In his essay *The Traveller's Mind* (*La mente del viaggiatore*, it.ed.) Eric J. Leed analyzes the western cultural model, which requires man to be mobile and woman to be static, in a consolidated mirroring of sexual identities (Leed 1992: 328); nonetheless, in the last part of his book the author considers that, in recent times, women moved "no longer constrained by those images of the mobile male and sedentary female" typical of the past (ibid: 335), and wishes for a greater interest in their travelogues.

Studies on female hodoeporics (Monga 1996: 6) are widespread nowadays, especially thanks to women scholars; however, the panorama of Italian women travelogue writers who "embarked with determination on a spatial and mental adventure traditionally denied to their sex" (Frediani et Al. 2012: 8) is still under investigation[1].

1. **Women's travel writing: forgotten accounts**

As a nation, Italy has a relatively recent history: it was unified only in 1861, after the turmoil of the Risorgimento. At the end of the century, aspiring to increase its position on the international scene, the new-born country was starting its colonial expansion; consequently, readers were developing a taste for adventure in exotic countries. An important representative of such narrative was Emilio Salgari (Verona, 1862 – Turin, 1911) who, even without an extensive travelling, built a remarkable repertoire by reworking the historical and geographical sources he found in libraries; his work is still well known and his books have involved, thrilled and educated not only his contemporaries, but many generations of Italians.

The literary production of Maria Savi Lopez (Naples, 1846? – 1940) met a different course and was almost completely forgotten. As an *ante litteram* ethnologist and a folklorist she mainly focused on the legends and traditions of the western Alps, albeit writing some travel books set in Northern Europe; her fascination for this area was affected both by her Romantic interest in folklore and history, and by her Positivist philosophical approach.

Nei Paesi del Nord (*In Northern Countries*, 1893) is a fictionalized account that deals with a journey to Iceland, a country very little known to Italians at the time: as evidence, in 1824 the renowned Romantic poet and philosopher Giacomo Leopardi had chosen an Icelander to represent the vain escape of man from Nature. In his *Dialogo della natura e di un islandese* (*Dialogue of Nature and an Icelander*) the protagonist embodies the author's philosophy of *cosmic pessimism*: "[…] who likes or benefits from this very unhappy life of the Universe, preserved with damage and death of all the things that compose it?" (Leopardi 2003: 624).

2. **An unknown author…**

Few biographical information exist about Savi Lopez, so it is not possible to say whether she actually visited Northern Europe or was, like Emilio Salgari, a *voyageuse en fauteuil*. I follow the considerations of historian Giovanni Levi, one of the pioneers in the field of microhistory who, in his essay about contemporary Greece *I tempi della storia* (*The Times of History*), reports an obvious, albeit far from trivial, observation: "The rich leave more documents than the poor, men than women, adults than children, and – evidently – the literate of the illiterate" (Levi, 2009: 43-44), thus underscoring how cultured people have more consistent means to be remembered and see their personal events set in history, while culturally disadvantaged categories are more easily forgotten. As a consequence, Levi argues for the need to go beyond the merely documentary level, and affirms that history is not only the result of a thorough analysis of documents, the conservation of which, albeit deceptively rich and sufficient, is often distorted and incomplete (ibid.: 45). According to him, "the historian's use of brain and imagination is in fact proportionally inverse to the amount of traces available, the less we have, the more we must strive to understand, to interpret the fragments, to reconstruct. Scarce documentation warns us: documents are useful, but history must look at them with suspicion, always attentive to what left no trace, but nevertheless had relevance" (ibidem).

I have therefore tried to investigate Savi Lopez's life, following the few existing traces, using both her works and the rare documents available, while interpreting, as Levi affirms, what left no trace in spite of its relevance.

Indeed, the biographical events of the author contrast with the hypothesis of a journey to Iceland: as a girl, Savi Lopez was forced to follow her father, who fled Bourbon political persecutions, from Naples to Turin; here she studied (privately, as no higher education was available for women at her time) and developed a strong interest in the folklore of Western Alps. Her marriage lasted only a few years: she soon became a widow with an eight-year-old son to look after. Back to Naples (then part of the reign of Italy) she earned her living as a teacher, as well as a reporter and a writer; as it was a habit among women writers at the time, her literary production was mainly addressed to the young generations and her aim was mainly educational. Albeit she cannot be considered a scholar, all her life she was a well-known expert in the field of Italian traditions and continued to collaborate with outstanding academics: among them, Angelo de Gubernatis, Professor of Sanskrit in Florence, and Giuseppe Pitré, the founder of Italian folklore. Last, but not least, she was on friendly terms with important Italian writers, such as Giosuè Carducci and Antonio Fogazzaro,

3. **… a traveller or a *voyageuse en fauteuil* ?**

At Savi Lopez's times reaching Iceland was neither easy nor customary[2]: communication took place by sea, usually to and from Scotland and Denmark, and concerned mostly trade and fishing; besides, scientific interest was more oriented to the surrounding ocean (notably, the "North-West passage" that might connect northern Europe and America) than to the forlorn island in the far north. Nonetheless several scholars, interested in its weird landscapes and geological nature, had reached it; among them, the Swedish scientist Uno von Troil, who in 1772 embarked to observe the active Hekla volcano and the famous Geyser, which soon gave its name to all other geysers worldwide[3]; and Sir George Steuart Mackenzie, more interested in Icelandic history, who tried to explain "the causes that so spectacularly changed the character of this 'distinct and peculiar race of people', from a nation producing the great medieval saga literature to the apathetic and feeble people he found in 1810" (Agnarsdóttir, 2010: 235). Among these early travellers, only one woman: Ida Pfeiffer, an Austrian self-taught scholar who visited Iceland in 1845 for a few months. Pfeiffer explored both the geological and the botanical field, and in 1846, once back in Vienna, published *Nordlandfahrt: Eine Reise nach Skandinavien und Island im Jahre 1845* (*A visit to Iceland and the Scandinavian North in 1845*).

Even if Savi Lopez can be situated among the few Italian women travel writers of her time, it is quite unimaginable that this middle-class woman, a mother and a teacher, could afford expensive trips abroad or long absences from Italy. Last, but not least, her book was first published in 1893, when Iceland was not yet known as an international tourist destination – the first cruise from Hamburg took place in 1905[4].

Savi Lopez was always very scrupulous in verifying her sources, as her works about Alpine folklore prove; therefore, she may have read the books of the first visitors, especially Pfeiffer's report, with its sound scientific accuracy and wide amount of details. Besides, most of her information were certainly sourced from the encyclopaedias of the time, that contain the legends, historical topics and scientific information she reports: among these, the *Manual of Natural History of Blumenbach*, translated into Italian in 1826, and the *Annals universal statistics,* published in Milan in 1832, as for scientific information; the *Literary and Artistic Scientific Museum* published in Turin in 1846, dealing with sagas and folklore; the *Universal ancient and modern biography* (Venice, 1828), that reported legendary characters; *Danish Greenland – Its People and Its Products*, written by Dr. Hinrich Rink in 1877, regarding the Inuit people. Last, but not least, the well-known review "L'illustrazione italiana" (Italian Illustration) had published some impressive photos of the Hekla volcano 1878 eruption.

4. **The characters: interweaving relationships**

Savi Lopez gives voice to her characters, a heterogeneous group composed of few men, a woman, and three young teenagers, to develop the narrative discourse. The comfortable living room of an English castle (an exotic setting in the eyes of 19th century Italian readers) frames the opening of the book. Here, the readers meet the protagonists: Lord Holland, the owner of the mansion and the organizer of this journey, eagerly waiting for the arrival of the steamer *Vittoria* that, after a brief stop in Denmark, will sail to Iceland. On board, besides Captain Fowl (the Lord's trustworthy old friend), will sail his two teenage children, Rolf and Amy; Sir James, another good friend of the Lord's, and his young daughter Silvia; eventually, miss Margaret, Amy's governess.

All these characters are mostly masks, perfectly recognizable to the readers, reliable in their narratives, credible in their statements, without psychological implications: once outlined, they act as intermediaries, lending the readers their concrete, sensory perception and driving their cognitive re-elaboration. Therefore, in the reassuring context of the steamer, in company of these conventional characters, the narrative can concentrate on the unknown exotic destination.

The protagonists are sketched in different ways; female figures respect the gender(ed) stereotypes of the time: the two young girls, (the first English, the second of an Italian mother), are physically contrasting and, while young Amy is "beautiful and blonde, like her brother, who could be thirteen" (Savi Lopez 1920:2), Silvia, Amy's friend, is "beautiful and dark […] taller and stronger […] seeing her, one would say she was born in some distant southern land"(ibid.:4); though her Italian origin (already obvious in her aspect) is revealed later, her sturdy aspect implicitly contrasts to a certain weakness and fragility in Amy, and Silvia assumes a reassuring role to her younger friend. The third female figure, the governess Miss Margaret, is "tall and dry, with pale blond hair, long teeth, very pale blue eyes with no expression"(ibid.:8): she represents the typical English spinster, an unattractive figure, but certainly suitable for her role and dutifully attached to young Amy.

On the contrary, male characters are never depicted, so encouraging the readers to build their own images, based either on the characters' own statements, or on the qualities and skills they show during the journey.

The Captain is introduced by Lord Holland: "An old sea dog […] accustomed to guiding his ship with great skill in the midst of dangers"(ibid.:10); an emotional Lord recommends his children to him: "[…] you are boarding the joy, the glory, the hope of my old home"(ibid.:13), he says before the steamer sets off.

Sir James, Silvia's father, is characterized by his knowledge, and the assertive tone of his

own words.

Young Rolfe, Amy's brother, proves to be a curious boy, eager to challenge unknown experiences. As for the Swedish scientist Franz, welcomed on board after his shipwreck, the author merely informs that both he and his son are provided with dry clothes by Sir James and Rolfe.

The characters show their diverse relationships according to the canons of the time: men are characterized by frank, cordial comradeship, and mutual esteem; all the children show deference, respect, and unconditional trust towards the adults[5]. The two girls' interest is a continuous stimulus to men's explanations; sensitivity is almost exclusively entrusted to them, as well as irrational fears and homesickness; Rolfe often shows his impatience and curiosity, but also some general knowledge; all the children are thoroughly aware of the importance of their journey and do their best to make the most of it, composing their herbaria with Icelandic species during their trips inland. Eventually the governess, the only adult woman in this microcosm – literally embarked on an adventure that she would have gladly avoided – decently bears all her female anxieties and stands apart, silently aware of her subordinate role both by gender and by social status; she seldom shares her limited knowledge with the group.

The narrative content undergoes a fixed division: the Captain, an experienced traveller, describes competently the environment, and reports some of his sailing memories, as well as stories learned from other seamen; moreover, his thorough knowledge of Northern folklore and traditions allows him to narrate Scandinavian legends. Sir James, instead, is meant to deepen some cultural and artistic aspects, in few cases supported by Miss Margaret. Dr. Franz is mostly entrusted with the geological description of Iceland. Eventually, Rolfe sometimes acts as a sort of cultural mediator, turning this wide range of information into a simplified language for the two girls, indirectly facilitating also non-specialist readers at home.

While the ship's crew is completely ignored and the Icelandic guides remain anonymous, few subsidiary characters confirm the reliability of the narrative: the first one is the Scottish girl in Bornholm, who survived her family after a sinking and was adopted by a generous Swedish family; her moving story involve both the travellers and the readers, who partake in her tragic destiny. An Icelandic shepherd hosts the group during their trip to the mountains and witnesses his love for his home country, where he chose to settle back after living abroad. Eventually, the Akureyri host tells the visitors about superstitions and myths still widespread in Iceland.

5. **An educational itinerary**

The educational aim of this expedition is made clear by Lord Holland's words to his children: "You know well that since last year I wanted to take you on a suitable educational journey"(ibid.:2); the destination he chose is "that island that appears abandoned by God"(ibid.:7), as Sir James defines it.

The narrative follows the itinerary, leading the readers through an unknown path, rich in cultural destinations as well as weird natural events, constantly interwoven, as it is shown in the following summary.

Sailing from the English Channel across the North Sea and along the dunes of the Jutland peninsula, an amazing experience is immediately offered the party: a typical Nordic sunset, characterized by a "bizarre feast of light, a fantastic dance of colours"(ibid.:22) that leaves the travellers "an unforgettable impression"(ibidem).

The day after, in a general excitement, the steamer reaches Copenhagen: "soon everyone arrived in the beautiful city, that is rightly called 'cheerful' by its inhabitants"(ibid.:41). This visit lasts only one day, then the tourists visit Roskilde, the ancient capital, by train; once back on board, a bad turn in the weather keeps the steamer offshore before resuming its journey to Bornholm; this unexpected stopover gives the Captain the opportunity to tell several shipwrecks that occurred in that area, as well as episodes of the historical conflicts between Sweden and Denmark.

In Bornholm the group meets a Scottish girl, adopted by a local family after a shipwreck, an outstanding example of solidarity among the poor offered to the readers. Then, after reversing the course, the Vittoria heads out to the open sea and, on their way to the Faroe Islands, passengers experience the vision of mirages. A new, remarkable sight awaits them around the archipelago: icebergs appear, both fascinating and threatening at the same time.

The Captain gives some information about these islands and their inhabitants, then the group visits Tórshavn; here the narrative highlights the bleak landscape and the persistent bad smell of fish, dried along the streets.

The monotonous sailing in the open ocean is enlivened with the narration of legends, until the ship faces a storm, and everyone has to stay below deck; at night the survivors of a Norwegian vessel, shipwrecked on its way back from Iceland, are rescued; among them, the Swedish scientist Franz Nikold with his young son.

During the last part of the sailing to Iceland the Captain tells some anecdotes about Greenland and the Greenlanders, called in the book “Eskimos”; later, it is the Swedish scientist’s turn to narrate his terrible shipwreck, while sharing his sincere enthusiasm for the “island of fire and ice”(ibid.:151).

When the travellers finally arrive on sight of the coast and Sir James describes its characteristics his daughter Silvia shows her excitement, while Miss Margaret is disappointed because of the grey, monotonous landscape. After the puffins on the Vestmannaeyjar the image of Reykjavík appears: just a small city, almost devoid of any cultural interest, warns the Captain.

Once landed, the group reaches an emporium, where they meet some natives; on the main square, they notice Thorvaldsen’s monument, while in the streets they can see the typical Icelandic horses. The tour ends with a visit to the Cathedral and the Parliament, the only outstanding buildings in the city.

The excursions into nature are more interesting: at the “hot water springs”(ibid.:196) the party observes women cooking and washing clothes in the open air. A horseback ride takes the group to

Þingvellir, where the first Parliament in history had met since 930. During this excursion, the absolute lack of inns forces the travellers to share a shepherd’s shelter: quite surprisingly, the man had travelled abroad to several European countries, but he eventually preferred to return and live in his homeland. He is happy to answer their questions about the winter on the island and tell them about the Hekla volcano.

The following day the group visit the geysers: here they meet some Icelanders that, already used to welcoming the few English tourists, gather to sell such “souvenirs” like typical wood and bone handicrafts, as well as hats and woollen gloves.

The Captain has to juggle icebergs on the way to the last destination, Akureyri; the town is pretty, with small houses and flowers on the windowsills, but unfortunately the stench of fish hanging to dry spoils the air everywhere. An invitation to lunch allows the visitors to meet a local family and hear the description of the long, gloomy Arctic night from the very voice of the natives. Here, in this extreme northern spot, the group can observe the midnight sun and witness the killing of a white bear, which had just attacked some men.

On their way back seals and whales are often spotted from the deck of the ship. Back in Reykjavík, passengers are pleasantly surprised to find Lord Holland, who decided to join

them despite his health problems. All together they joyfully return to England, and the narration ends with Silvia's meaningful comment: albeit satisfied with the experience, she remembers her Italian homeland, "more beautiful, more cheerful than any northern country!"(ibid.:230).

6. **A tightly woven narrative fabric**

Savi Lopez's narrative relies on a wealth of information combined into different threads, according to a precise hierarchical order, and mostly reported by her characters.

Weaving a widely different range of information in a tight plot, alternating legends and historical topics, interposing scientific elements to memories, comparing events and actual experiences she creates a narrative fabric, varied and compact at the same time, where her educational and documentary purposes remain hidden in the foreground of an adventurous journey.

The author means to characterize the Icelandic environment as exhaustively as possible: above all she ranges from folk stories about trolls and giants to the Sagas about real or imagined ancestors, often containing supernatural elements; then, she deals with historical events, as well as accounts about the island's social organization and politics, with regards to its contacts with the rest of Europe; she also sources information from mythology, thus explaining the origins of both natural phenomena and religious habits. The author is also accurate in describing the natural environment, the geological structure, and the climate of this exotic island. Whenever it is possible, she lets her travellers observe and filter the topics through their actual experience.

To emphasize the sense of extraneity with the destination – an exotic place totally new to her Italian readers, reached only after a long, dangerous, and demanding sailing – the author widens the gap between the text and her readers choosing a castle on the English coast as the starting point to this adventure; this gap is furtherly reinforced by the protagonists, who are not Italians but English travellers.

As a balance to this estrangement, Savi Lopez provides a reassuring and familiar microcosm: the steamship Vittoria, where the group always returns after their excursions, a steady scene where the narrative develops through their conversations.

The somewhat heterogeneous distribution of the chapters clearly shows a hierarchical order of the content: Iceland occupies five chapters, and five more ones, set on board the steamer during navigation, explain a vast range of cultural phenomena: from sagas to popular

legends, to the Arctic physical and geological phenomena. The remaining four chapters break this interwoven structure, offering a descriptive frame: the first sets the narrative scene, another one describes the Faroe Islands, and two are dedicated to Denmark and Copenhagen.

The author assumes a heterodiegetic and omniscient role to provide information, often quoting "our travellers" as spokespersons, creating a complicity among the three parties in her work: herself, the characters, and her readers[6]. These travellers often share her omniscient role, talking about a variety of topics (from legends to history, from botany to the physical phenomena of the Arctic); in this realistic environment her audience of non-specialist readers is encouraged to identify and feel involved, both emotionally and rationally.

7. **Thread 1: Folklore and legends**

Savi Lopez's first narrative thread covers her main interests: myths and popular legends, mixed to historical subjects, are developed since the very start of the journey and all along the navigation. This subject is mainly let to the Captain and Sir James, who often take turns in the dialogues: while sailing towards Denmark the first hints at "the old times"(ibid.:59) when "on Christmas Day King Klinte-Konge [received] many gifts at the Stevnsklint reef, where he was believed to be living"(ibidem) near the coasts of Denmark. Gifts to the temple of Odin were also brought in the village of Lejre. Sir James follows, describing the Valhalla and the privileges of glorious dead warriors.

While the steamer heads to Iceland, among the mists of the North Sea, the Captain narrates the legend of Great Father Ocean's palace, destroyed by Christopher Columbus when "he crossed the old borders of the world"(ibid.:118), thus eliminating ancient beliefs; however, some old stories survive, like the ones about legendary female figures living almost everywhere in marine waters: the Mediterranean Sirens are known as Mary Morgan in the English Channel and in Brittany, and are called Mermaids in the Baltic Sea, in the North Sea and in the Atlantic Ocean. He also reports the story of Perlina, King of North Sea's daughter, that he had heard from other sailors: she used to live on the mainland for some years as the guest of a couple of sovereigns until, returning to the beach, yielded to the call of her fellow creatures and, taken by nostalgia, she swam back into the abyss.

During their stay in Reykjavík the group returns to the steamer every night and here the conversations sit between legend and history: the Captain maintains Sagas act as a system that preserves culture, both oral and written, providing "many memories of these nations"(ibid.:173). Saga herself was in fact personified: "In the ancient epic songs of the

old Edda it was said that goddess Saga was sitting night and day next to god Odin, the inventor of poetry and, like him, she used to drink from a golden cup, drawing water in the great river that represented history; therefore, we understand that, according to the concept of the peoples of the North, poetry and tales must find their position in history"(ibid.:174).

The narrative proceeds with Sir James developing the topic introduced by the Captain: he describes first the figure of the skalds, the Icelandic singers, then the old and the new Edda, with its cosmogony based on the Giants, the first inhabitants of the world, still alive in the Icelanders' imagination; of which the legend of the Stone Woman, a huge stone located between Breiðafjörður bay and Faxaflói Bay, stands as an appropriate example.

Few guides and a shepherd during the trip inland witness popular beliefs; the shepherd describes the fickle and evil trolls and witches, including the fearsome hundred-headed Gryla. These good and bad spirits still play important roles in the natives' difficult daily life.

Superstitions about the weird characters who populate the island are confirmed by the Akureyri's host: during the long and boring winter nights people tell how "the giants of the cold season, also called Trolls, according to popular beliefs jealously guard immense riches; they command a whole people of miserable castaways who, according to our rough neighbours in Greenland, have their noses cut off; they own herds of whales, seals, polar bears; and when they sit on enormous icebergs, wearing a shimmering mantle of ice upon their shoulders and a crown of diamonds on their long white hair, there is no king of the earth who can equal them in grandeur and majesty"(ibid.:225).

8. **Thread 2: Tales of kings and pirates**

The three teenagers traveling north represent the ideal audience for some historical episodes of the countries visited; here, more than focusing on accuracy, the narrative concentrates on the characters' relational and emotional aspects.

While sailing towards Denmark the Captain talks about wars between the Danes and the Swedes; the story of the city of Viborg and the adventures of King Erik are instead entrusted to the voice of Miss Margaret. During the excursion to Roskilde, the ancient capital of Denmark, Sir James illustrates some historical events: first the victory of Valdemar in Estonia and his return from that land, laden with riches; then, the Danes' fights against pirates, and their freeing of Christian slaves. Sir James also tells about Queen Margaret, a sort of *ante-litteram* feminist, who defeated and humiliated her cousin Albert of Mecklenburg. He had advised her to sew, instead of competing with men for power; in

response, the queen defeated him and "commanded him to be brought before her in feminine clothes, wearing a madman cap, with a tail long 19 arms […] because he had said that he would wear the crown only when Margaret would have been his prisoner »(ibid.:57).

The visit to Bornholm in search of a "Nordic Museum of antiquities"(ibid.:66) unfortunately shows just a " dunghill of ancient peoples"(ibidem), a rather chaotic heap of weapons, tools, and ornaments in stone and bronze, says the Captain. Once ashore, the party observes the runes and Sir James provides explanations about menhirs, or dolmens, like the English *stonefenge*[7]**.**It is again the Captain to tell the story of Egill, the pirate who resided on the island in King Canute's times: this king was undoubtedly "the greatest king in the North"(ibid.:70), as he "conquered England"(ibidem).

On the way back along the Jutland, the Captain reports the story of Vejle, first seat of King Gorm the Elder, and later of Christian II; Sir James follows, to deepen the character of Gorm the Great. Eventually it is the governess, Miss Margaret, who describes a female figure: Queen Thyra, wife of Gorm the Great, who was committed to spreading Christianity. Then the Captain describes Ahrus, the most important city of Jutland, and tells the story of Gustav Väsa's imprisonment on the island of Kallö. A new story told by the Captain deals again with a pirate, Palnatoke, enemy of King Harald Blatand, son of Queen Thyra.

In Cronborg fortress's basements, built in 1585 to resist the Swedes, legend has that Ogier the Dane, knight of Charlemagne, lays still asleep; this fortification resisted 1659 siege by Charles X of Sweden and also this story is told by two voices, Sir James's and the Captain's.

Finally, young Rolfe is entrusted with the narration of a recent historical event: the 1801 battle between Horatio Nelson and the Danes, that the Admiral had defined as the bloodiest of all his 105 battles.

Whereas Denmark occupies a great deal of the historic narrative, history of Iceland is very essential. The trip to Þingvellir allows Sir James to illustrate the organization of the old Parliament, showing the stone seats, the Logberg, or rock of the law, where laws and judgments were released; and eventually the "blood stone"(ibid.:183), where convicted were executed. Sir James asks his small audience to try and visualize a session of the Almannagjá: "tall warriors"(ibidem) protected the priests and judges, while people could watch them from a high platform. In this place, on June 4th, 1000, the chieftain Snorri, returning from Europe, delivered his famous speech that converted Icelanders to Christianity, "a great change as regards habits and religion, that took place without strife and bloodshed on the island"(ibid.:184). Eventually, Sir James traces a brief history of the Althing, from its abolition during the Danish rule to its restoration in 1843, ending with Iceland's autonomy

in 1874.

Also the Swedish scientist Franz participates in the historical narrative: he starts describing the early Norwegian settlements in Greenland in 868, and their sailing from Iceland to Greenland, where they remained until 983. Afterwards, the journeys were mainly directed southwards to Europe, and only a small number of people remained in Iceland, subdued by Hakon of Norway in 1264, until the island was finally ceded to Denmark in 1830.

Eventually, Sir James explains the scarcity of monuments and community buildings in Reykjavík: for a long time the Icelanders had preferred to hold their Parliament in the open.

9. **Thread 3: science, nature, religion**

Sailing unknown waters can only but stimulate curiosity among the passengers (and presumably, among the readers too) about the marine environment; the Captain, the only expert in this field, describes the sandy coast of Jutland, focusing on the phenomenon of moving dunes, extremely dangerous to sail since any storm changes their morphology.

Further on, between the Faroe Islands and Iceland, the passengers experience mirages, which the children had only read of as typical phenomena of desert areas. It is again the Captain who explains why navigation becomes more difficult near the Poles: the approach to the magnetic pole disturbs the compass needle and makes it less sensitive. In front of Reykjavík harbour he also provides a technical note about a dredger, “stealing the deepest secrets from the sea”(ibid.:163).

Icelandic geological nature is described by Dr. Franz, the Swedish expert just rescued on the steamer. Instead, the author herself tells of the most surprising natural events that await the party around Akureyri: the dangerous icebergs and the amazing midnight sun.

Eventually, it is again her voce to provide few features of northern economy: fish processing takes on a crucial importance both in the Faroe Islands and the city of Akureyri, while Bornholm is famous for its granite and agricultural products. Savi Lopez also highlights the spread of Catholicism, which contributed to decrease false beliefs and superstitions; conversely, albeit Lutheranism was the most widespread creed in the author’s times, she omits any hint to it.

10. **Thread 4: Italy**

The presence of Silvia, Sir James’s young daughter, keeps the image of Italy alive with her frequent observations and comparisons all over the narrative; her observations provide the

readers a reassuring sense of superiority. Since the beginning “the laughing villages and crowded hotels”(ibid.:9) of Piedmontese valleys, where “flowers are gathered in bundles”(ibid.:10) are contrasted with the “poor land of Iceland”(ibidem). Any image described by Silvia is invariably in favour of her distant homeland: Aosta Valley castles are more interesting than the Danish ones; Pompeii is richer in archaeological finds than Bornholm; Icelandic volcanoes are less fascinating than the Vesuvius; the beauty of the Gulf of Naples and the Apennines win over the desolation of the Icelandic landscape.

Besides, while she declares her equal love for both her parents’ countries, Italy and Great Britain, it is the first that prevails in her discourse: ” [Italy] acquired so much glory on the sea […] introduced us to the New World, and is now preparing to be respected and powerful more than ever”(ibid.:5): Silvia’s observations allude to the greatness of the Medieval Maritime Republics (Venice, Genoa, Pisa, Amalfi in Italy, and Ragusa on the Croatian coast) that ruled the Mediterranean; to the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus, and eventually to the leading role of the new state, the so-called Third Italy[8] in the contemporary international arena.

Italian recent history is also alive in Silvia’s words: she grows furious at the mere mention of Horatio Nelson, who caused the death of Neapolitan Admiral Caracciolo; only Sir James’s assertion – that the “reliable Italian battleships”(ibid.:6) would be able to keep any foreign threat away from the peninsula – reassures her.

Last, but not least, Italian artistic primacy is reaffirmed by miss Margaret, who describes Thorvaldsen’s educational journey and his cultural debt to the peninsula.

11. A thread apart: Greenland and the Inuit

Greenland stands apart from the steamer’s route; however, its folklore, history, nature, and culture are strictly interwoven into a one-night narrative thread that reports the scarce, stereotyped and not always accurate notions of the author’s times.

Greenland appears as a land of uncertain borders, where the pagan, ignorant and semi-nomadic people live, says the Captain. This gloomy environmental situation leads them to be extremely superstitious and to believe in mysterious presences; they spend a nomadic life in tents in summer, while in winter they stay in common residences “divided into as many parts as the families who live in the house”(ibid.:138); their clothes consist of “some rather tight trousers, and a jacket with a tight hood around the neck, with such small openings where one can only pass one’s hands and head through”(ibidem). Only their talent allows them to survive in that hostile nature: they invented ice fishing, and manage to assemble

very protecting clothes and extremely robust boots.

A question of Miss Margaret's allows Sir James to illustrate some historical details: contacts between Greenland and Iceland remained regular for several centuries, but around 1450 "no one cared about Greenland anymore"(ibid.:139). However, the few residents seemed to have no memory of that first colonization: in fact in 1585, when John Davis landed with his crews, the inhabitants considered them as supernatural beings, showing the same reaction as the South American Indians in front of the Spanish Conquistadores.

According to the Captain, Greenlanders maintain 'primitive' beliefs: despite their Christianization, superstitions remain alive, and magical powers are bestowed to the *Ingersuits*[9], both benign and evil spirits similar to human beings, that live in elegant residences. The Captain adds that local legends are preserved intact by a strict oral tradition: the narrator can "vary […] the expression given to words and gestures; but he is not even allowed to change a syllable, because everyone knows them and, as soon as they hear the slightest variant, they warn the narrator of his mistake"(ibid.:140). The Captain ends with the moving story of *Iliarsorkik*[10], "less boring than many others"(ibidem): the boy, a little orphan rejected by the village, has to show his courage facing and defeating a bear to be accepted in the community.

Overall, the Captain justifies the natives' frame of mind: in fact "theirs is a country where earth, sky, and sea have such an aspect that almost force those who see them to imagine foreboding events"(ibid.:145). In addition, sometimes they hear "certain very loud cries, [that] one cannot know whether they come from the atmosphere or from the sea"(ibidem), considered "bad omens"(ibidem); from the mountains "a deafening noise, as if struck by a lightning […]"(ibidem) echoes, while "blocks of ice scattered over the endless plains sometimes have the appearance of monstrous animals, of gigantic people"(ibidem); moreover, sometimes bears land on icebergs and attack the poor Greenlanders. Finally, in addition to real dangers, the natives imagine the existence of Kajarjaks[11], a kind of gigantic spirits causing violent storms. While this narration arouses amazement and fear in the two girls, it seems to stimulate young Rolfe's (and possibly some readers') sense of adventure – leading him to imagine wild adventures in the Arctic area.

12. Conclusions

Such a fluid narrative situation creates a "suspension of disbelief", as S.T.Coleridge defined it in his *Biographia Literaria*, that encourages the readers to identify with the travellers of a weird journey, feel a wealth of new emotions and learn a huge amount of information about Iceland, a neglected area of the world.

Conversely, the rigidly defined structure guides and supports their imagination, both during their explorations and in the reassuring setting of the steamer, ending their adventure back home. Consequently, the readers achieve a complete and exhaustive, albeit not always accurate, image of Iceland.

The characters mirror the readers: young people give voice to curiosity, enthusiasm, in some cases even fear and hesitation in front of the unknown; adults represent reliability, culture and experience, while the only female figure, fragile "by nature", does not hide her apprehensions and reveals her own sensitivity. Eventually, the author arranges a complex intersection of characters and themes, offering her readers a unique opportunity to get acquainted with Iceland while remaining comfortably seated in their armchairs.

N.B. *All translations into English are by the author.*

References

AGNARSDÓTTIR, Anna, "In Search of "A Distinct and Peculiar Race of People": the Mackenzie Expedition to Iceland, 1810", in 1700-tal Nordic Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies 10:11; DOI:10.7557/4.2619

COLERIDGE, Samuel Taylor (1817). *Biographia Literaria*, https://web.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/biographia.html

CUTINELLI, Francesco (1890). "Maria Savi Lopez e l'ultimo suo libro", in Rassegna pugliese di scienze, lettere e arti", Volume VII, n.18-19, pp.285-286.

FREDIANI, Federica (2007). *Uscire*. Reggio Emilia: Diabasis.

FREDIANI, Federica; RICORDA, Ricciarda; ROSSI, Luisa (2012) *Spazi segni, parole*. Milano:Franco Angeli.

LAWSON LUCAS, Ann (2017) *Emilio Salgari. Una mitologia moderna tra letteratura, politica, società. Vol. 1: Fine secolo. 1883-1915. Le verità di una vita letteraria.* Firenze: Olschki.

LEED, Eric J. (1992). *La mente del viaggiatore.* Bologna: il Mulino.

LEOPARDI, Giacomo (2003) “Dialogo della Natura e di in islandese”, in Armellini, G.-Colombo, A. (edit), *La letteratura italiana,* vol.B, p.624. Bologna: Zanichelli.

LEVI, Giovanni (2009). “I tempi della storia” in Historical Review / La Revue Historique, Institut de Recherches Néohelléniques, vol. VI pp.41–52.

MASOERO, Marisa (1985). *Introduzione* In: Maria Savi Lopez. Leggende delle Alpi. Ivrea: Pheljna, p. XI.

MASOERO, Marisa (1993). “Maria Savi Lopez. Un racconto, alcuni versi e saggi” In: Marco Cerruti (a cura di), Il «genio muliebre». Percorsi di donne intellettuali fra Settecento e Novecento in Piemonte. Antologia. p. 91-135. Alessandria: Edizioni dell’Orso.

MONGA, Luigi (1996). “Travel And Travel Writing”, in Annali d’Italianistica L’Odeporica/Hodoeporics: On Travel Literature, Volume 14. pp. 6-54.

PERUGI, Rosella (2019). *Altrove. Viaggiatrici italiane nell’Europa del nord.* Doctoral thesis, UTU: Turku.

PFEIFFER, Ida (1853) *Visit to Iceland and the Scandinavian North*. London: Ingram, Coke &Co..

ROSSI, Luisa (2005) *L’altra mappa*, Diabasis, 2005; R.Perugi, *Altrove*, Doctoral Thesis, Turku University, 2019.

SAVI LOPEZ, Maria (1893). *Nei paesi del Nord: Danimarca ed Islanda.* Torino: G. B. Paravia. (this article refers to 1920 edition)

SAVI LOPEZ, Maria (2002). *Nani e Folletti.* Palermo: Sellerio.

SAVI LOPEZ, Maria (2008). *Leggende del mare .* Palermo: Sellerio.

SAVI LOPEZ, Maria (2014). *Leggende delle Alpi* Ivrea: Il Punto-Piemonte.

SAVI LOPEZ, Maria (2016). *La donna italiana del XIV secol.,* Liber-liber: e-book

SAVI LOPEZ, Maria (2018) *Tramonto regale.* Liber-liber: e-book

STEUART MACKENZIE, Sir George (1811) *Travels in the Island of Iceland: During the Summer of the Year MDCCCX*. London: Thomas Allan

ed., https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=4xwCAAAAYAAJ&pg=GBS.PA72&hl=it

VON TROIL, Uno (1780). *Letters on Iceland: containing observations on the civil, literary, … history; antiquities, … customs, … &c. &c. made, during a voyage undertaken in the year 1772, by Joseph Banks, … Written by Uno von Troil, … To which are added, the letters of Dr. Ihre and Dr. Bach to the author, … Also Professor Bergman's curious observations* ….London:
Robson, http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/book/lookupname?key=Troil%2C%20Uno%20von%2C%201746-1803

Endnotes

[1] Among others: L.Rossi, *L'altra mappa*, Diabasis, 2005; F.Frediani, *Uscire*, Diabasis, 2007; F. Frediani, R. Ricorda, L. Rossi, *Spazi segni, parole*, Franco Angeli 2012; R.Perugi, *Altrove*, Doctoral Thesis, Turku University, 2019.

[2] Ida Pfeiffer writes that she had to wait several weeks in Denmark, before she could find a cargo ship for Iceland (Pfeiffer 1856:20).

[3] U. von Troil, 1780: Letters on Iceland […] the definition is given in letter XXI, p.247- "hver".

[4] Another Italian traveller, Giulia Kapp Salvini, took part in this cruise and left a travelogue: Le capitali del Nord (Hoepli, Milan 1907).

[5] An example can clarify this statement: before leaving, both Amy and Rolfe are worried to leave their father alone, but express their apprehension in very different ways: while the boy, staring into his father's eyes, offers directly to give up the trip, Amy instead looks for a physical contact sitting at the bottom of her father's chair, in a subordinate position, and silently expressing the same purpose by stroking his hand.

[6] The sentence –"our travellers"- and the possessive "our" will be repeated several times (pp. 13, 31, 42, 180, 181 …), to consolidate the relationship between readers and protagonists.

[7] The Author compares the site of Stonehenge, well known to her English travellers, to explain the value of these Danish remains; the letter f instead of h may be a misprint.

[8] It was Giosuè Carducci, one of the outstanding poets of the time and Nobel Prize in 1906, to appoint as “Third” the recently unified Italy, resulting from the struggles of Risorgimento, to mean it as a leading power, heir to the greatness of the Roman Empire and the Renaissance.

[9] The author uses the English spelling to report the names of these, as well as the following, spirits.

[10] See above, n.9.

[11] See above, n.9.

Share this:

- Share