

La letteratura vittoriana e i mezzi di trasporto: dalla nave all'astronave

a cura di

Mariaconcetta Costantini

Renzo D'Agnillo

Francesco Marroni



*La letteratura vittoriana e i mezzi di trasporto:
dalla nave all'astronave*

I mezzi di trasporto hanno svolto un ruolo centrale nello sviluppo dell'immaginazione letteraria dell'Ottocento inglese. Questo volume, che raccoglie gli Atti del IV Convegno Internazionale CUSVE (Pescara, 2-4 dicembre 2004), offre una molteplicità di traiettorie interpretative del concetto vittoriano di mezzo di trasporto, dalla navigazione a vela all'astronave, ma anche dalla semplice passeggiata al viaggio in bicicletta, dall'escursione in sella a un asino al viaggio in treno, dalla carrozza settecentesca al viaggio sulla luna.

Means of transport played a fundamental role in the literary imagination of nineteenth century England. The papers collected in this volume were delivered at the IV International Conference of the University Centre of Victorian and Edwardian Studies (CUSVE) in Pescara from 2 to 4 December 2004. They offer a variety of interpretative approaches on the significance of means of transport for the Victorians, including donkey riding, cycling, sailing, travelling by railway, voyaging in space, walking, riding in an eighteenth-century carriage and journeying to the moon.



La letteratura vittoriana
e i mezzi di trasporto:
dalla nave all'astronave

a cura di
Mariaconcetta Costantini
Renzo D'Agnillo
Francesco Marroni



Copyright © MMVI
ARACNE editrice S.r.l.

www.aracneeditrice.it
info@aracneeditrice.it

via Raffaele Garofalo, 133 A/B
00173 Roma
(06) 93781065

ISBN 88-548-0607-2

*I diritti di traduzione, di memorizzazione elettronica,
di riproduzione e di adattamento anche parziale,
con qualsiasi mezzo, sono riservati per tutti i Paesi.*

*Non sono assolutamente consentite le fotocopie
senza il permesso scritto dell'Editore.*

I edizione: maggio 2006

Indice

Prefazione	9
<i>Preface</i>	11
Mirella Billi	
The Romance of the Coach	13
Richard Ambrosini	
Il viaggio di Marlow in <i>Heart of Darkness</i> : una rilettura	33
Mariaconcetta Costantini	
Haunting on Board: The Gothic Vessels of Wilkie Collins	45
Anthony Dunn	
Representations of Cultural Space in Henry James's <i>Italian Hours</i>	65
Leo Marchetti	
Il treno e l'astronave: dalle 'junctions' di Dracula ai 'cilindri' di Horsell Common	81
Roger Ebbatson	
Fair Ships: A Victorian Poetic Chronotope	91
Enrico Reggiani	
"Worshipping our railroads". Victorian Catholic Writers and the Railway as a "Cultural Metaphor"	111
Michela Vanon Alliaia	
In viaggio verso la terra promessa: <i>The Amateur Emigrant</i> di R. L. Stevenson	133
Mary Patricia Kane	
Mysterious Transports: Temporal Perception in the Short Fiction of Vernon Lee	151
Emanuela Ettore	
Dai bassifondi londinesi ai mari della classicità: George Gissing e le voci dell'inquietudine	167

Miriam Sette	Muoversi malinconicamente. George Eliot, <i>Middlemarch</i> e la lipemania viatoria	177
Saverio Tomaiuolo	Towers and Trains: Topologies of Dispossession in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's <i>John Marchmont's Legacy</i>	187
Chiara Magni	Sull'acqua con Lewis Carroll: da <i>Alice</i> a <i>The Hunting of the Snark</i>	199
Eleonora Sasso	William Morris's Archaeologic Journey: Inside and Outside Imaginary Homelands	209
Raffaella Teofili	<i>She wants to ride her Bicycle</i> : l'incursione della New Woman nell'iconografia maschile	221
Massimo Verzella	A Car Ride to the End of the World: <i>The Time Machine</i> by H. G. Wells	235
Carla Fusco	<i>New Grub Street</i> : Gissing, the Intellectual, and the Hectic Response to Means of Transport	245
Michele Russo	La scrittura come viaggio metaforico in <i>New Grub Street</i> e <i>The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft</i> di George Gissing	253
Anna Enrichetta Soccio	<i>The Signalman</i> di Charles Dickens: simulacri e incubi	261
Michela Marroni	Medievalismo e nostalgia vittoriana: John Ruskin e i viaggi dell'immaginazione	273
Raffaella Antinucci	"Omnibus Trips": The Victorians and the New Culture	283
Nicoletta Brazzelli	Viaggio per acqua nell'Africa equatoriale: Mary Kingsley "floating into heaven"?	293

Silvia Antosa		
Transport and a Society in Transition in the Fiction of George Eliot		307
Tania Zulli		
"Mapping the Unknown": Rider Haggard Between Realism and Imagination		317
Raffaella B. Sciarra		
<i>Travels with a Donkey</i> di R. L. Stevenson: sul dorso di un asino in piena rivoluzione industriale		325
Paola Evangelista		
"Voyagers by land and sea": figure itineranti nella poesia di Emily Brontë		337
Elio Di Piazza		
Velieri e piroscafi in <i>The Mirror of the Sea</i> di Conrad		349
Alan Shelston		
Opportunity and Anxiety: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Development of the Railway System		363
Renzo D'Agnillo		
The Restlessness of a Victorian Pedestrian. Matthew Arnold's Walking Poems: <i>Resignation</i> , <i>The Grande Chartreuse</i> and <i>Thyrsis</i>		373
Francesca Saggini		
Transporting Scenes: Motion and Sensation on the Victorian Stage		387
Nicoletta Vallorani		
"Impervious to gravitation". H. G. Wells Between the Earth and the Moon		407
Mario Faraone		
"A Stamp for a Penny" and a Pillar Box: Anthony Trollope ufficiale postale, in viaggio tra lavoro, conoscenza e scrittura		421

Renzo D'Agnillo

The Restlessness of a Victorian Pedestrian. Matthew Arnold's Walking Poems: *Resignation, The Grande Chartreuse and Thyrsis*

The pilgrim walking along a lonely pathway in a natural landscape is an archetypal poetical image. But the special connection between walking and poetic inspiration itself is a modern notion that has its roots in the cultural revolution of the Romantics. In the works of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Byron, walking, first and foremost, entails a momentary escape from the self and the cumbersome events of daily life. As William Hazlitt underlines in his essay "On Going a Journey": "We go a journey chiefly to be free of all impediments and of all conveniences; to leave ourselves behind, much more to get rid of others"¹. It is no accident that the Romantic passion for walking coincided with the development of technological progress which transformed travel in such a way as to radically reduce distances to times previously regarded as unimaginable. In spite of the undoubted social-political progress mechanical travel initiated, it also imposed limitations on human perception, particularly in terms of the simultaneous deletions of points of view. As Hazlitt indicates: when we travel: "we cannot enlarge our conceptions; we only shift our point of view"². In other words, rapid changes of viewpoints only have a detrimental effect on poetic creativity since movement, rather than being self-dictated, and thus interrelated with the internal movement of the poet's perceptions, is externally imposed. Such a disadvantage does not apply to the walker, who is at liberty to follow any path that stimulates his sensitivity for reflection. The Romantics themselves wandered in order to escape from the cold earth³ and, in deliberate antithesis to the combined purposes of instruction and pleasure that characterised the Grand Tour, built their poetic visions upon the

¹ William Hazlitt, *The Complete Works*, Vol. 8, ed. P. P. Howe, London, J. M. Dent and Sons, 1931, p. 181.

² *Ibid.*, p. 187.

³ Bernard Blackstone, *The Lost Travellers: A Romantic Theme with Variations*, London, Longman, 1962, p. 4, distinguishes between *mental travellers*, like Blake, and *cold earth wanderers* like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Byron. Such a distinction, however, overlooks the obvious fact that even cold earth travellers are ultimately mental travellers.

imaginative transfiguration of nature under the influence of the sublime and the picturesque.

Matthew Arnold takes up the Romantic conception of walking as a physical manifestation intrinsic to the very process of poetic composition, to extend its significance on an existential level to a poignant representation of spiritual and philosophical crisis. The walks on which each of the three poems to be discussed are based, may be considered the physical manifestation of a restlessly inquiring mind engaged on a very personal quest that is charged with a sense of definite purpose. To follow Arnold imaginatively through these walks one becomes aware of a trajectory that is paradigmatic of the stages of his poetic development, in which an initial sense of loss and confusion eventually leads to re-affiliation and the possibility of recovery and restoration. Behind each walk a ghostly presence becomes the central reference point for an otherwise disoriented poetic voice: in *Resignation*, historical pilgrimages are contrasted with the private pilgrimage of two protagonists as they retrace a familiar landscape: the journey in *Stanzas From the Grande Chartreuse* assumes all the features of an anti-pilgrimage in which the monastery is the external backdrop for a series of ironic meditations on a spiritual and existential crisis and *Thyrsis* returns full circle to the notion of a private pilgrimage as the poet moves through a landscape of mythical significance transfigured by its intrinsic connection with his own imaginative world.

Resignation, besides being an early post-mortem homage to the young Arnold's father (anticipating *Rugby Chapel*) is also a testimony of his zest and vitality for walking (of which the poet himself was to be the proud inheritor). But its philosophical exploration of man's place in the universe is not without intertextual nods at *Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey* by William Wordsworth. Although there are contrasting viewpoints between the poems, the important aspect to underline in this context is the difference in their dynamics. For, in spite of its reference to a real journey undertaken with his sister Dorothy, the only active agent in Wordsworth's poem is the poet's roving eyes; there is no sense of the poem physically 'going' anywhere as such. In contrast, the first four sections of Arnold's poem, which describes a walk with his sister Jane over the Arnboth Fells in the Lake District in 1833, literally move along with the speaker as he retraces the familiar topological landmarks of his first walk there ten years previously. Unlike Wordsworth's, Arnold's

landscape is topographically delineated, characterised by physical motion, and densely populated with a wandering humanity represented by pilgrims, armies, walking parties and gypsies. The opening of the first section presents a historically shifting panorama:

*To die be given us, or attain!
Fierce work it were, to do again.
So pilgrims bound for Mecca, prayed
At burning noon: so warriors said,
Scarfed with the cross, who watched the miles
Of dust that wreathed their struggling files
Down Lydian mountains: so when the snows
Round Alpine summits eddying rose,
The Goth, bound Rome-wards: so the Hun
Crouched on his saddle, when the sun
Went lurid down o'er the flodded plains
Through which the groaning Danube strains
To the drear Euxine: so pray all
Whom labours, self-ordained, enthrall [...]⁴*

A universal image of Christians, Muslims and Pagans equally co-involved in a gruelling quest is the immense backdrop to be contrasted to Arnold's own walking pilgrimage. Whether the goal be spiritual redemption or territorial occupation the Activist's plight is characterised by a hardship and endurance that knows no going back. In contrast, the second section, with its sudden shift into the present tense, introduces the gentle nature of the modern speaker:

*But milder natures, and more free;
Whom an unblamed serenity
Hath freed from passions, and the state
Of struggle these necessitate;
Whom schooling of the stubborn mind
Hath made, or birth hath found, resigned [...]*
(*P*, p. 89)

However, liberated as he may be from the struggle and danger of such passions, the poetic voice is only too aware of the ambivalent effects of the resulting state of resignation which, however much the product

⁴ Matthew Arnold, *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, ed. Kenneth Allot (2nd edition Miriam Allot), London, Longman, 1979 (1965), p. 88. All subsequent quotations refer to this edition with page and line numbers provided in the text preceded by the initial *P*.

of a wise passivity, has an ultimately numbing influence on the human sensibility. In this respect, the very title of the poem represents the opposite of a physical progression as implied by the walking journey. Furthermore, the fact that the poet traces the same journey taken ten years previously through a landscape whose features seem practically unaltered and in which he and his sister: "[...] Here sit [...] again unroll,/Though slowly, the familiar whole [...]" (*P*, p. 92) rather reinforces this impression of immobility and passivity.

The third section sets up a comparison between the two walks that concern the brother and sister, first as members of their now dead father's motley bands, and second as the sole survivors of that company ten years later. These two walks are interlinked by the point of departure: "We left, just ten years since [...] we left to-day [...]" (*P*, p. 90). The former walk is clearly a parody of the dreary, exhausting journeys described in the opening of the poem and its energy, joviality and positiveness lead (in contrast with the "miles of dust", "alpine summits" and "flooded plains" of the incipit) to a spiritually rewarding end: "We bathed our hands with speechless glee/That night, in the wide-glimmering sea" (*P*, p. 92). From the beginning, the goal of the journey: "The valley's western boundary" (*P*, p. 91) is made clear to every eye and the various landmarks are passed with all the lightness and ease of a festive excursion:

A gate swings to: our tide hath flowed
 Already from the silent road.
 The valley pastures one by one,
 Are threaded quiet in the sun:
 And now beyond the rude stone bridge
 Slopes gracious up the western ridge.
 Its woody border and the last
 Of its dark upland farms is past:
 Lone farms, with open-lying stores,
 Under their burnished sycamores:
 All past: and through the trees we glide
 Emerging on the green hill side
 (*P*, p. 91)

The relentlessly linear progression of the walk marked by dynamic and directional verbs ("swings", "flowed", "threaded", "slopes" and "glide") underlines a sense of positive purpose that contrasts with the fatigue and struggle of the journeys in the first section – a contrast reinforced by a series of deliberately opposing references:

who watched the miles
of dust that wreathed their struggling files (P, p. 89)

reviews and ranks our motley bands (P, p. 90)

The Hun,

Crouched on his saddle (P, p. 89)

High on a bank our leader stands (P, p. 90)

A goal, which gained, may give repose, (P, p. 89)

Makes clear our goal to every eye (P, p. 90)

The struggling files (P, p. 89)

Our wavering, many coloured line (P, p. 91)

At burning noon (P, p. 89)

Through the deep noontide heats we fare (P, p. 91)

The joviality of the former walk is characterised by the unqualified confidence the members of the party bestow upon their leader. Thus, there is no question of any hesitation in their confronting: "Those upper regions we must tread!" (P, p. 91) and even the walkers' serious air seems assumed as a counterfeit to their cheerful acceptance of their task. The prepositional phrase is also connotative of the spiritual significance the now dead father has assumed for the poetic speaker and which, at the time, was only unconsciously felt.

The enumeration of the various landmarks at the beginning of the fourth section, on the other hand, conveys a sense of emptiness and apathy as the poet and his sister move along the same path as mere: "Ghosts of that boisterous company". The monotony is underlined by the three-times repetition of the verb "tread" in the first three lines together with the repetition of the adverbial "here":

Once more we tread this self-same road,
Fausta, which ten years since we trod;
Alone we tread it you and I,
Ghosts of that boisterous company.
Here, where the brook shines, near its head,
In its clear, shallow, turf-fringed bed:
Here where the eye first sees, far down,
Capped with faint smoke, the noisy town:
Here sit we, and again unroll,
Though slowly, the familiar whole.

The solemn wastes of heathy hill
 Sleep in the July sunshine still:
 The self-same shadows now, as then,
 Play through this grassy upland glen:
 The loose dark stones on the green way
 Lie strewn, it seems, where then they lay:
 On this mild bank above the stream,
 (you crush them!) the blue gentians gleam.
 Still this wild brook, the rushes cool,
 The sailing foam, the shining pool. –
 These are not changed: and we, you say,
 Are scarce more changed, in truth, than they.
 (P, p. 92)

The contrast between the first and second walk could not be more evident. Just as the former walk is characterised by liveliness and joviality, the latter is marked by brooding melancholy and stasis. With their father now absent, all faith has vanished with him. Lost and helpless, the poet is unable to resuscitate his ghost and can only focus his attention on a landscape void of energy. The predominance of insubstantial elements (“shallow”, “faint smoke”, “solemn wastes”, “shadows”, “loose-dark stones”, “mild bank”, “sailing foam”) and passive verbs (“sit”, “sleep”, “lie”) contribute to the physical and spiritual apathy that becomes the dominant note in the poem. The lifeless, almost dreamy atmosphere of the present walk is most effectively rendered in the dreary long vowels, alliterative laterals and nasals and subordinate clause of: “[...] and again unroll,/Though slowly, the familiar whole [...]”. The most active verb (“crush”) alludes to Fausta as a spoiler or destroyer of the landscape and this brash intrusion on the poetic speaker’s discourse anticipates her callous observation that they have hardly altered any more than the landscape. Her refusal to accept change reflects a youthful disregard for the passing of time which induces the older poetic voice into imparting the impersonal moral lessons which characterise the latter section of the poem with its bleak view of a universe that is indifferent to man and to which man must finally subject himself.

Stanzas From the Grand Chartreuse describes a mountain journey to a monastery which Arnold visited during his honeymoon. The Grande Chartreuse is the house of the very severe order of Carthusian monks situated in the French department of the Isre, north of Grenoble, at a height of 3,205 ft. above sea level. The original settlement was founded by St. Bruno about 1084. The first convent on

the present site was built between 1132 and 1137, but the actual buildings date only from about 1676, the older ones having been often burnt – a testimony to the hostilities between this strict religious order and the outside world. That Arnold should choose to visit such a remote place may have been true to character. That he took the arduous journey with his wife, Fanny Lucy, while they were on their honeymoon, may have seemed a woeful display of manly callousness. But, by Arnold's time, the Grand Chartreuse had become an appealing objective for Romantic pilgrimages. Beckford had already written a fascinating account of his visit there in 1778. Thomas Grey, Horace Walpole and John Ruskin also bore testimony to the place in their writings. Most significantly of all, Wordsworth describes his visit to the monastery in 1790 in Book VI of *The Prelude*. There is small wonder that Arnold could barely resist adding his own name to this list of illustrious literary figures. Besides, in her letters, Fanny Lucy reveals an enthusiasm on visiting the place that almost rivals Arnold's own, in spite of the fact that he was ordered to retire to his cell at 7:00 p.m. leaving her alone "in a small house"⁵.

As with *Resignation*, the presence of Wordsworth also looms behind the composition of the *Grand Chartreuse*. For he had once stayed at the monastery for two days in pleasant contemplation of its scenery and later included a description of it in *The Prelude*. Arnold's poem owes little to Wordsworth's appeal for the sublime and the picturesque however, and his diary jottings show how, on the contrary, he interpreted his journey in almost sombrely dramatic and spiritual terms. From a biographical point of view, his pilgrimage seems to have been conducted in a mood hovering between curiosity (as a non-Catholic) and morbidity (as a soul in spiritual hunger). His wife's letters testify to his staunch determination as he walked all the way from Col de Seigne to Cormayeur: "[...] and scarcely seemed tired at all, although the heat was great and the ascent each day very long and fatiguing"⁶. She may also have added 'dangerous'. At one point Arnold insisted on taking an uncommon but picturesque route which found them pursuing narrow, rocky and steep paths unknown to man, at one point her feet dangling from a donkey where Arnold had

⁵ Park Honan, *Matthew Arnold, A Life*, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1983, p. 239.

⁶ Cecil Y. Lang (ed.), *The Letters of Matthew Arnold*, London, The University of Virginia, 1996, 1, p. 217.

placed her, over a three hundred foot precipice! It is perhaps telling that the opening description of the poem conveys little of such alpine adventurousness and seems more intent on conveying the slow but sure approach to the monastery:

Through Alpine meadows soft-suffused
 With rain, where thick the crocus blows,
 Past the dark forges long disused,
 The mule-track from Saint-Laurent goes.
 The bridge is crossed, and slow we ride,
 Through the forest, up the mountain-side.

The autumnal evening darkens round,
 The wind is up, and drives the rain;
 While, hark! Far down, with strangled sound
 Doth the Dead Guier's stream complain,
 Where that wet smoke, among the woods,
 Over his boiling cauldron broods.

Swift rush the spectral vapours white
 Past limestone scars with ragged pines,
 Showing – then blotting from our sight!
 Halt! – through the cloud-drift something shines!
 High in the valley, wet and drear,
 The huts of Courrierie appear.

Strike leftward! Cries our guide; and higher
 Mounts up the stony forest-way.
 At last the encircling trees retire;
 Look! Through the showery twilight grey
 What pointed roofs are these advance?
 A palace for the Kings of France?

Approach, for what we seek is here!
 Alight, and sparely sup and wait
 For rest in this outbuilding near;
 Then cross the sward and reach that gate.
 Knock; pass the wicket! Thou art come
 To the Carthusians' world-famed home
 (*P*, pp. 285-286)

The relentless sense of purpose in the directional imperatives is set against a landscape qualified by impending death, as evident in such gloom evoking phrases, not entirely void of gothic-like melodrama as: “long-disused”, “autumnal evening darkens”, “strangled sound”, “Dead Guier’s stream”, “spectral vapours”, “scars” and “twilight

grey". The brooding melancholy of Arnold's description is in stark contrast with the excitement of Wordsworth's account:

[...] while St. Bruno's pines
 Waved their dark tops, not silent as they waved,
 And while below, along their several beds,
 Murmured the sister streams of Life and Death,
 Thus by conflicting passions pressed, my heart
 Responded; "Honour to the patriot's zeal!
 Glory and hope to new-born Liberty!
 Hail to the mighty projects of the time!"⁷

Arnold approaches the monastery with the tentative reverence, of, in the words of one critic, a "guardedly sceptical tourist"⁸. This is a world with which he has little acquaintance or knowledge:

Those halls, too, destined to contain
 Each its own pilgrim-host of old,
 From England, Germany, or Spain –
 All are before me! I behold
 The House, the Brotherhood austere!
 – And what am I, that I am here?
 (P, p. 287)

Arnold's journey is conducted in correspondence with his own imaginative recreation in the form of a confrontation with the ghostly voices of the teachers from his past (including father Goethe, Senancour and Spinoza) all equally dumbfounded at his presence there:

For rigorous teachers seized my youth,
 And purged its faith, and trimmed its fire,
 Showed me the high, white star of Truth,
 There bade me gaze, and there aspire.
 Even now their whispers pierce the gloom:
 What dost thou in this living tomb?
 (P, p. 288)

⁷ William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: The Four Texts (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850)*, Jonathan Wordsworth (ed.), London, Penguin, 1995, p. 231.

⁸ Roger B. Wilkenfield, "Arnold's Way in 'Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse'", *Victorian Poetry*, 23 (1985), p. 413.

The central dramatic tension lies in the fact that the liminal space of the Grande Chartreuse provokes the paradoxical realization on the part of the poet that he is also wandering in a liminal space: "between two worlds, one dead,/The other powerless to be born [...]" (*P*, p. 288). The past world of the old order of religious faith, and the modern world of uncertainty and lack of beliefs. In his self-representation as a kind of Orpheus figure passing along a river of death. The very mention of Dead Guier's stream takes on a sinister significance, whereas in Wordsworth it is neutrally charted with its sister stream, the Guier Vif ("the sister streams of life and death"⁹). Arnold's pilgrimage is therefore not conducted with the reverence of the pilgrim. His real 'gods' are elsewhere. "Think of me", he says to his old masters: "[...] as [...] a Greek/In pity and mournful awe might stand/Before some fallen runic stone-/For both were faiths and both are gone" (*P*, p. 288). Rather than leading to an enlightened awareness of the emptiness of old faiths, the speaker desires to lose himself in the hidden static world of the monastery, in order either to retrieve them again, or become oblivious of them forever: "Ah, if it be passed take away,/At least the restlessness, the pain; Be man henceforth no more a prey/To these out-dated stings again!/The nobleness of grief is gone-/Ah, leave us not the fret alone" (*P*, p. 289). In the quiet world of the Grande Chartreuse, Arnold sees a possible way out of his own restlessness and pain in words that are short of prophetic of his future poetic activity: "Silent – the best are silent now" (*P*, p. 290). Perhaps nowhere more powerfully than in the "Grand Chartreuse" is the tension in Arnold between action and mobility and apathy and futility more poignantly expressed. The poem ends as *Resignation* began, with the image of a mass humanity representative of war and peace: moving through the landscape around the monastery as a form of temptation to entice the monks away from their immobility and isolation:

But, where the road runs near the stream,
 Oft through the trees they catch a glance
 Of passing troops in the sun's beam –
 Pennon, and plume, and flashing lance!
 Forth to the world those soldiers fare,
 To life, to cities and to war!

⁹ W. Wordsworth, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

And through the wood, another way,
 Faint bugle-notes from far are borne,
 Where hunters gather, staghounds bay,
 Round some fair forest-lodge at morn.
 Gay dames are there, in sylvan green;
 Laughter and cries – those notes between!
 (P, pp. 292-293)

Arnold's poem concludes with the juxtaposition of two irreconcilable worlds: "Pass banners pass [...] and leave our desert to its peace" (P, p. 294). The final words are those of the monks who need no sympathetic voice to come to their defence. Arnold is ultimately as crushed by the power of their autonomous presence as he is by the uncertain outside world in which there is: "nowhere yet to rest my head" (P, p. 289). As in *Resignation*, there are none of the sought-for effects of a pilgrimage (no spiritual rejuvenation or catharsis), merely a confirmation of the poet's restlessness and angst, though with the added knowledge of an alternative world in which the possibility of philosophical solace is refuted.

Such a possibility is envisaged in *Thyrsis*, Arnold's great elegy to his one-time friend, the poet Arthur Hugh Clough. His conception for this poem was intrinsically bound with his memory of his walks with Clough while they were students together at Oxford. After Clough's death in Florence in 1861, Arnold returned to the scenes of his youth at Oxford together with the ghost of his friend in the form of his verses:

I shall take them (verses by C.) with me to Oxford, where I shall go alone
 after Easter; and there, among the Cummer hills, where we have so often
 rambled, I shall be able to think him over as I could wish¹⁰.

The present perfect tense in the penultimate phrase is a telling slip, for Arnold had evidently still not been able to reconcile himself to his break with Clough¹¹. Indeed, at the centre of the poet's reflections is the fact that although both he and Clough have become exiled from this idealised world of their youth: "Too, rare [...] grow now my visits here (P, p. 499); But Thyrsis of his won will went away" (P, p. 500), Arnold's poetry has kept faith with it, whilst Clough's "piping took a

¹⁰ C. Y. Lang (ed.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 121, letter dated 22 January 1862.

¹¹ Arnold's main contention concerned the overt political and social content of Clough's verse, in particular the cynicism of his social satire.

troubled sound/of storms that rage outside our happy ground [...]” (*P*, p. 500). The intratextual background to *Thyrsis* is Arnold’s early poem *The Scholar Gypsy*, which was, significantly, one of the few poems by Arnold Clough highly rated: “I myself think that the ‘Gypsy Scholar’ is best. It is so true to the Oxford Country”¹². Arnold’s own response was self-disparaging: “I am glad you like the ‘Gypsy-Scholar’ – but what does it do for you? [...] the “Gypsy Scholar” at best awakens a *pleasing melancholy*. But this is not what we want”¹³ (my italics). The importance, for Arnold, of the moral function of poetry, of animating and ennobling the spirit, was precisely what he thought *The Scholar Gypsy* fell far short of performing.

As with *Resignation*, *Thyrsis* evokes the memory of a former walk characterised by a temporary escape from the bonds and formalities of every day life. It also follows the same pattern of contrasting two walks (the older and wiser poet now walking alone) and dramatising the poet’s attempt to retrace the original spirit of the former walk. However, whereas the walk in *Resignation* leads to decidedly sombre philosophical considerations, in *Thyrsis* the poet is brought round full circle to a possibility of self-discovery and future hope. The opening lines describe a townscape marked by transformation in which an initial dysphoria underlines the obliterating effects time induces on the memory:

How changed is here each spot man makes or fills!
 In the two Hinskeys nothing keeps the same;
 In the village street its haunted mansion lacks,
 And from the sign is gone Sibylla’s name,
 And from the roofs the twisted chimney-stacks-
 Are ye too changed, ye hills? [...]
 (*P*, p. 498)

The poetic voice can initially only ask a series of questions as he retraces a once familiar landscape which has in the meantime become forgotten to him: “[...] once I knew each field, each flower, each stick” (*P*, p. 499). The questions gradually take on a rhetorical tone as he begins to focalise more clearly on his surroundings: I know these slopes: “who knows them if not I?” (*P*, p. 503). As in few other of his

¹² Quoted in Nicholas Murray, *A Life of Matthew Arnold*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1996, p. 141.

¹³ Howard Foster Lowry (ed.) *The Letters of Matthew Arnold to Arthur Hugh Clough*, London, Oxford University Press, 1932, p. 282.

poems, in *Thyrsis* Arnold plots precisely named landmarks¹⁴. In an essay which retraces the walk, Sir Francis Wylie comes to the conclusion that the poet was truthful in almost every detail¹⁵. He notes in particular the fact that it takes in a region wholly to the west and south west of Oxford on the Berkshire side, rather than the Oxfordshire side of the Thames. This topological exactness is significant since it confirms the extent to which the walk constituted a temporary escape from Oxford for the young Arnold which undoubtedly allowed free rein to the scope of his imaginative visions. The gradual recognition of a former terrain which has, for the poet, become "too rare", is also a reassessment and re-emphasis of the poetic and cultural ideals nurtured within that terrain.

Unlike *Resignation*, whose first sections plot the itinerary of the two protagonists' walk along the Armoth Fells, *Thyrsis* contains only one stanza that actually describes the walking journey:

But hush! The upland hath a sudden loss
 Of quiet! – Look, adown the dusk hill-side,
 A troop of Oxford hunters going home,
 As in old days, jovial and talking, ride!
 From hunting with the Berkshire hounds they come.
 Quick! Let me fly, and cross
 Into yon farther field! – 'Tis done; and see,
 Backed by the sunset, which doth glorify
 The orange and pale violet evening-sky,
 Bare on its lonely ridge, the Tree! the Tree!
 (P, p. 505)

The immediacy of the physical journey narrated in the present tense and underlined by a series of imperatives ("Hush [...] look [...] Quick [...] Let me fly [...] 'Tis done [...] and see") gives way to imaginative recreation at the very point in which the poet recognises the same tree, ("the single elm-tree bright/Against the west" (P, p. 499) which he and Clough had previously associated with the scholar gypsy. The excitement of the poet's discovery is underlined by the long embedded clause which creates a crescendo separating the main verb "see" from

¹⁴ Among which, Childsworth Farm, the Ilsley Downs and the Thames (P, p. 499).

¹⁵ Sir Francis Wylie, "The Scholar Gypsy Country", in C. B. Tinker and H. F. Lowry, *The Poetry of Matthew Arnold. A Commentary*, London, Oxford University Press, 1940, pp. 351-373.

the object "Tree". The Tree has a particularly symbolic valence for Arnold's quest since it at once unites the poetic ideals and human affections of his youth. The sudden invocation to his friend is all the more poignant when one realises that Arnold deliberately confuses the temporal coordinates of Clough's departure for the continent with his actual death as his reflections drift from the "rude Cumner ground" (*P*, p. 507) to the Classical world of Greek myth:

Hear it, O Thyrsis, still our tree is there!
 Ah, vain! These English fields, this upland dim,
 These brambles pale with mist engarlanded,
 That lone, sky-pointing tree are not for him;
 To a boon southern country he is fled,
 And now in happier air [...]

Thou hearest the immortal chants of old!
 Putting his sickle to the perilous grain
 In the hot cornfield of the Phrygian king
 For thee the Lityerses-song again
 Young Daphnis with his silver voice doth sing [...]
 (*P*, p. 506)

The poet's moment of reconciliation with Thyrsis depends on a deliberate eschewing of all past conflicts and an exclusive recognition of a commonly shared quest: "Thou too, O Thyrsis, on like quest wast bound;/Thou wanderest with me for a little hour" (*P*, p. 507). Consequently, Arnold not only by-steps the problematical issue of his friend as an implicit critical presence, but actually expresses his own sense of hope through the direct discourse of Thyrsis/Clough with which the poem concludes: "Roam on! The light we sought is shining still [...]" (*P*, p. 508). Thyrsis' incitement to "roam on" may be seen on one level as reiterating the restlessness of Arnold's quest, but it also points to a possibility of future hope which leads, not so much to the reconciliation of an estranged relationship, but a reaffirmation of the moral function of Arnold's poetical ideals, for, in spite of the fact that the poet cannot "reach the signal-tree tonight", it remains "a happy omen" (*P*, p. 505) of that hopeful vision.