emphatically declares, “Politics farewell, however! For what could I do? with inquiring, / Talking, collating the journals, go fever my brain about things o’er / Which I can have no control” (5.188–90). These repeated disavowals, however, as
Stephanie Kuduk Weiner suggests, point as much to Claude’s disillusioned republicanism, and how much the failure of his ideals truly stings him. This continued longing to connect meaningfully to others is what fuels the amours in *Amours de Voyage*.

John Goode’s 1971 essay “1848 and the Strange Disease of Modern Love” perhaps remains the most insightful inquiry into how love and politics intersect for Clough, beginning with *The Bothie of Tober-na-Voulich* (1848). For Clough and other disillusioned radicals in his circle like Tom Arnold, “Love is the life of life because it is what brings us to the unity of the universe. In a society based on division, love is cursed, distorted into the dualistic laws of the world. Love and revolution are thus brought together—their fates are bound up.” Goode argues that *The Bothie* corrects for these divisions of class (and nation) with the successful love affair of a Scottish peasant girl and an Oxford undergraduate who meet each other while the latter is on vacation: “The poem celebrates the possibility of love, and defines its relationship to the contemporary social structure. Precisely because it is such an affirmative poem about love, and love cannot merely be seen as a relief or escape from the social structure, it necessarily becomes a radical critique of society and a vision of the possibilities of historical change.” In some sense, Clough raises the stakes in *Amours de Voyage*: the setting is a good deal less pastoral and familiar culturally than *The Bothie*, and Clough resists the too-easy revolutionary symbolism that would come with Claude falling in love with, say, an Italian peasant girl—which is not as farfetched a possibility as it might seem.

Browning in effect does as much in *Pippa Passes*—marrying his own hopes of a cosmopolitan, politically charged poetics to the moral symbolic authority he invests in Pippa. *Amours de Voyage* asks if love can survive the voyage between members of the same culture and roughly the same class and still be love—transcendent and revolutionary in its denial of its own apparent self-interest, whether economic or sexual—a love that is “its own inspiration” (2.278). There is something that draws people together, and Clough wants to understand what this force is with the same acuity he applies to his investigation of what keeps people, and nations, apart.

Early in the poem, Claude reveals to Eustace that he finds himself attracted to Mary for reasons that he hopes are not delusional or “fictitious,” his preferred term for affinities based not on truth but on “[s]ome malpractice of heart and illegitimate process” (2.271–72). He wants to distill his attraction to her, if possible, from physical beauty alone and from mere chance or convenience of location. “I am in love, you declare,” he writes to Eustace. “I think not so; yet I grant you / It is a pleasure, indeed, to converse
with this girl. Oh, rare gift, / Rare felicity, this! she can talk in a rational way, 
can / Speak upon subjects that really are matters of mind and of thinking, / Yet in perfection retain her simplicity” (2.252–56). Claude’s assessment here is obviously sexist in its insistence that Mary show learning beyond most Victorian women yet that she still be safely “feminine.” His sexism, in fact, was even stronger in earlier versions of the poem. For the final version, Clough chose to omit the lines, “Never, however you tempt her, however you urge it, consents to / Unsex herself, and come out as a Lady Macbeth of letters.”

This could, however, be a case where Clough’s and Claude’s opinions part ways. Later Clough raises the possibility that Claude may be underestimating the very intelligence and independence of thought he values in Mary merely because she is a woman. Her letters indicate she is more willing than he realizes to break free from convention and attach herself to the uncertain social commodity he represents. Chauvinistic as they are, Claude’s comments nonetheless reveal a genuine feeling that he and Mary can communicate beyond the kinds of “small talk” expected of young people at the time. There is a complex flirtation going on between them even as their movements and conversation seem closely monitored by others traveling with Mary. In some small way, they have managed to break free of the pattern of imposed discourse that characterizes so much of the poem.

The uncertain way they both describe their interest in each other also argues against its factitiousness. From the beginning they seem willing to honestly confront their reservations about each other. Mary, for instance, says tepidly of Claude after first meeting him, “I do not like him much, though I do not dislike being with him” (1.268). Later, she says, “he rather repels me. / There! I think him agreeable, but also a little repulsive” (2.329–30). Mary also seems well attuned to Claude’s confused attitudes toward women—that they be intelligent but not threateningly so—and that he expects people in general to meet him more than half way. She understands that the high value he places on genuine affinity will perhaps keep him from fully embracing any kind of relationship:

Was it to you I made use of the word? or who was it told you?  
Yes, repulsive; observe, it is but when he talks of ideas, 
That he is quite unaffected, and free, and expansive, and easy;  
I could pronounce him simply a cold intellectual being.—  
When does he make advances?—He thinks that women should woo him;  
Yet, if a girl should do so, would be but alarmed and disgusted.  
She that should love him must look for small love in return . . . (3.31–37)
As Mary confesses here, there’s clearly something striking about Claude that promises to expand her own intellectual and social horizons. She juxtaposes him, for instance, with Georgina’s more conventional suitor, George Vernon, whom she says “has a very fair right to be jealous” of Claude (1.267). Mary’s letters always convey a sense of just how restrictive that social world can be—how her attraction to Claude must be preaddressed through the people she is with, in a sense. Later, after interference by her sister and George, Mary can reach Claude only by asking her correspondent Miss Roper to act on her behalf. What Mary and Claude need to be able to do, ideally, is address each other outside of the social structures that shape the poem. Until that point, their interactions will always be characterized by uncertainty and miscommunication. Claude is never able to shake the feeling that he does not see her and his attraction to her for what it really is, whatever that truth may be.

Claude’s romantic and political dilemmas come down to a fundamental question of human relations that he debates with Eustace, whose opinions he reconveys second-hand to the reader. Put simply, Claude’s fear is that nobody really knows anybody else. It is a reflection in some ways of what Raymond Williams termed the “crisis of the knowable community”: the sense of individual alienation growing out of the social displacement caused by nineteenth-century industrial capitalism and urban expansion.\(^{37}\) Clough, in fact, had a long-standing suspicion of the extravagant promises made on behalf of border-crossing free trade, one expressed as early as 1840 in an essay composed while he was a student at Balliol. “The claims of Commerce have been triumphantly established, as one great and principal glory of European Civilisation,” Clough conceded. However, anticipating Marx and Engels to some extent in the Communist Manifesto, he worried that commerce “carries away with it gradually every vestige of local attachments.”\(^{38}\) Amours de Voyage would make the same connection between the conditions of modern mass culture—with its trains and steamers—and the sense that one daily has more contact with people but remains, paradoxically, even more isolated. The modern world is one of masses of people juxtaposed with one another, with nothing drawing them together other than chance:

Juxtaposition, in fine; and what is juxtaposition?
Look you, we travel along in the railway-carriage, or steamer,
And, pour passer le temps, till the tedious journey be ended,
Lay aside paper or book, to talk with the girl that is next one;
And, pour passer le temps, with the terminus all but in prospect,
Talk of eternal ties and marriages made in heaven. (3.107–12)
All connections, Claude suggests, are a kind of invention, a pattern imposed on what is essentially a random redistribution. Is modern love no better, a factitious effort to “make sense of it all,” like the book or newspaper he puts aside? Eustace apparently objects to Claude’s characterization of modern life as a series of juxtapositions: “Juxtaposition is great,—but, you tell me, affinity greater” (3.151). Affinity, Claude counters, is often simply “familiarity,” what seems natural after so much repetition—a connection made “greater and lesser, / Stronger and weaker . . . by the favour of juxtaposition / Potent, efficient, in force,—for a time” (3.152–54).

Claude recognizes a powerful critical purchase to the notion of juxtaposition that Eustace misses, something that underpins Claude’s cosmopolitanism of negation. If the modern world has lost a sense of local rootedness, it might yet develop a more open, expansive paradigm in its place. Understanding juxtaposition can lessen the grip of those misleading, sometimes destructive affinities that take the form of rigid certainties—calcified notions of what is “natural” or “normal.” If the nationality, class, and religion one is born into are the products of chance, it follows that the high investment one places in these is also ungrounded. Admittedly, this is the kind of cosmopolitanism that critics such as Gertrude Himmelfarb disparage as being lifeless and coldly intellectual: “What cosmopolitanism obscures, even denies, are the givens of life: parents, ancestors, family, race, religion, heritage, history, culture, tradition, community—and nationality. These are not ‘accidental’ attributes of the individual. They are essential attributes.”

Himmelfarb’s point rings true to the extent that we all recognize the nurturing role of these factors in our lives: to deny them, at the very least, just seems ungrateful. Her criticism nonetheless overlooks the insight that comes when one attempts to suspend those affiliations and view them critically.

Clough seems especially wary of the understanding that religion should form one of those essential givens. “Allah is great, no doubt, and Juxtaposition his prophet” (3.137), Claude remarks, transposing his earlier phrase and hinting at how the will of God can be used to justify the state of relations that chance has brought into effect. For Clough, Christianity was no better than Islam in this respect, a belief he refused to back down from for the sake of his professional advancement. Writing to Edward Hawkins, the Provost of Oriel College and the man to whom Clough would have to submit his resignation later that year, he wondered, “Is Xtianity really so much better than Mohometanism, Buddhism (a more extensive faith) or the old heathen philosophy? Are those virtues and graces, which are our moral and religious tradition, really altogether Christian?” (1:249).

The kind of ecumenicism Clough preaches here comes into being only when one questions
“the givens of life.” Religiously speaking, his questioning may have taken him farther away from those givens than any other poet studied here. While the Brownings, for instance, would agree that religion must serve cosmopolitan ends and not contract itself over questions of dogma, their world church still mostly assumes a Christian outline.

Clough continued to expand on these kinds of ideas in an essay drafted in his 1852–53 Notebook. Making what would prove to be his most explicit connection between cosmopolitan thinking and religious openness, Clough writes, “we cannot refuse to know when we are told it on good authority that there are many more Buddhists in the world than there are Christians.—And it appears to me that it is much more the apparent dispensation of things that we should gradually widen than that we should narrow and individualize our creeds. Why are we daily coming more and more into communication with each other if it be not that we learn each other’s knowledge, and combine all into one.”

What made Christianity special for Hawkins, Clough implies, was not that it was nearer the truth but that it was familiar and, in its Anglican form, safely English. Clough’s remarks also serve as a revealing comment on empire: Britain’s global expansion is of little progressive use if its goal is simply to spread English ways of thinking or create what would later be christened “Greater Britain” by Charles Dilke. England needed to be equally open to transformation and modulation from the outside. The challenge for the critical cosmopolitan then becomes how to build new affinities or reaffirm old ones that survive this test of exposure and juxtaposition. As Martha Nussbaum has said, cosmopolitanism, “is often a lonely business,” one that “offers only reason and the love of humanity.” Claude has plenty of the former, but remains uncertain as to where and how to cultivate the latter. It could be, as Himmelfarb insists, that one cannot thrive without resting finally on givens such as nation or race, which history has shown to be stubbornly complex and persistent modes of identification. Fundamentalist brands of religion, likewise, continue to prosper worldwide, often by targeting more ecumenical mainstream sects. Claude wants affinities that aren’t factitious, but the risk he takes is that no affinity is “quite sure to be final and perfect” (3.156). The poem provides no easy answer to his dilemma.

Aligning Claude with Mary seems one way out, but Clough finally denies him this possibility. What to make of this denial is the poem’s ultimate interpretive problem, one that Clough, in some sense, simply drops into the reader’s lap. As I have already argued, the poem provides enough evidence to suggest that they share some kind of affinity, and nothing really happens between them in the poem to undermine this conclusion. The circumstances of how their affair comes to unravel, however, suggest that
Clough’s main objective might be to underscore just how difficult it can be to overcome or resist that network power through which personal affinities must be channeled. In some sense, Clough never gives us or his protagonists the chance to find out if they are “meant” (by him) for each other. They are undone by a confusing combination of interference from others, misdirected or misunderstood letters, and the sudden, rapid nature of their movement between various Italian cities.

Social complications begin to intervene in the form of Mary’s sister Georgina, who asks George to “say something” to Claude (2.337), we discover, in a letter she writes to their sister Louisa. George carries out her wish, and thus begins a series of interferences and attempts at recovery that finally seem to sap the will of both Claude and Mary. As she writes, “It seems, George Vernon, before we left Rome, said / Something to Mr. Claude about what they call his attentions” (3.240–41). Claude in turn is “astounded” and “horried,” but “obtaining just then, as it happened, an offer / (No common favour) of seeing the great Ludovisi collection,” he begs off of going with them to Florence: “How could I go? Great Heaven! to conduct a permitted flirtation / Under those vulgar eyes, the observed of such observers” (3.274–76; 278–79). Beneath Claude’s snobbery resides a genuine sense of imposition on himself and Mary; they are being forced prematurely to turn from the language of ideas to that of social obligation. Mary shares Claude’s vexation at George’s interference and indicates her own wish to escape from such restrictions. “It is so disagreeable and so annoying to think of! / If it could only be known, though we never may meet him again, that / It was all George’s doing and we were entirely unconscious, / It would extremely relieve—Your ever affectionate Mary” (3.243–46). In a postscript, she asks the recipient of the letter, her friend Miss Roper, to meet with Claude: “Say whatever is right and needful for ending the matter. / Only don’t tell Mr. Claude, what I tell you as a secret, / That I should like very well to show him myself I forget it” (3.256–58). Mary hereby reveals the difficulty that her own inability to speak with Claude leaves her in. Like him, she wishes to return to their earlier state of affairs, but the demand that she keep moving—ironically, so that her family can make preparations for her sister’s wedding—prevents any chance, it seems, of a personal encounter. As the poem pushes towards the close, her letters become briefer and more written to the moment, testifying to the fact that, unlike Claude, she is not in control of her movements: “We shall be off, I believe, in a hurry, and travel to Milan, / There to meet friends of Papa’s, I am told, at the Croce di Malta” (3.265–66). This she reveals in another postscript, again underscoring the unsettled state she has been thrown into, swept up in the social network of the British middle class abroad.
Claude almost immediately second-guesses his decision not to accompany them, realizing that he may have been making an excuse of George’s interference to absolve himself from fully examining the true nature of his attraction to Mary. He adopts a middle course of sorts, following a day or two behind the Trevellyns. As a result, letters and notes begin to multiply and miss their destinations, with Claude himself becoming a kind of letter without a clear address: “Gone to Como, they said; and I have posted to Como. / There was a letter left, but the cameriere had lost it. / Could it have been for me?” (4.19–21). Mary likewise gets caught up in a kind of postal frenzy: “I wrote him a note” (4.65), she tells Miss Roper, referring to the one Claude never received, which was in fact meant to clarify the misimpression left by another note in a hotel register about their movements. Mary had hoped to connect with Claude at Bellaggio, “but this was suddenly altered” (4.60)—why or by whom is not made clear—and as a result her note ends up misdirecting him. In his account to Eustace, Claude writes, “I have returned and found their names in the book at Como. / Certain it is I was right, and yet I am also in error. / Added in feminine hand, I read, By the Boat to Bellag- gio.—” (4.39–41). Describing her subsequent letter, one intended to redirect Claude but never delivered, Mary writes, “I wrote three lines to / Say I had heard he was coming, desirous of joining our party;— / If so, then I said, we had started for Como, and meant to / Cross the St. Gothard, and stay, we believed, at Lucerne, for the summer. / Was it wrong? And why, if it was, has it failed to bring him?” (4.68–72). She also wonders, “Or may it, perhaps, have miscarried? / Any way, now, I repent, and am heartily vexed that I wrote it” (4.74–75). How to address each other seems a hopelessly complicated and entangled affair, full of misimpressions and misdirections. On some level, Claude and Mary seem verbally matched—conveyed subtly by Claude’s excitement at seeing her handwriting—but their words and their movements never emerge in tact from this matrix of postal and transportation networks.

It gradually becomes clear that the most important letter in Amours de Voyage is the one between Claude and Mary that was never written. That brief note she leaves in a hotel register indicating their next move is their only direct written communication. The tragedy of this “epistolary tragi-comedy or comi-tragedy” (2:546) is thus that they might have connected had they been able to address themselves to each other more freely. One could also find fault with Claude for insisting that Mary measure up to an idealized and perhaps impossible affinity. But even if he had resolved to think otherwise, it seems that events move too quickly for their relationship to have any chance to recover. Mary, in fact, writes the last letter of the poem, and while, like
Claude, she resolves to put their affair behind her, she confesses, “Ah, well, more than once I have broken my purpose, and sometimes, / Only too often, have looked for the little lake-steamer to bring him” (5.207–8). This is in many ways a brilliant metaphor for all of the missed connections of *Amours de Voyage*, one that recalls Claude’s earlier shipboard reflection on juxtaposition. The modernized lake-steamer reminds one as well of Macaulay’s insistence that better technologies of transportation were all people needed to bring themselves together. The end of Clough’s poem, in contrast, is one of rapid-fire letters and movements to and fro where everyone seems to be hurrying up to arrive at no particular destination. Fittingly, the Trevellyns return to England, and Claude, listlessly, heads “Eastward, then, I suppose, with the coming of winter, to Egypt” (5.205).

As Mary moves out of reach, Claude confronts the possibility of a life of isolation and wandering in ways that have strong implications for Clough’s own social and ideological aims as a poet. Most of Canto V is a test of Claude’s resolve as he tries to build something worthwhile from the ruins of his failure to connect: “I will not cling to her falsely,” he states, invoking limpets once more, “Nothing factitious or forced shall impair the old happy relation.” He resolves to “hit the open road,” as we would say now, in a typically male celebration of traveling free-agency: “I will let myself go, forget, not try to remember; / I will walk on my way, accept the chances that meet me, / Freely encounter the world, imbibe these alien airs” (5.51–55). But Claude’s grand plans quickly turn more inward and sterile, as Clough implies with a metaphor that appears to suggest something more than limpets: “I, who refused to enfasten the roots of my floating existence / In the rich earth, cling now to the hard, naked rock that is left me” (5.66–67). Clough then extends the parallel a little further when he reveals that Claude, in fact, does not intend to post this particular letter: “Yes, it relieves me to write, though I do not send” (5.70). But has Claude, in some sense, been writing only to himself all along? Clough’s decision to excise drafts of two letters written by Eustace from the final edition of the poem would appear to support this impression. Recall as well that from the beginning Claude stated his primary objective in writing was simply to be *en rapport*, and now he fears the loss of even this tenuous affinity: “So in your image I turn to an *ens rationis* of friendship. / Even so write in your name I know not to whom nor in what wise” (5.75–76). This suspicion that letters never address a person so much as an absent presence, a ghost or invention of one’s own imagination, has haunted the poem all along. Tennyson, in fact, confronts much the same
anxiety in *In Memoriam* (1850) before finally insisting on the trans-substan-
tive power of letters. Faced with the possibility that Hallam’s physical pres-
ence has been totally lost to him, or that, even worse, he never really knew
him to begin with, he famously resolves his doubt in Section 95 of the poem
by rereading a letter in Hallam’s hand: “So word by word, and line by line, / The
dead man touched me from the past, / And all at once it seemed at last / The
living soul was flashed on mine” (95.33–36). Claude, however, no lon-\nger allows himself this kind of comfort. With the total collapse of the ideal
of the personal letter, Claude must accept the possibility that he has merely
engaged in a kind of verbal masturbation all along.

Without a clear compass heading or sense of audience, Clough enters
the mode of the Flâneur in Crisis—the traveling version, if you will, of the
“Radical in Crisis,” as Isobel Armstrong has described him. Clough shuttles
between two opposing artistic identities. The first disdains convention and
longs to walk freely, if only along the margins of society. The other identity
still clings to Carlyle’s more publicly engaged Hero as Poet, someone seeking
a more affirmative connection to modern European culture, one character-
ized by the higher (and more uncertain) intellectual and spiritual essence of
Arnold’s proposed confederation. Clough is not ready to concede that his
exile from the seats of political and cultural power is irrevocable and that he
must become something more akin to Baudelaire’s painter of modern life. Rather, Clough wants the freedom to offend his audience, to plumb spiritual
and moral depths—as he would do even more unreservedly in *Dipsychus—
and still be reclaimable by that audience. This may explain Clough’s need to
test the poem against the opinion of his perceptive if more conventionally
minded friend Shairp, who, as we have seen, seemed genuinely disturbed by
it on Clough’s behalf: “On the whole I regard ‘Les Amours’ as your nature
ridding itself of long-gathered bile. Once cleared off I hope you have done
with bile. Don’t publish it—or if it must be published—not in a book—but
in some periodical” (1:275). Clough responded to Shairp’s pointed objections
with good humor, beginning one reply, “Good Heaven! don’t be afraid.—You
are a very gentle beast and of a good conscience and roar me like any suck-
ing dove” (1:276). Clough did not back off entirely, however, asking, “But
do you not, in the conception, find any final Strength of Mind in the unfor-
tunate fool of a hero?” (1:278).

One scene in particular near the close of *Amours de Voyage* brilliantly dra-
matizes Clough’s internal culture war. For one moment, Claude’s anxieties
appear rather suddenly to have resolved themselves:

Comfort has come to me here in the dreary streets of the city,
Comfort—how do you think?—with a barrel-organ to bring it.
Moping along the streets, and cursing my day, as I wandered,  
All of a sudden my ear met the sound of an English psalm tune.  
Comfort me it did, till indeed I was very near crying.  
Ah there is some great truth, partial very likely, but needful,  
Lodged, I am strangely sure, in the tones of the English psalm tune.  
Comfort it was at least; and I must take without question  
Comfort however it come in the dreary streets of the city. (5.86–94)  

Claude, as we know by now, is incapable of taking it without question. The repetition of the soothing “comfort” becomes a verbal drug of sorts, helping Claude, like the lines in this passage, slide into a reassuring and rhythmic dactylic order, the same kind of pleasure he got earlier from repeating the alliterative “Mild monastic faces in quiet collegiate cloisters” (3.182 and 189). Claude briefly resides in the kind of religious certainty he associates with home and an earlier, more rooted existence. But he recognizes this is a “partial” epiphany at best, a quasi-mystical experience that smacks of factitiousness. What he experienced was merely juxtaposition, being in the right place at the right time:  

Almost I could believe I had gained a religious assurance,  
Found in my own poor soul a great moral basis to rest on.  
Ah, but indeed I see, I feel it factitious entirely;  
I refuse, reject, and put it utterly from me;  
I will look straight out, see things, not try to evade them:  
Fact shall be fact for me; and the Truth the Truth as ever,  
Flexible, changeable, vague, and multiform, and doubtful—  
Off, and depart to the void, thou subtle fanatical tempter! (5.96–103)  

Dismissing false comfort, Claude recaptures his “Strength of Mind” and affirms of himself, as he had at the outset of the poem, “I can be nothing at all, if it is not critical wholly” (1.144). Shairp too conceded this point, albeit somewhat grudgingly: “everything crumbles to dust beneath a ceaseless self-introspection and criticism which is throughout the only inspiration” (1:275). Even so, he still insisted, “one has supped one’s fill of negations and now would prefer a draught of something stronger” (1:277). Clough, as we know, would not take the leap of faith that would have allowed him to bring Claude and Mary together. If they were meant for each other, their union could take place only in some dim and distant future, in a space not yet invented. In the meantime, there would be no closure, no teleology. Such was the uncertain promise—and power—of Clough’s cosmopolitanism of negation.
In an earlier letter advising Clough on his religious doubts, Shairp held out the hope that “Christianity may live and put forth a new power of life amid forms of life yet undreamt of,” thus continuing to provide the spiritual and cultural basis of European civilization: “Sometimes I console myself with hoping that all this confusion and perplexity and suffering comes from its passing into its newer forms—while we like the men in Thucyd[ides’] night battle know not friend from foe” (1:218). One senses that Clough looked hard for these new forms in the Europe of his day, but simply could not locate them, as he had written in “Easter Day. Naples, 1849”:

Through the great sinful streets of Naples as I past,
With fiercer heat than flamed above my head
My heart was hot within me; till at last
My brain was lightened, when my tongue had said
Christ is not risen! (1–5)

As a result, Clough remains dogged by the sense that he was not doing his part to breathe new spirit and energy into poetry—that he was merely recyling a debased Byronism for an audience that had already supped its full of negations. In this respect, Clough’s closest companion among the other poets I discuss in this book might be Swinburne, who would find ways to affirm Clough’s cosmopolitanism of negation, remapping the Anglo-European contact zone as one of necessary disruption and alienation. Swinburne, in other words, would recognize the important role of offending people in order to communicate with them. Working before the emergence of Swinburne’s post-crisis-of-faith intellectual and spiritual confederation, however, Clough, like Claude, cannot as yet figure out whom to address his poem to.

*Amours de Voyage* concludes, in fact, with a problem of address: the “L’Envoi,” as Clough labeled the poem’s final elegiac stanza in his first draft of the poem, serves, as it were, as the poem’s shipping instructions:

*So go forth to the world, to the good report and the evil!*

*Go, little book! thy tale, is it not evil and good?*

*Go, and if strangers revile, pass quietly by without answer.*

*Go, and if curious friends ask of thy rearing and age,*

*Say, I am flitting around from brain unto brain of*

*Feeble and restless youths born to inglorious days;*

*But, so finish the word, I was writ in a Roman chamber,*

*When from Janiculan heights thundered the cannon of France.* (5.217–24)
Clough’s poem travels by fits and starts, like himself: still in motion but paradoxically fixed in his chamber. Likewise, with the italics and Roman print now closely interwoven, the elegiacs and letters of the poem finally come together in this passage and speak to each other—conceptually and visually. Poetry reports what it sees but will not engage in a factitious arrangement of cause and effect or attempt to reinvent the Europe of the past. It will not fashion connections where there are none, and thus Clough refuses to make the Roman Republic part of a larger historical narrative. The cannon make a lot of noise, but for no apparent objective: he can give their location only. Clough had created a new kind of cosmopolitan verse, but as yet he could address it only to the future.\textsuperscript{56}

**P.S. Arnold and Amours de Voyage**

Arnold, for certain, would not be that audience, even though Clough had reason to believe he might recognize attitudes they shared as committed but somewhat disillusioned Anglo-Europeans.\textsuperscript{57} But whereas Shairp at least had some specific criticism to offer, Arnold tersely concluded, “as to the Italian poem, if I forbore to comment it was that I had nothing special to say—what is to be said when a thing does not suit you—suiting and not suiting is a subjective affair and only time determines, by the colour a thing takes with years, whether it ought to have suited or no.”\textsuperscript{58} After two more years had passed, Arnold was able to offer some muted praise vis-à-vis Tennyson’s *Maud*: “From the extracts I have seen from Maud, he seems in his old age to be coming to your manner in the Bothie and the Roman poem. That manner, as you know, I do not like: but certainly, if it is to be used, you use it with far more freedom vigour and abundance than he does—Altogether I think this volume a lamentable production, and like so much of our literature thoroughly and intensely provincial, not European.”\textsuperscript{59} The “Roman poem” was incisive and full of energy, but it was a misdirected energy, not settled on more constructive poetic ends, as Arnold saw them. Clough’s was not the Europe of Arnold’s dreams and no doubt seemed merely to amplify the sense of lost connection that closes “Dover Beach”: both poems, in fact, end with the sounds of a doomed and pointless military engagement echoing in the reader’s ears. Could Clough at least infer that Arnold detected a broader absorption of contemporary European intellectual trends in *Amours de Voyage*? Or was he to infer the opposite—that, like Tennyson, he too was being provincial? Arnold’s point was unclear, much like the overall status of
their friendship, which had already begun to taper off before Clough left for the United States in October 1852. Now conducted via transatlantic post and aimed mainly at correcting perceived misunderstandings, theirs had become, as Claude might have put it, an *en rationis* of friendship.\(^{60}\)

Arnold offered another piece of advice to Clough the following February that, although meant to be critical, might finally serve as the most apt expression of Clough’s unique strengths as a poet and as a commentator on the possibility of cosmopolitanism. For Arnold, all Clough’s problems could be summed up in one tendency—the failure to find his *assiette*—his seat or position—and stick to it:

You ask me in what I think or have thought you going wrong: in this: that you would never take your assiette as something determined final and unchangeable for you and proceed to work away on the basis of that: but were always poking and patching and cobbling at the assiette itself—could never finally, as it seemed—“resolve to be thyself”—but were looking for this and that experience, and doubting whether you ought not to adopt this or that mode of being of persons qui ne vous valaient pas because it might possibly be nearer the truth than your own.\(^{61}\)

By the measure of Arnold’s ideal of a unified intellectual and spiritual confederation of Europe, Clough’s journey was a failure. He could not invent that higher, more orderly essence that poetry *ought* to embody in order to “inspirit and rejoice the reader” (1:2), as Arnold demanded of the form later that year in his Preface to *Poems* (1853). To be fair, then, Arnold was subjecting Clough on a more psychological level to the same scrutiny that would soon cast his own *Empedocles on Aetna* (1852) into critical exile. Here was another poet failing to connect, caught up in “the dialogue of the mind with itself” (1:1). While this suggestion might have been good personal advice to Clough, one finds it harder to forgive Arnold—as a literary critic—for failing to recognize that this shifting, unsettled ground was Clough’s assiette: challenging the given, ranging freely among ideas, and—in more Arnoldian terms—poking, patching, and cobbling at the best that is known and thought. Arnold was certainly not alone among Clough’s friends in finding fault with *Amours de Voyage*. Still, one thinks, it *ought* to have suited him more.