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**Seeking Cultural Authority in Unbeaten Paths:
Amelia Edwards's Journeys Through
the Dolomites and Egypt**

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Introduction

As soon as I had the chance to know and study the literary figure of Amelia B. Edwards during a university course, I thought that the authoress's travel books were a very interesting and valuable topic of investigation for my final dissertation. After several months devoted to the analysis of Edwards's travelogues, I can state that my expectations have been fully answered.

Indeed, Amelia B. Edwards was a versatile and prolific literary figure of the Victorian period. From a very early age she excelled in many artistic fields, but writing represented for her the most suitable means to earn her living, as she made the choice not to marry and depend on a husband. Edwards worked mainly as a novelist, journalist, Egyptologist and travel writer. Her successful travel books, titled *Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys* (1873) and *A Thousand Miles up the Nile* (1877), are the outcomes of two extended journeys through the Dolomites and Egypt respectively.

Amelia Edwards is a perfect example of those independent women travellers who sought alternative identities for themselves, far from the constraints of Victorian British society. These unconventional women took advantage of the popularity of travel writing in order to enhance their cultural authority, and during the nineteenth century a great quantity of travel texts narrating their adventures were published. Since Amelia Edwards's travelogues are the main focus of this thesis, through the analysis of some significant passages, I show how the process of acquiring social esteem and recognition through travel writing was not immediate. Indeed, Victorian women writers were considered

suitable for writing novels and poems, and the non-fictional genre of travel writing was thought to be a male prerogative. Therefore, a particular tension is noticeable both in the majority of Victorian women writers and in Amelia Edwards's travel writing, as she employed several devices to establish her own voice while still making use of masculine literary stratagems, which reveal the typical aggressive stance of the colonizing British culture towards the rest of the world.

For a thorough understanding of the significance of Amelia Edwards's travelogues, it is necessary to devote the first chapter of this dissertation to a general overview of travel writing. This part shows how, despite the publication of numerous scholarly books on the topic of travel writing, it is not easy to define the genre and outline its main literary features. However, what seems to be a certain fact is that travel books have always been considered engaging and popular literary products, which aim at presenting to a reading audience a foreign reality filtered through the eyes of a writer/traveller. The author's personality, therefore, always emerges through the pages of a travel text and, most of the times, the journey functions as an opportunity of self-discovery on the part of the writer. Moreover, chapter 1 offers an historical synopsis of travel and travel writing; it focuses especially on the nineteenth century, defined as the golden age of this literary genre, since it is the period in which a greater number of people could travel and relate their experiences abroad. Finally I illustrate how Victorian female travel writers could seize on the democratisation of travel and the popularity of travel writing in order to escape the limitations imposed by British society and enhance their cultural authority within the patriarchal field of travel writing.

After having offered an introductory overview of what is the central focus of all Edwards's literary productions, chapter 2 presents Amelia's figure as a

multifaceted and talented intellectual of the nineteenth century. Despite Edwards's prolific and remarkable career, critical studies on her literary productions have been scarce so far. Apart from several authoritative essays, only two official biographical books have been written by Joan Rees and Brenda Moon, and generally scholars highlight how Amelia Edwards's travel writing is worthy of consideration among all the works she had produced. The chapter is divided into two parts. The first one deals with Amelia's early professional career, mainly as a journalist, novelist and travel writer. During this phase of life, the authoress had worked intensely. She published plentiful, diverse pieces of writing, ranging from journal articles to history books, translations, poems, essays, short stories, novels and, above all, travel accounts. Furthermore, the second part of chapter 2 explores the later stage of Amelia Edward's career as an influential Egyptologist, which coincides with the last ten years of her life. After having sought a professional position within the Victorian cultural milieu as an inexhaustible and flexible writer, in 1882 Amelia decided to move on and totally devote herself to the cause of Egyptology by founding the Egypt Exploration Society. As a matter of fact, by committing herself to the study and preservation of the archaeological remains of ancient Egypt, Amelia (who essentially was an amateur) was able to consolidate her cultural authority within the patriarchal academic domain of Egyptology. Even during her career as a professional Egyptologist, Edwards revealed an intense passion for travelling, since she had the opportunity of giving lectures abroad until the very end of her life.

If the first two chapters serve as an introduction to Amelia Edwards's travel writing, the two following ones get to the core of this dissertation. I do not provide the summaries of the plots, but I take into account what I consider as some of the

most relevant passages of the books in order to highlight important literary characteristics of both Amelia's and the majority of Victorian women's travel writing.

In chapter 3, I examine Edwards's first successful travel account published in 1873 under the title *Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys: A Midsummer Ramble in the Dolomites*. After delineating the structure and the subject-matter of the book, I explore how Amelia reacted when she confronted herself with the Dolomites, a region of the Italian Alps which was still unexplored by mass tourists in the nineteenth century. Since Edwards possessed an artistic talent, it is interesting to observe her responses to the Italian art and how she represents the mountain district through the numerous sketches that embellish the book as well. A related aspect which is worthy of consideration is Amelia's reliance on the language of the visual art to describe the scenery, as she frequently employs the aesthetic term "picturesque" when she refers to the mountains. The chapter also examines the significance of the setting, since the Dolomites could provide the writer with the right amount of originality in order to turn the travelogue into a successful work. Moreover, as far as literary devices are concerned, I analyse Amelia's use of some fictional techniques such as characterisation and dialogue. Since the story is told by a narrative persona, I discuss the issue of autobiography which affects every non-fictional travel text. Furthermore, I examine how Amelia faced the Victorian female writers' problem of self-affirmation. Indeed, while on the one hand Edwards is able to establish her own voice through personal depictions of the Dolomites, on the other hand she makes use of apologetic prologues and recurrently adopts an aggressive stance typical of men's travel writing.

Chapter 4 deals with Amelia Edwards's second travelogue titled *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*, which was published in 1877. Unlike the Dolomites, by the second half of the nineteenth century, Egypt was both a fashionable destination for tourists and an appealing topic for readers. Edwards, therefore, could count on the popularity of the Egyptian land in order to profit from publishing her account. However, as I will explain, she always pursued originality by distancing herself from the authors of guide books and offering a personal narrative. Moreover, besides illustrating the structure and the itinerary of the book and exploring Edwards' motivation for visiting Egypt, I focus on the writer's own use of the picturesque vocabulary to render the Egyptian territory, since this time she employs a more marked pictorial style to describe the foreign reality. Indeed, Amelia's artistic sensibility is particularly evident in the detailed and lyrical depictions of statues, pyramids, sphinxes and temples of ancient Egypt. However, Edwards's passionate portrayals of the millennial monuments harshly contrast with the writer's unsympathetic comments on the Egyptian population. As a matter of fact, I dedicate two sections of this chapter to the analysis of Amelia Edwards's imperialistic attitude, which emerges especially aboard the boat used to traverse the Nile River together with other British fellow travellers.

Travel Writing: A Preliminary Overview

1.1 Introduction

In the first chapter of this thesis a brief investigation on the general topic of travel writing will be presented. The requisite for this overview was basically taken into consideration in the light of a concern for a better understanding of the specific literary genre here considered and the context within which Amelia Edwards wrote her two travelogues. In view of the fact that the number of books which come under the category of travel literature is incredible vast, the consequent critical bibliography which has been produced on the subject is very extensive, too. In order to lighten the task of facing the broad theme of the history and criticism of travel writing, since its actual beginning one of the springboards for this dissertation has been constituted by *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing* (2013), the work of Timothy Youngs, Professor at the Nottingham Trent University and Director of the correspondent Centre for Travel Writing Studies, which gives a useful overview on the subject. Moreover, I have referred to the similarly titled volume *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (2002), edited by Timothy Youngs and Peter Hulme, which presents additional information contained in the essays of several authors, among whom we can find James Buzard,

another valuable critic whose studies help to obtain a further perspective on travel writing criticism. As a result of these first essential readings, one can immediately recognise what the extent of the subject is.

This chapter has been conceived as an attempt to accompany us into the intriguing world of Amelia Edwards's travel writing. I will first try to delineate the genre and present some of its characteristics as a distinctive and fascinating type of literature, which may be thought as meeting ground between two different realities, that of the author (the self) and that of the place he/she travels to (the world). Subsequently, the focus of the second paragraph of this chapter will be dedicated to a synopsis of the history of travel and travel writing in the nineteenth century, the golden period of this form of nonfiction literature and the era in which Amelia Edwards lived in. Barbara Brothers and Julia Gergits in their introduction to the volume *British travel writers, 1837-1875* observe that "Victorians did not invent travel or travel writing, but they passionately loved both."¹ As a matter of fact, it can be said that for Victorians the experience of travelling was an integral part of their lives, both when they practically set out on a journey and when they vicariously experienced an adventure by reading the pages of an author's travel book as armchair travellers. Finally, the third part will examine another question which must be highlighted because relevant for the Victorian era: the gender of the travel writer. In fact, being a female adventurer and author in the nineteenth century was of particular significance since this figure distanced herself totally from that idea of femininity embodied in the concept of *The Angel in the House*, which was hugely supported by the Victorian establishment, which saw any form of female emancipation as a menace for the social order.

¹ B. Brothers and J. Gergits (eds.), *British Travel Writers, 1837-1875*, Detroit: Gale Research, 1996, p. xi.

1.2 Travel Writing: Some Peculiarities of This Literary Genre

The written narration of a foreign place has served and will always function as an instrument to introduce readers to a different reality filtered through the eyes of its author. Almost everyone during their lifetime had read or will read at least one travel account (a journal article, a diary, a guide book and so on) and what seems to be immediately apparent is that three subjects perform different roles in the processes of composition and reception of a piece of writing. Two of them are active subjects, that is to say the author/traveller (who maintains throughout the journey the condition of guest)² and the reader, respectively responsible for transmitting and perceiving that *foreign place* as accurately as possible; the place and people depicted, instead, seem to be passive agents (being subjected to description) which, however, “serve a function. Usually they contribute to the narrator’s enlightenment and sense of identity.”³ Mary Louise Pratt defines these “contact zones” the “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination”.⁴ Therefore, in travel accounts three forces are put into play, each one acting dissimilarly in the rendering of what is considered *other*.

It is intriguing to understand the dynamics which may determine the authenticity of a book and probably that is the reason why several scholars have committed themselves to the study of this appealing discipline. Each of them has crafted their own debatable assumptions, drawing on several theories from Michel

² In this regard, Michael Kowaleski points out that “a crucial element of all travel writing remains the author’s ‘visitor’ status. He or she remains, as the reader’s surrogate, a cultural outsider who moves into, through and finally beyond the places and events encountered”. M. Kowaleski, “Introduction: The Modern Literature of Travel”, in M. Kowaleski (ed.), *Temperamental Journeys: Essays on the Modern Literature of Travel*, Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1992, p 9.

³ T. Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 159.

⁴ M. L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London: Routledge, 1992, p. 4.

Foucault's discourse analysis to Edward Said's theory of the distorted perception of Eastern cultures known as Orientalism, from Formalists to Postcolonialists, and so forth.⁵ In this dissertation I will not adopt one particular straightforward theorization, but I will avail myself of several feminist critical texts which have followed the teachings of their famous predecessors to build their own analysis.

Dennis Porter in the introduction to his work on travel writing, *Haunted Journeys*, remarks on the inadequacy of discourse theory due to an excessive trustworthiness on the capacity of collective speech to examine individual travel texts. He opts for Freudian psychoanalysis as a more suitable instrument to approach travel literature, which would allow, even if with its limitations,⁶ to consider travels as self-discoveries on the part of the adventurers. According to Porter, "the most interesting writers of nonfictional travel books have managed to combine explorations in the world with self-explorations. They submitted themselves to the challenge of travel and, in the process, managed if not always to make themselves over, then at least to know themselves differently."⁷

This interpretation appears to be one of the most interesting and intimate ones, inasmuch as it represents for scholars the possibility to investigate the mind of the traveller, creating a sort of ideal confidence with the latter. In this way, considering the Freudian emblematic terms *desire* and *transgression* of the subtitle of Porter's book, this theory might work for the study of Victorian women's travel writing, in view of the fact that they were able to follow the instinctive yearning to journey, defying the social constraints of their time. However, discovering the

⁵ A list regarding theoreticians of travel writing is offered by Mary Baine Campbell in the chapter titled "Travel writing and its theory" from the volume *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, P. Hulme and T. Youngs (eds.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 261-78.

⁶ According to Porter, "psychoanalysis, too, has its inherent limitations [...] chiefly because it is both ahistorical and apolitical." D. Porter, *Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991, p. 14.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

profound motivation for travelling entails a deep knowledge of the writer, which is not an easy task to undertake, especially when, despite the biographical notes published, he/she is a multifaceted and enigmatic one, as in the case with Amelia Edwards. While I will analyse her life, my assumption is that it is not simple to affirm that she ventured on her journeys as a result of a pure and simple interest to examine the remote territories of the Italian Dolomites and Egypt for study purposes or due of a sense of dissatisfaction felt at home. The reasons for travelling can be various, “they range from exploration, conquest, colonization, diplomacy, emigration, forced exile, and trade to religious or political pilgrimage, aesthetic education, anthropological inquiry, and the pursuit of a bronzer body or a bigger wave.”⁸ Yet “the public motive does not preclude in a traveler the kind of personal investments”⁹ he or she makes to experience the romantic pleasure of travelling. The theoretical aspect of travel writing is just as interesting as boundless a topic, but it goes beyond the scope of this dissertation; hence, for the investigation of Amelia Edwards’s travel books, I will just consider the suggestions of some scholars on women’s travel writing and Amelia Edwards’s travel books.

Youngs defines travel writing as “the most socially important of all literary genres”¹⁰ because

[i]t records our temporal and spatial progress. It throws lights on how we define ourselves and how we identify others. Its construction of our sense of ‘me’ and ‘you’, ‘us’ and ‘them’, operates on individual and national levels and in the realms of psychology, society and economics. [...] Travelling is something we all do, on different scales, in one form or another.¹¹

As a result of this, travelling is an evident social phenomenon which involves everybody and, as stated before, affects directly the personality of the individual, but also the relationships between the self and the rest of the world, with

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁹ *Ivi.*

¹⁰ Youngs, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

¹¹ *Ivi.*

consequences verifiable in different areas. The power of travel appears to be both indisputable and relative (it influences travellers in different ways) and also consequent “[r]epresentations of the travel experience [may] affect subsequent travellers. [...] They can shape one nation’s view of, and conduct towards, another.”¹² Especially interesting is the comment of Elizabeth Bohls regarding the extraordinary ability of one’s previous readings to influence his/her own mind even when they find themselves in direct contact with another reality. Bohls observes that “travel does not always entail openness to unfamiliar cultures. In fact one suspects this is rarely the case. Most travelers carry with them an entire apparatus for assimilating their new experiences to comfortable system of belief”.¹³ This might suggest that travel would both oblige to exit one’s own comfort zone and question one’s own preconceptions concerning the *other*; however, almost none of the adult travellers would possess the ability to undertake a journey completely open-minded, ready to understand fully different customs, traditions and values and re-elaborate them properly in written accounts.

The reasons which induce a person to move from one place to another are disparate and have changed over time; if circumstances allow, for a large number of people around the world, travelling, which was considered until recently as another mere hobby, nowadays seems to have become a fundamental need, essential for a personal and cultural enrichment. Since its remote origins, travelling indeed has spurred many adventurers to put into words their wanderings in order to convey foreign realities in familiar terms. As Youngs points out, “[a]uthors of travel accounts may write primarily for themselves or for others (e.g.,

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹³ E. A. Bohls, *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics, 1716-1818*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 18.

governments, sponsors, societies, expedition leaders, family and friends).¹⁴ Also

Casey Blanton underlines that

[t]ravel literature has a long and honourable history. [...] This compelling urge to describe the journey does not diminish throughout history, and there seems to be no end to the wealth of travel texts. [...] Despite changes in style and purpose, the effect of these narratives on the reader has not diminished. From Marco Polo to Bruce Chatwin, travelers' tales about distant places and cultures have proven to be remarkably popular reading. The persistence of this kind of writing is undoubtedly related to human curiosity [...]. But curiosity alone does not account for the persistence of this genre.¹⁵

Thus, human interest in reading about different places and people seems to be insufficient to justify the lasting attractiveness of travel writing. The peculiarity of this appealing literary genre lies in the power of its narrative structure: the aficionados of travel writing are completely involved from the beginning till the end of the plot, that is to say from the departure till the homecoming (if this is provided by the author) or conclusion of the voyage. This spatiotemporal progress is the basic framework for every travel story, where the "reader is swept along on the surface of the text by the pure forward motion of the journey while being initiated into strange and often dangerous new territory."¹⁶ The development of the traveller's adventures engages readers in such a compelling way that this type of writing is one of the most popular ones, also because it is through this simple pattern that figurative images are suggested, "thus converting the journey into a mode of introspection."¹⁷ To this end, Blanton explains that the depth of this self-examination has varied in the course of the history of travel writing. On the one hand, we have early accounts where travellers are so focused on the achievement of a specific goal (for instance, navigators seeking new routes, pilgrims headed for places of worship, merchants aiming at new trading) that the foreign reality does

¹⁴ Youngs, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

¹⁵ C. Blanton, *Travel Writing: The Self and the World*, New York: Routledge, 2002, pp. 1-2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

not particularly appear to strike them, keeping concealed any hypothetical consequence provoked in their inner selves. On the other hand, there are more modern, open styles of travel writing, where the effects which travel has on the narrator's mind are voiced, crafting a dramatic narrative which bonds readers with the travellers' frank impressions of their journeys. This last variety is identified by Blanton as *genuine* travel literature, different from the less personal and curiously defined *pretravel* accounts lacking an emotional response to travel, which saw its fully development in the Romantic period. According to Blanton, "[g]enuine 'travel literature,' as opposed to what has been called 'pretravel,' depends upon a certain self-consciousness on the part of the narrator that was not seized upon until after the Renaissance and, in fact, not highly developed until the concern with 'sensibility' in the eighteenth century."¹⁸ However, it could be said that both sorts of narrators frequently exchange strategies, creating works where autobiographical hints may be observable also in the most detached tales, but also objective descriptions of places and people may enrich the most intimate storylines. Blanton also suggests that a good piece of travel writing should possess an equilibrium of the private and the public spheres which allows readers to discover simultaneously the reality depicted, the emotions experienced by the traveller and their own feelings evoked by the vicarious voyage.¹⁹

What both Youngs and Blanton highlight in their studies is the complexity of travel writing, the issue to delineate its specific features, as it is not a circumscribed genre, but it makes use of different literary devices. Youngs notes that "[n]o discussion of travel writing seems complete without critics remarking on the difficulty of determining their object of study. [...] [T]his stubbornly indefinable

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

form that some critics argue does not constitute a genre at all".²⁰ In addition to this, he explains that the concept of *genre* itself is permeable and changing, especially if readers consider that travel writing is predominantly constituted by the element of mobility. In this way, the genre turns out to be subjected to the power of the text, so that the latter can disregard different genre classifications, but rather can exploit and transform them for its own purposes, in order to accurately convey ideas, images and intents to readers in an innovative way. Youngs believes that "[o]ur understanding of genres is historically as well as textually determined"²¹ and in his opinion, simplifying all theorisations is the best way to deal with the heterogeneity of travel writing, arguing that it "consists of predominantly factual, first-person prose accounts of travels that have been undertaken by the author-narrator"²² who can freely "draw on the techniques of fiction to tell [his/her] stories. Plot, characterisation and dialogue all play their part. Whereas some travel writers insist on absolute verisimilitude, others readily admit to the manipulation and invention of detail."²³ Therefore, if a potential genre of travel writing is taken into consideration, this may count on fictional devices to recount in a more intriguing manner the adventures of the explorer, without the risk of being discredited as imaginative literature. Likewise, as Youngs continues to observe, fictional accounts may take advantage of travel writing strategies to render their plots more verisimilar, just as in the case of the novel *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe (1719).²⁴ Amelia Edwards's travel writing employs several fictional

²⁰ Youngs, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-2.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²² *Ivi.*

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 4. Also Blanton underlines that the "genuine" travel writer's plots are more attentively constructed than the "pretravel" impersonal and descriptive ones and the sensitive narrator "often borrows from the world of fiction to establish motivation, rising and falling action, conflict, resolution, and character." Blanton, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

²⁴ Youngs, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

techniques in order to grasp and hold the audience's attention, but this does not mean that what Edwards reports did not take place. Hence, the reading public should rely on the author's words and at the same time be aware that the process of writing is itself a recreation of the journey carried out previously, which entails a sort of manipulation of the authenticity of that experience. The craft of a story is in any case a reconstruction, but the more factual the narration proves to be, the more skilful the author is. Normally readers tend to identify the author with the narrator of the story; however, they should bear in mind that travel and travel writing entail differentiations of intensity of that experience and the one who recounts the journey is simultaneously "actor (involved in the travel), reviewer (remembering it), and author of it (some time after the event). Between these differences falls the narrator, a composite, in-between figure that is the result of experience, imagination and art."²⁵ In this respect, it will be interesting to consider Amelia Edwards's choice to tale her travelogues through the narrating persona identified as *The Writer*.

Despite many scholars claim that the veracity of the voyage is the essential element which permits to distinguish travel writing from other fictional types of travel literature, the complexity of this field of study does not fade. As a matter of fact, the multifaceted nature of travel writing seems to represent its real value:

[i]t is that quality, along with travel writing's long history, that has contributed to the problems of definitions. The genres from which travel narratives borrow, or of which they are composed, stand in their own right: the scientific record, the diary, the autobiography, correspondence, the novel, journalism and so on. [...] we should accept that this is what actually characterises [travel writing]. It is a genre whose intergeneric features constitute its identity.²⁶

The field of travel writing studies has attracted the academic interest rather recently, approximately from the 1980s, when credit started to be recognised to

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

travel narrative, which was no longer considered a second-rate literature, but instead “rich, complex, flexible and worthy of endless study.”²⁷ Over the years, scholars have committed themselves to the decoding of travel texts, which, for some of them (Edward Said above all), are not as objective and innocent as they appear to be, but either burdened with preconceptions about a foreign place/society and portrayed through the filters of Western culture (as it happens in some passages of Amelia Edwards’s books) or, on the contrary, used as an instrument to subvert any form of domination (as in the case with postcolonial writers). Youngs observes that for those texts which “[i]n the eyes of Said, and many of those writing under his influence, [...] not only reflected and accompanied, but also helped facilitate the exercise of colonial power”²⁸ in reality critics are inclined to ignore the socio-historical conditions in which they were composed; in fact, recently there has been a tendency to “question the earlier models of imposition and domination and to stress instead processes of negotiation, transculturation and even exploitation by ‘native’ peoples. Such studies tend to view the space of encounter [...] as involving exchange [...] rather than compliance, submission and imposition.”²⁹ Mary Louise Pratt’s *Imperial Eyes: travel writing and transculturation* is one of the most eminent instances of these new critical approaches to travel writing; in her opinion the *contact zone* “treats the relations among colonizers and colonized, or travelers and ‘travelees’, not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understanding and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power.”³⁰

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 163

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

³⁰ Pratt, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

In spite of all the literary theories critics have been applying hitherto to investigate travel writing, Youngs recognises the difficulty to establish a common thread to all the approaches, and, unfortunately, nowadays “no general travel theory as such has emerged.”³¹ Consequently, in absence of common rules for the study of travel writing, this paragraph has been conceived as an attempt to put in order significant scholars’ suggestions and identify certain peculiarities of this literary genre, given that the specific object of this investigation is Amelia Edwards’s travel writing, which is only a part of her prolific work. As mentioned before, Tim Youngs’s work may serve for all those interested in the topic as an ideal and start to approach the genre of travel writing.

1.3 Travel and Travel Writing in the Nineteenth Century

As Youngs observes, the history of travel literature is incredibly ancient because “[p]eople have always travelled and told [both written and oral] stories about their travels.”³² The earliest forms of travel writing differed from those modern ones, also because the reasons for moving around have transformed over the years. Scholars believe that travel literature has deep roots which date as far back as thousands of years, right up to epic tales such as *Gilgamesh*, the *Histories* of Herodotus³³ and Homer’s *Odyssey*, when the depiction of the “physical world newly discovered was more compelling than [that of] the mind of the traveler, and the

³¹ Youngs, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

³³ Youngs notes that, apart from telling the conflict between the Persian Empire and the Greeks between 430 and 424 BCE, “The *Histories* draws on Herodotus’s own journeys in the Middle East, North Africa, Central Asia and the Balkans and on others’ accounts of these regions. Its combination of information and the fantastic anticipates the mixture of fact and fiction [...] that has characterized travel writing ever since.” *Ibid.*, p. 20.

narrator's purpose was to record the details of this often exciting journey."³⁴ There are critics who find examples of travel writing even in the Bible. M. H. Abrams explains that the *peregrinatio vitae*, or rather the peregrination of life conceived as "an extended journey through alien lands", involves, for instance, Adam and Eve when they are banished from Eden, the Hebrews when they fled from Egypt or Cain whose castigation forces him "to wander as a fugitive and a vagabond".³⁵

Before the nineteenth century, travelling was in most cases a prerogative of all those who could afford long periods of rambling around both known and unknown routes; basically, in the nineteenth century "the *who, where, what, and how* of travel all transformed, and so, too, was the literature of travel."³⁶ Looking back very briefly, people (mostly men) during the Middle Ages journeyed as: pilgrims or missionaries heading for sacred destinations, either to carry on their spiritual quest and look for an alleviation from illness or fight the infidels in the Holy Land; ambassadors serving their state governors; merchants seeking new routes for their trades. Among these, it is important to remember the celebrated Marco Polo and Christopher Columbus, who narrated the Far East in their travelogues.

The Elizabethan era was characterised by hordes of European explorers and conquerors who adventured into territories of the New World and "traveling abroad had become an endeavour for the few – something not only inappropriate for women, children, and the old, but also unaffordable for the most."³⁷ During this epoch, some accounts start revealing what Blanton describes as "the emergence of

³⁴ Blanton, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

³⁵ M. H. Abrams, "Introduction: Spiritual Travellers in Western Literature" in B. Magliocchetti and A. Verna (eds.), *The Motif of the Journey in Nineteenth-Century Italian Literature*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994, pp. 1-20, p. 1.

³⁶ Brothers and Gergits (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. xi.

³⁷ *Ivi.*

a personal voice, conscious of changes and emotions wrought by encounters with the foreign world [...]. The consistent use of this voice is a slow but steady phenomenon throughout Renaissance travel accounts.”³⁸ An example of this more mindful and carefully composed tales is Sir Walter Raleigh’s *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Beautifull Empire of Guiana* (1595), in which the voyager “consciously fashions a fictionlike narrative of this journey. [...] [The story] has none of the tedium of other captain’s reports. It has purpose, danger, adventure, failure, and new possibilities. And it has a hero, albeit mostly fictional.”³⁹

Blanton explains that this involvement between self and world becomes more and more evident throughout the following centuries and, especially from the eighteenth century, “[b]oth types of narratives – the scientific and the sentimental – would eventually become the two dominant models for the travel genre.”⁴⁰ Therefore, the reading public was gradually introduced to written productions which, on the one hand, catalogued the scientific discoveries of a now classifiable foreign world subjugated to a Eurocentric perspective, and, on the other, highlighted the narrators’ voice, so as to elevate and emphasise their abilities to survive in the outer world. In fact, Roy Bridges remarks that travel writers used to “embrace approaches ranging from an expositions of the results of the scientific exploration claiming (but rarely managing) to be objective and value-free to the frankly subjective description of the impact of an area and its people on the writer’s own sensibilities.”⁴¹ Typically, travellers narrated “experiences and observations day to day on the basis of a log or journal”⁴² and, clearly, Western

³⁸ Blanton, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴¹ R. Bridges, “Exploration and travel outside Europe (1720-1914)” in P. Hulme and T. Youngs (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, cit., pp. 53-69, p. 53.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

superiority was more emphasised in science accounts which contributed to the perpetuation of “‘an intellectual conquest’ of most of the rest of the world”.⁴³

Subsequently, as Blanton points out,

[b]y the end of the [eighteenth] century, as the precarious Enlightenment balance between science and sentiment begins to make way for the subjectivity of the romantic period, travel writing veers toward the self. [...] One no longer needed a scientific or political reason for going abroad (i.e. to seek new knowledge, complete one’s education, or discover new territory). By the close of the eighteenth century [...] desire replaces duty as the motivation for travel.⁴⁴

Romanticism was thus characterised by a spread of painstakingly composed travel accounts which focused on the narrators’ sensibility and response to the stimuli of the most *picturesque* sites of the world, so that the resulting experiences were craftily dramatised in literary works.

As stated above, before the Victorian period – apart from merchants eager to expand their trades, diplomats working for their nations, missionaries committed to spread the word of God, intrepid explorers who hunted for new lands to appropriate and researchers who left on scientific expeditions – essentially only wealthy people (mostly young and male) were able to travel around well-known routes of the European continent to acquire knowledge and experience with different cultures. Until the nineteenth century, travelling was certainly not an easy task to embark on, due to the lack of appropriate means of transport and communication. In fact, “[t]ravel was dirty, tiring and time-consuming, not be undertaken without serious commitments of money, time, and energy. [...] Usually, [...] travelers required a huge equipage, because the customary stay was for three years and the travelling group might include distant relatives as well as companions and servants.”⁴⁵

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁴⁴ Blanton, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.

⁴⁵ Brothers and Gergits (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. xi.

The traditional Grand Tour defied all the discomforts of travelling and, from about 1660 until 1840, many young wealthy men journeyed around well-defined European paths, reaching the principal amusing, cultural and artistic sites of the continent. Originally intended for the young British aristocrats, very soon the tour involved also the rest of the young Europeans of the upper classes. The experience was considered essential for their education and travel turned out to be a fundamental investment for their lives. As James Buzard explains, “[t]he Grand Tour was, from start to finish, an ideological exercise. Its leading purpose was to round out the education of young men of the ruling classes by exposing them to the treasured artifacts and ennobling society of the Continent.”⁴⁶ On the other hand, due to the simultaneous spread of dissolute vices like “drinking, gaming, and whoring [...], the behaviour of Grand Tourists soon attracted sufficient criticism to call into question the aims of the entire enterprise.”⁴⁷ Throughout the eighteenth century, the number of those lucky ones who could meet the expenses of the Grand Tour “grew steadily, interrupted only for short periods by upheavals, particularly the Napoleonic Wars. [...] To guide the many travelers [...] tours memoirs proliferated, becoming precursors of contemporary guide books”.⁴⁸ During the break imposed by the Napoleonic wars, British travellers noticed that national sites could evoke emotional sensations, too. Thus, people started travelling to places impregnated with Celtic aesthetic references such as the Highlands, which, for instance, were narrated in Walter Scott’s *Waverley, or, ‘Tis Sixty Years Since* (1814); otherwise, they resorted to their own imagination in order to reach figuratively southern European places full of Gothic allusions, and this aesthetic

⁴⁶ J. Buzard, “The Grand Tour and after (1660-1840)” in P. Hulme and T. Youngs (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, cit., pp. 37-52, p. 38.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁴⁸ Brothers and Gergits (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. xii.

vogue started with the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764).⁴⁹

Once the conflict between France and England had ceased in 1815, "Britons seemed to explode across the Channel, heading abroad in greater numbers than ever before, and jokes and complaints about the 'British invasion of Europe' began to make regular appearances in the periodicals."⁵⁰ In its last phase, The Grand Tour gradually had become less and less elitist and its definitive end corresponded with the advent of mass tourism, a change which completely revolutionised the concept of travel. As Youngs observes, "[t]he progression of nineteenth-century tourism [was] characterised by the increasing access of the middle classes to travel as a result of improved transport and greater affordability."⁵¹ As a matter of fact, nineteenth-century travellers could travel with greater liberty than their predecessors, mainly thanks to the gradual development of technology and machinery (improved roads and carriages, but principally the spread of steamboats and railways) and be assisted by numerous institutions and facilities which were born in order to foster tourism. In particular, travellers could take advantage of the "emergence of the 'travel agent', especially in the corporate person of Thomas Cook and Son, and of the modern tourist's guidebook, as it was separately invented by Karl and Fritz Baedeker in Germany and by John Murray III in England (in 1835 and 1836, respectively)."⁵² If a potential advertising slogan for

⁴⁹ Buzard, "The Grand Tour and after (1660-1840)", cit., pp. 43-44.

⁵⁰ J. Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to 'Culture', 1800-1918*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 19.

⁵¹ Youngs, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

⁵² Buzard, "The Grand Tour and after (1660-1840)", cit., p. 48.

nineteenth-century travel had existed, this could have been synthesised with three comparatives: better, faster, cheaper.⁵³

Nonetheless, like the majority of the socio-cultural changes, also this democratization of travel provoked contrasting opinions among the intelligentsia and the public opinion of that epoch. As Buzard points out, on the one hand, technological progress was welcomed as an extraordinary contribution to the modernisation of travel, which permitted people to move more easily and, therefore, expand one's own store of knowledge. On the other hand, this transformation of the way of journeying was considered as a real threat by those who defended the purity of the authentic travel experience, because all this would have led tourists to increase their mental indolence.⁵⁴ On the whole, the nineteenth century was characterised by a series of remarkable developments (for instance, the inventions of photography and telegraph date back to that period) and "[t]echnology radically altered the experience of space and time."⁵⁵ Additionally, transportation improvements, which allowed to travel even across the oceans, were "central to maintaining British global superiority because they made access to distant lands reliable and quick."⁵⁶ However, it was the rail system which changed considerably the lives of both Victorians travellers and workers, permitting these latter individuals to reach rapidly the industrialised cities from newborn suburban districts. As Marjorie Morgan observes, "[t]he democratization of travel made possible by the railway caused many to conclude that the Victorian age was, more than anything else, a 'travelling age'. [...] So many sightseers from

⁵³ 'Safer' should be the fourth comparative especially suitable for the Victorian woman who, for Thomas Cook's package tours industry, became a significant target among its clients, "since the tours were seen as 'protecting' the tourist against possible intrusions". Buzard, *The Beaten Track*, cit., p. 58.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁵⁵ M. Moran, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, London (etc.): Bloomsbury, 2013, p. 62.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

England in particular trekked around Europe that the English came to be characterized [...] as a nation of travellers.”⁵⁷ Victorians could journey on

trains in nearly all developed countries, and this dramatically reduced the time and cost of travel while increasing its comfort [...]. By the time Victoria ascended the throne, railroads, which had begun carrying passengers in Britain in 1830, were laying track in Canada, had expanded their services through more than a thousand miles of track in the United States, and within a few decades would be used by Continental travelers going from Zurich to Baden, from Paris to Rouen and Orléans, from Turin to Genoa, and through the Alps from Switzerland to Italy. By 1876 the first Chinese railroad had been completed, and travelers on railways in Britain had increased from 23 million in 1842 to 604 million in 1880.⁵⁸

However, as Buzard points out, not all Victorians welcomed progress unanimously: a minority of intellectuals, who possessed a prominent Romantic sensibility, considered transport revolution as damaging for individual souls.⁵⁹ They felt that aberrant speed and easy affordability (members of the upper classes could journey with members of the lower classes) had broken the perfect ideals of travel. Indeed, “[t]he nostalgia for a ‘simpler’ and ‘better’ past expressed at the opening of the century echoed again and again as improvements in transport expanded opportunities: *new types of people* [my emphasis] became able to travel, and new destinations for all travelers appeared.”⁶⁰

As I have stated before, the democratisation of travel was mostly triggered by improved means of transport and connections and the support offered by Cook’s package tours,⁶¹ which allowed *new types of people* to head towards several newly

⁵⁷ M. Morgan, *National Identities and Travel in Victorian Britain*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2001, pp. 13-14.

⁵⁸ Brothers and Gergits (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. xii.

⁵⁹ Not only William Wordsworth, but also Victorian sages such as John Ruskin and Thomas Carlyle saw these brand-new vehicles as a concrete menace for the connection between man and nature. The landscape, once wholly perceptible aboard horse-drawn carriages, now just passed hurriedly by travellers’ eyes and this fact would have caused the loss of human imaginative drives. However, “there was no necessity to associate means of transport with mental laziness [...] Even Ruskin acquiesced to riding (with his wife) by train [...] [and] by steamer [...]; but such concessions to facility received no comment. Instead, Ruskin and others habitually associated speed, and its concomitant lower cost, with superficiality.” Buzard, *The Beaten Track*, cit., pp. 35-36.

⁶⁰ Brothers and Gergits (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. xii.

⁶¹ On the fifth of July, 1841, Thomas Cook organised his very first package excursion which carried 570 people from Leicester to Loughborough by train. The price, one shilling per person, included

accessible destinations. These figures were identified as mass *tourists*, who were blamed essentially for their presumed passive way of travelling and visiting places, as they submitted all sort of personal initiatives to Thomas Cook's pre-organised tours and Murray and Baedeker guide books.

It was during the nineteenth century that the difference between the meaning of traveller and that of tourist became more and more accentuated. The overall feeling was that real cultural experiences could be fully lived only by those brave travellers who "[laid] claim to an aristocracy of inner feeling"⁶² and dared to discover areas *off the beaten track*. These areas were considered unreachable by mere tourists, who lacked a minimum of sensibility to appreciate adventures. Travellers were supposed not to be afraid of going far away from home and to be able to completely understand the foreign reality they dived into, as they looked for "authenticity through a difference from home. The genuine [was] sought in a flight from modernity; from machines, money and, often, from urbanisation, too."⁶³ The principle characteristics of Victorian era were the inclination and the capacity of the British belonging to different social classes to explore both their own nation and other parts of the world and the rich literary production resulting from these wanderings. Yet, those labelled as tourists, "frequently disdained by travel writers, were [...] criticized for being superficial (that is, for needing a [guide] book), for moving rapidly from place to place, for acquiring material possessions, for travelling in groups, and for failing to study and contemplate the places they

railway tickets and food for that one-day trip. For a brief overview of the history and records of Thomas Cook's travel agency see Buzard, *The Beaten Track*, cit., pp. 49-65.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁶³ Youngs, *op. cit.*, p. 60. According to Youngs, this quest for more authentic genuine realities was illusory and hypocrite, since it denied the very same technological progresses which allowed travellers to reach their favourite destinations. Youngs differs this travellers' xenophilic passion for things strange and exotic from the written accounts that narrated adventures in territories under the influences of the British Empire, which "encourages export of the lifestyle and values of the home society". *Ivi.*

visited.”⁶⁴ The mass tourists (also defined as *Cookites*) were deemed as vulgar, noisy and insensitive people and they were perceived as intruders by members of the middle and upper classes. As Youngs writes, “[a]long with this democratisation comes a fear of the loss of special privilege and exclusive experience. [...] It leads to intensified attempts to distinguish travellers from tourists, both in travel practices and travel narratives.”⁶⁵ Hence, the common denominator of all those adventurers who wanted to differentiate themselves from mass tourists was constituted by the desire “to find and to experience the unknown”.⁶⁶ Very often, travellers managed to convey the charm of their explorations through the pages of travel books, collecting also some important information, especially of scientific and ethnographic nature.⁶⁷ It was mainly thanks to the expansion of British Empire that

[i]n the nineteenth century those who wished to test their mettle and be known as travelers [could] seek farther afield than the Continent for their adventures. If hardship and danger posed no obstacles, unbeaten tracks to the East in search of antiquities, treks into the heart of Africa in search of the Nile [as Amelia Edwards did], and journeys to other parts of the world still “unimproved” or just undergoing “improvement” through colonization and the work of the missionaries were available. As travel literature reveals, some who ventured forth did so as much to distance themselves from tourists as to learn, braving primitive conditions, using antique modes of transportation, and experiencing danger in remote corners of the earth.⁶⁸

Yet, it was the commercialization of touring which determined the profiles of nineteenth-century travellers: they were British people, mostly from the middle and upper classes, who fulfilled different social and professional roles, who likewise journeyed for various reasons in company (with relatives or friends) or single-handedly around the globe. For instance, some travelled for health reasons,

⁶⁴ Brothers and Gergits (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. xii.

⁶⁵ Youngs, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-59.

⁶⁶ Brothers and Gergits (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. xiv.

⁶⁷ The Victorian period was characterized by “increased literacy rates and innovations in printing [which] led to more affordable editions. [...] What seems to modern eyes remarkable [...] is the combination of ethnographic, geographical and other scientific information with personal travel narrative, written with sufficient clarity for the understanding of a general audience.” Youngs, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

⁶⁸ Brothers and Gergits (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. xiii.

seeking cures and benefits in some pleasant place, some as missionaries or soldiers, some for education and acculturation, some just for pleasure, and so on. Such liberty of movement enjoyed by Victorian travellers and tourists was not experienced by any of their predecessors, since now it was “a broadly accessible form of leisure travel no longer based in the overt class and gender prerogatives of the Grand Tour.”⁶⁹

Surely, in those days, being a citizen under Queen Victoria’s British empire meant to have permission to discover striking places in nearly every part of the world. Victorian travellers visited, tried to comprehend and described foreign realities for their Western reading audience. They had the world at their disposal, even though the collateral effect of British imperialism was that of subjugating other cultures to an ineluctable westernization. As Moran explains, “[n]ews of the unusual sights, peoples, and customs across the Empire filled the columns of newspapers and magazines, stimulating curiosity about other cultures and encouraging the growth of human and social sciences like anthropology.”⁷⁰ The expansion of the empire might have favoured those who yearned to be recognised as true travellers searching for exotic places to be narrated. Bridges observes that “Britain’s ever closer engagement with the wider world meant that larger and larger numbers of travellers and explorers made journeys to report upon it.”⁷¹ Travel writers often felt anxious and “susceptible to that dilemma of *belatedness*”,⁷² as they needed to demonstrate that their adventure was not second-rate and their writings were original and different from the massive corpus of accounts of the tracks already beaten. Travellers who did not dare to reach undiscovered and

⁶⁹ Buzard, *The Beaten Track*, cit., p. 18.

⁷⁰ Moran, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

⁷¹ Bridges, “Exploration and travel outside Europe (1720-1914)”, cit., p. 55.

⁷² Buzard, *The Beaten Track*, cit., p. 158.

remote lands but decided to cross well-trodden European routes and recount their journey for a reading audience, perceived the annoying sensation of being simultaneously “one of a crowd and late on the scene”.⁷³ Therefore, their primary necessity was to differentiate themselves from the hordes of tourists, employing the expedient of “rebellion or rôle-distancing”,⁷⁴ which would have enabled them to achieve this goal.

In the nineteenth century, travel writing was as varied as were travellers’ reasons for journeying in Britain and abroad and the increasing number of avid readers fascinated by their adventures confirmed the popularity of the genre. Progressively, travel writing turned out to be a remunerative job, whose income allowed to earn one’s living and many “Victorian amateurs created careers and professional identities for themselves as they observed.”⁷⁵ Travel literature ranged from the more impersonal records which collected useful scientific data⁷⁶ to the more personal accounts, which focused on the “individual [...] distinctive reactions to the stimuli of the tour”;⁷⁷ from the updated and objective texts of guide books, to the stories of discovery and adventure in very distant lands narrated by intrepid explorers and navigators, who were identified as “modern heroes”;⁷⁸ from personal letters and diaries, but also “booster literature”,⁷⁹ which were written by settlers who emigrated en masse to the colonies, to the written testimonies of

⁷³ Buzard, “The Grand Tour and after (1660-1840)”, cit., p. 49.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁷⁵ Brothers and Gergits (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. xv.

⁷⁶ This is the period of the emergence of several scientific societies (the most known was the Royal Geographic Society) which promoted travels and explorations abroad. Inevitably, the discoveries listed in popular books gave the impression of cataloguing the world in the interest of the maintenance of British supremacy over the rest of the world. Bridges recognises in the “non-annexationist approach” of scientific expeditions a means to improve, in any way, “overseas expansion. [...] Scientist-travellers advanced into the non European-world even more enthusiastically and in greater numbers. However, something yet more fundamental was happening: science itself was becoming ‘imperialistic.’” Bridges, “Exploration and travel outside Europe (1720-1914)”, cit., pp. 60-61.

⁷⁷ Buzard, “The Grand Tour and after (1660-1840)”, cit., p. 49.

⁷⁸ Youngs, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

⁷⁹ *Ivi.*

missionaries committed to convert those who were considered as uncivilised populations.

Usually, all forms of travel writing were accompanied by engraved illustrations or, by the end of the Victorian period, photographs, which helped to convey to readers the traveller's perceptions of other places and cultures. Amelia Edwards too, who was also a skilful sketcher, embellished the two travelogues with her remarkable drawings. Besides these visual devices, Brothers and Gergits identify other common features which typified the books belonging to this nonfictional literary genre, and which are present, more or less distinctly, in Edwards's travel writing:

[a] reader can expect a narrative that details the writer's journey in following a straightforward, linear sequence – even if the actual journey did not at all resemble the final presentation. The narrative presents a blend of humorous, perhaps spicy, anecdotes; detailed description of peoples and places; “scientific”⁸⁰ observation and discoveries; philosophizing about the role of the British Empire in world affairs; advice to future travelers through that area; and comparisons between British culture and others that the writer encounters. [...] Readers can also expect a narrator who is curiously neutral, one who observes and lectures with a generic voice that allows readers brief glances at his or her personality but carefully keeps them distanced.⁸¹

In chapters three and four I will have the chance to highlight that the narrators' detachment does not have to be taken for granted, as, when they observe, they usually adopt, in Pratt's terms, *imperial eyes* and even apparently neutral commentaries reveal their viewpoint. Frequently, the writer's curious gaze towards *the other* was filtered by an imperial ideology. Indeed, “[t]ravel writing enables readers to glance at the author's inner workings, to apprehend the nature, concerns, and opinions of authors.”⁸² Readers need to remember where writers came from and, as far as travel could broaden the travellers' horizons, they were,

⁸⁰ I have added inverted commas to suggest the usual fashion of the period of collecting scientific data in an amateurish way. It is important to remember that even Charles Darwin started as a travel writer: his book *Narrative of the Surveying Voyages of His Majesty's Ships Adventure and Beagle* (1839) was the result of an educational travel lasted five years, the majority of which spent in South America.

⁸¹ Brothers and Gergits (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. xvii.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

after all, British citizens living under Queen Victoria's empire. Victorian travellers' mindset was influenced by the peculiar socio-political conditions of the epoch and to completely free their minds was probably almost impossible a task.

Another important characteristic of all types of travel literature is the didactic aspect. As Brothers and Gergits observe,

[u]nlike novels, travel books were considered educational and sensible by most Victorians, for these books were dedicated to teaching readers about the unknown and thus escaped the censure of frivolousness applied to novels which were most often regarded as written by and for women and were condemned for lacking the seriousness of history and other factual works.⁸³

As a matter of fact, "[t]ravel in this period was not only a source of enjoyment but also clearly balanced by a desire for education; [...] travel provided an opportunity, especially for women, to escape the rigidity of Victorian society and, very often, to write exemplary travel accounts."⁸⁴ Therefore, I have considered essential to dedicate a paragraph to the importance that travel and travel writing played in Victorian women's lives, in order to progressively move on to Amelia Edwards's travel books, the main topic of this dissertation.

1.4 Victorian Women's Travel Writing

In what follows I am going to outline how, in the nineteenth century, the liberty of movement impacted on women writers; I will analyse further relevant aspects of Victorian women's travel writing when, in the next chapters, I will have the chance to take into consideration the travel books of one of them, that is the versatile and prolific Amelia Edward.

In the nineteenth century, women's living conditions were not equal to their male counterpart, as they did not possess the same rights (for instance they could

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

⁸⁴ Blanton, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

not vote) and it was difficult for them to have access to higher education. Philippa Levine points out that Victorian society was thoughtfully structured and organised and the repressive state apparatus responded to a necessity of exerting and maintaining control over people's lives: "[t]he position of women, and the construction of masculinity and femininity, owed as much to religious values as to biological difference or to the changing requirements of the economy. [...] The ideology of the separated spheres [...] was highly effective in ordering people's values according to its precepts."⁸⁵ The theoretical notion of the *separate spheres*, coined by contemporary historians, consisted in a conventionally accepted Victorian "model of a binary opposition between the sexes",⁸⁶ which imposed a differentiation between men and women in terms of "economic and political rights"⁸⁷. The rigidity of the nineteenth-century society limited enormously the woman's existence and she was constantly subjected to criticisms and condemnations as soon as her conduct and reputation were considered unacceptable by the highly moralistic conventions of that epoch. As Moran explains, with the excuse of a supposed predominant emotive side of their nature, women were given a precise place in society:

[a]t the centre of the bourgeois view of women was the philosophy of the separate sphere. [...] women were best equipped for the private or domestic realm; and men were naturally suited to the active, aggressive and intellectual domains of public life, including commerce, government and the professions. In this gender ideology, biological difference, together with assumptions about the contrasting psychological make-up of women and men, fixed social expectations. Theories about women's bodies, innocence, emotional (rather than rational), temperamental and maternal, self-sacrificing instincts underpinned the concept of the Victorian female presence as spiritually inspiring. Indeed, the favourite metaphor for womanhood was the 'Angel in the House' [...]. [Women] were 'protectively' enclosed in the home and subordinated to senior male figures: father and brothers when single, husband once married.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ P. Levine, *Victorian Feminism: 1850-1900*, London (etc.): Hutchinson, 1987, pp. 11-13.

⁸⁶ M. Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*, London: Virago, 1989, p. 8.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 9.

⁸⁸ Moran, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-36.

The space reserved to women was that of the domestic enclosure, principally at the service of relatives who required their presence and assistance. A woman was supposed to possess those moral qualities, such as love, altruism and lack of ambitions, which, in adult life, would have naturally converted her in that *angel in the house* so much eulogised by Coventry Patmore.

Actually, the theory of the *separate spheres* was not as inflexible as it might appear. As Maria Frawley explains, “the ostensibly rigid separation of nineteenth-century social life into a [female] private sphere of home, family, and interpersonal relations and a [male] public sphere of works and politics”⁸⁹ has been recently questioned by scholars who has drawn attention to “the fluidity of public/private boundaries [...] basing their arguments on evidence of Victorian women’s participation in public activities.”⁹⁰ Especially when living conditions required increased incomes, working-class women were employed in factories or fields, whereas middle-class women, when they did not devote themselves to the refined arts such as theatre, music or painting, could aim to work as teachers, governesses, or dedicate themselves to the practice of writing and editing literary genres considered appropriate for them, especially novels. Many female professionals became famous as “accomplished writers, journalists, reviewers, and periodical editors [who] handled the *business* of literature, negotiating with contributors and dealing with backers.”⁹¹ In the Victorian period, women were linked in particular with fiction as both producers and consumers, while there was a general inclination to devaluate all nonfictional works written by female writers. Again, the explanation for this female confinement to a precise type of writing originated

⁸⁹ M. H. Frawley, *A Wider Range: Travel Writing by Women in Victorian England*, London (etc.): Associated University Presses, 1994, p. 25.

⁹⁰ *Ivi.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

from the common belief that women were not biologically equal to men and, consequently, they were thought to be suitable for reasoning in a precise manner.

According to Frawley,

[t]he association of women writers with the genre of the novel and, to a lesser extent, poetry, is in turn indicative of a larger cultural tendency to identify women with the potential for the creative rather than with the analytical. As repositories of creative potential, women were “naturally” suited to novel writing. [...] Nonfiction, seeming to demand more analytical skill on the part of its author, was, by implication, male territory. [...] The tendency to associate women with the creative rather than with the rational and analytical was part and parcel of the widespread assumption of male intellectual superiority, a belief corroborated by the observation that the brain of a man had greater physical weight than that of a woman.⁹²

Gradually, social changes (which were spurred by early feminist ideologies) occurred during the nineteenth century: women were allowed to participate more actively in public life and were introduced to the possibility of entering professions which usually were male-dominated. Among the “[f]ormidable women [who] exercised considerable public influence”⁹³ Moran indicates “Amelia Edwards (1831-92), [who] brought about [...] the professionalization of Egyptian archaeology”.⁹⁴

The century here considered was the historical period when several women belonging to the middle and upper classes started to travel alone to far-off places, distant from their homeland, the Great Britain. The freedom of journeying on one’s own (or paired with a female friend, as Amelia Edwards did) constituted an important achievement in the history of Western female emancipation, because for centuries women had the possibility to move abroad only when they went with their father or were accompanied by their husband or a male chaperone. However, social conventions of that period still regarded this activity as not wholly appropriate for women and, “even as late as the mid-nineteenth century, was

⁹² Frawley, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-33.

⁹³ Moran, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

⁹⁴ *Ivi.*

considered a dangerous and probably licentious endeavour for a woman to undertake.”⁹⁵ Yet, a significant number of nonconformist women had the courage to challenge Victorian rules and prescriptions, “to cross physical and ideological distances, [and] to expand institutional and psychological borders.”⁹⁶ As a matter of fact, touring abroad affected them personally, permitting to mature and find stimuli for the development of their own identity outside the strict confines of Britain; the very process of empowerment of women was boosted by their intentional departure from England’s institutions. They could also take advantage of their privileged position as English travellers, which most probably enhanced their self-confidence and self-assertiveness while journeying abroad. Furthermore, for those who wanted to publish “letters, essays, articles, and books about their experiences abroad,”⁹⁷ travel writing represented also the fundamental key to gaining recognition and authority, distinguishing themselves, expressing independence, as well as establishing credibility and trying to obtain respect from their male colleagues. After the publication of their writings, often women also had the possibility to lecture audiences about their findings. As we will see, also Amelia Edwards toured the United States giving speech on the treasures of ancient Egypt. Hence, Victorian women recognised in travel writing a concrete possibility to emerge as professionals and make ends meet, as well as “actively help to shape their society’s belief – about the wider world and, in some cases, about the position of women in that world.”⁹⁸

Generally, women, who were eager for liberty and discoveries, had fuelled the desire to move beyond England thanks to their previous readings portraying

⁹⁵ Blanton, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

⁹⁶ Frawley, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

distant lands. Apart from “travel guides [which] influenced ways of imagining countries and continents”⁹⁹, women used to “read travel books of their forebears and contemporaries”¹⁰⁰ which nourished their imagination. As Frawley points out, novels themselves presented experiences in foreign countries, where young women had the opportunity to learn from other cultures and enjoy a sense of freedom: “[i]n Victorian literature as a whole, travel frequently functions as a means to place a narrative of female energy and control somewhere outside England. [...] [B]y taking a woman outside the boundaries of England novelists opened up the scope of possibilities from which to construct narratives of identity.”¹⁰¹ Hence, the concept of travel was rooted in Victorian women’s mind as something more than a recreational activity, since it was strictly related to the definition of the self. Unconventional women considered travel as uplifting for their soul and the most effective method for broadening their store of knowledge. Indeed, not from education, but through experience they were able to achieve credit for themselves.

Women, in particular, “did not like to acknowledge that they traveled for pleasure rather than for education or acculturation, the primary reasons most often given for travel on the Continent.”¹⁰² Since female emancipation from social conventions was in any case a gradual process, Blanton observes that “Victorian women, perhaps still feeling that duty to ‘home,’ often required a scientific or artistic mission to frame their travels.”¹⁰³ Because of the disadvantaged position women occupied within Victorian society, in their travel writing the sense of

⁹⁹ Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁰ Brothers and Gergits (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. xviii.

¹⁰¹ Frawley, *op. cit.*, p. 18. Frawley cites as examples George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* (1871-72) and Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* (1853).

¹⁰² Brothers and Gergits (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. xv.

¹⁰³ Blanton, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

departing home for a legitimate reason used to be more accentuated than that present in the works composed by male authors. According to Shirley Foster, journeying

was not necessarily linked to bold radicalism, and it should not be regarded exclusively as a challenge to an ideology of female powerlessness. But such desire still smacked too much of self-pleasing and irresponsibility, and so certain strategies were employed to 'cover' it, regarding both the journeys and the published accounts. Chief of these is the insistence on 'proper' purpose, a way of validating the respectability and usefulness of the activity, especially where this could be related to current notions of womanhood.¹⁰⁴

Victorian women's decision to go abroad was judged uncommon and hazardous also by themselves: they were aware that leaving England meant facing the unknown, to the detriment of those familiar values which the domestic realm entails. In view of the fact that women "did not undertake travel lightly",¹⁰⁵ they felt the need to justify the supposed abandonment of their home duties, with the consequence that "their written accounts of journey abroad are often replete with explanation and justification for finding a life beyond the boundaries of England."¹⁰⁶ Overall, women travel writers made use of several *defensive devices*, since they knew well that they did not benefit from the same authority and privileges as their male colleagues. It was as if they preferred to take the first steps into the *unbeaten tracks* of travel writing slowly and humbly, without imposing themselves. The woman writer's starting position was that of the odd and eccentric lady traveller, the *spinster abroad*, the one who was often stereotyped through caricatures, so gaining respect and recognition from a gender-biased, patriarchal society required patience and modesty. Most of the time, the lady travel writer adopted a masculine voice even if she "ran the risk of being regarded as unwomanly and presumptuous. On the other hand, to speak consciously as a

¹⁰⁴ S. Foster, *Across New Worlds: Nineteenth Century Women Travellers and Their Writings*, New York (etc): Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990, p. 8.

¹⁰⁵ Frawley, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

¹⁰⁶ *Ivi.*

woman was possibly to devalue her own creation, undermining its authority and indicating its inferiority.”¹⁰⁷ Self-effacement was felt so much that, in order to warn readers about possible faults committed by women travel writers, they were also used to beginning their accounts with “apologetic prologues that prepare readers to expect workmanlike writing at best”,¹⁰⁸ and Amelia Edwards is no exception.

However, as soon as women became more confident of their influence on society and took the risk to adventure into unfamiliar literary paths, they were, at the same time, quite aware that their undertakings could have been worthy of appreciation, to the benefit of a personal professional achievement. The use of “[mostly male] outside sources of authority for corroboration of their own findings”¹⁰⁹ was still present in women’s book, but as the century progressed, women turned out to be more confident of their position within the male territory of travel writing and started to take on their own female discourse. Unlike male discourse, the feminine voice was characterised by the ability to deal with topics which men travel writers were not used to treating. For instance, women used to talk about the “appearance, costume and manners of women; details of domestic life [...]; behaviours towards children; marriage customs and female status; the importance of ‘space’ in the physical environment.”¹¹⁰ In particular, lady travel writers, in order to gradually make their voice heard among the plethora of travel books describing places already visited before them, availed themselves of the devices of “humour and irony, qualities that help construct their narrative personae and create a warm relationship between author-narrator and reader. [...] The more familiar the destination, the more the narrator relies on humour,

¹⁰⁷ Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

¹⁰⁸ Brothers and Gergits (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. xiii.

¹⁰⁹ Frawley, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

¹¹⁰ Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

personality and idiosyncrasy to distinguish [...] herself from previous travellers.”¹¹¹ A further aspect to consider is women’s possibility to exploit their gender to have access to particular and delicate areas of the foreign society, such as the setting of the harem. Additionally, as far as psychological introspection is concern, women were thought to be more sympathetic towards foreign cultures¹¹² and more apt to take advantage of their experience to define their own identity as women and affirm their authority as writers. In any case, “these are not constant elements in the women’s texts, but they are present to some extent in all of them, forming a sense of a generic and gendered discourse.”¹¹³ In chapters three and four we will notice how Amelia Edwards framed her own discourse as representative of the Victorian women travel writers.

As far as women’s significant literary legacy is concerned, the appraisal of female travel writing is quite a recent phenomenon: it dates back to the early 1970s, thanks to the feminist revival which started to reconsider the impact that Victorian lady travellers had on the history of English literature. The first effect of this revival has been constituted by the republishing of books which had been out of print for many years, mainly by virtue of the British feminist publishing company *Virago*. Secondly, several scholars began to demonstrate their interest in the topic of lady travellers, highlighting in their anthologies and studies the peculiar tension which is at the base of all Victorian women’s travel accounts: what the majority of critics find thought-provoking is female writers’ difficulty to attain a balance between the assertion of their feminine voice while dealing with what

¹¹¹ Youngs, *op. cit.*, pp. 152-53.

¹¹² This is only a suppositions, since “with the reading of women’s travel writing, the dominant reading tends to be an autobiographical one, which foregrounds those elements in the text which concern themselves with personal relations, self-revelation and other feminine characteristics.” S. Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women’s Travel Writing and Colonialism*, London and New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 51.

¹¹³ Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

was in origin a masculine type of writing. However, the attempt to discover and analyse female writers' incongruities and ambiguities is what renders at the same time this type of writing deeply intriguing and worthy of careful consideration.

Unfortunately, many scholars' works are inclined to generalise about nineteenth-century women's travel books, running the risk of neglecting individual authorial distinctiveness. Not all lady travellers shared the same exact background and their travelogues mirrored distinctive opinions and aspirations. For instance, Susan Bassnett points out that "[v]ariations derive from differences of social class, age, and religion, from shifts in time, from journeys to different parts of the world",¹¹⁴ but, at the same time, recognises that "clearly those women who travelled under the umbrella of the British Empire were, albeit unconsciously, colluding with the colonial enterprise"¹¹⁵ and "[o]ne consistent line through discussions of women travellers is the notion that they were somehow exceptional."¹¹⁶ Moreover, as I stated before, all women's travel book exhibit shared recurring literary features such as the attentions for details and interpersonal relations, but, while analysing a book, oversimplification should be avoided. That is the reason why I will investigate Amelia Edwards's travel books with a twofold approach, considering both their common gender characteristics and their individual peculiarities. Since the majority of scholars such as Bassnett, Youngs and Blanton¹¹⁷ mention Sara Mills's *Discourse of Difference* as a fundamental work for the study of the connection between women's travel literature and colonialism, I have also decided to avail myself of this bibliographic source which has helped me to move from the broad topic of travel writing to the

¹¹⁴ S. Bassnett, "Travel writing and gender" in P. Hulme and T. Youngs (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, cit., pp. 225-41, p. 228.

¹¹⁵ *Ivi.*

¹¹⁶ *Ivi.*

¹¹⁷ Bassnett, "Travel writing and gender", cit., p. 227. Youngs, *op. cit.*, p. 133. Blanton, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

more specific one, that is nineteenth-century women's travel writing. Additionally, as a second introductory material for the subject of Victorian women travellers, I have considered appropriate to read another valuable book whose title is rather allusive and captivating, that is Dea Birkett's *Spinsters Abroad*. Being the main topic of this dissertation quite specific, I will not often directly quote either from Mill's and Birkett's books, but rather, I will draw on more specific sources more closely pertaining to Amelia Edwards's travel works; nonetheless, these two volumes are very useful as preparatory sources for an accurate comprehension of the significance and a consecutive analysis of any Victorian women's travel text.

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter has been conceived to offer a preliminary overview of travel writing, since, from the very beginning of the drafting process, I have considered it essential for a better comprehension of the main subject of this dissertation, that is Amelia Edwards's travel accounts. I have suggested that Tim Youngs's *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing* can be an helpful initial source which exists among the copious bibliography regarding the topic of travel writing. As we have seen, a travel text essentially presents to a reading audience a foreign reality, which has been first experienced during the journey and then filtered during the writing process by a traveller/author. The main issue with travel writing is that nowadays it does not exist a general critical theory for approaching travel texts and scholars who are interested to decipher their complexities have been adopting "[a]spects of all the main literary theories – structuralism, poststructuralism, deconstruction, reception theory, psychoanalytic, Marxism, new historicism,

postcolonialism, ecocriticism and theories of gender and sexuality".¹¹⁸ For instance, I have mentioned David Porter's psychoanalytic approach as a possible suitable method for analysing some women travellers' texts and considering their journeys as opportunities for self-discovery and defining an identity. However, applying only one method seems to be limiting because travel writing is a permeable and variable genre and the reasons for travelling are as various as are the assumptions which critics can make about any travel account. What is certain is that travel writing is a very popular and engaging genre which triggers readers' curiosity about other places and cultures. Furthermore, as Youngs explains, "[o]f all literary genres, travel writing, which deals with encounter and observation, is best placed to transmit cultural values under the guise of straightforward report or individual impression."¹¹⁹ That is to say, travel texts are neither objective nor neutral, but loaded with traveller's assumptions about the *other* and even the most impersonal account "inevitably reveal[s] the culture-specific and individual patterns of perception and knowledge which every traveller brings to the travelled world."¹²⁰

This chapter has also delineated the principle characteristics of travel and travel writing in the nineteenth century. I have explained that, before the Victorian era, very few people could travel and journeying was not at all comfortable and safe. Victorians had the opportunity to experience the pleasure of travelling at leisure and discovering the unknown thanks to improved means of transport and greater affordability. This democratisation of travel gave rise to the birth of mass tourism, but this novelty was not well-accepted by everyone. The figure of the

¹¹⁸ Youngs, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

¹¹⁹ *Ivi.*

¹²⁰ B. Korte, *English Travel Writing from Pilgrimages to Postcolonial Explorations*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000, p. 6.

traveller was counterposed to that of the tourist, who was accused of travelling passively and letting himself/herself be guided step by step by Cook's package tours and Murray and Baedeker handbooks. The nineteenth century was the golden period of travel literature, and many writers jumped at the chance to put into words their wanderings in the most original way possible. As a result of the attractiveness of the genre, that of the travel writer turned out to be a remunerative job, which also gave women the possibility to embark on this profession.

Finally, I have showed how the transforming power of travel affected many upper- and middle-class nineteenth-century women, who challenged the constraints of Victorian gender ideology and, thanks to "the gradual loosening of restrictions of their movements",¹²¹ they could finally "broaden their activities."¹²² Victorian women were the first who could journey without being chaperoned by a family member and they could achieve empowerment and a sense of self through travel. Furthermore, they seized upon the popularity of travel writing in order to obtain further respect and esteem and numerous accounts which narrated their adventures were published. Yet, the process of acquiring cultural authority was not immediate and "they found it hard to gain recognition, so as travellers they often encountered if not outright hostility at least patronizing ridicule."¹²³ Hence, a particular tension, which stirred the interest of several scholars from 1970s, is noticeable in Victorian women's travel writing, as they employed several devices to find their own voice while still making use of masculine literary stratagems

¹²¹ Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹²² *Ivi.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 6. For a further exploration of the issue of women writers' public recognition see the chapter "Infection in the Sentence: The Woman Writer and the Anxiety of Authorship" in S. M. Gilbert and S. Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1984.

which reveal the typical aggressive posture of the colonizing Western culture towards the rest of the world.

Amelia B. Edwards:

A Multifaceted Victorian Woman Travel Writer



1. Amelia B. Edwards

2.1 Introduction

Amelia Edwards had a crucial role as a writer and intellectual in the nineteenth century. Her contribution to the Victorian literary panorama is of such an extent that a chapter is necessary to present her versatile life and career, since her existence was characterised by a desire to fulfil multiple artistic interests. If, on the one hand, it is true that the nineteenth century had witnessed the rise of many remarkable literary figures, on the other hand, while researching on Edwards's life, I have been particularly surprised to notice that her prolific career and influence have been neglected for a long time. Indeed, Joan Rees observes that "[s]he was well-known in her day, particularly as a novelist, but until the recent publication of a paperback edition of her book *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*, she was generally

forgotten after her death in 1892.”¹ While nowadays “websites on Edwards’s life abound”² and several authoritative essays concerning Edwards’s writings circulate, just two scholars have been as enthusiastic about her achievements as to produce hitherto two official book-length biographies based on a good amount of original autobiographical material (mostly diaries and letters),³ which helped me to become acquainted with this inexhaustible authoress. Despite the commitment demonstrated by Joan Rees and Brenda Moon in publishing *Amelia Edwards: Traveller, Novelist and Egyptologist* (1998) and *More Usefully Employed: Amelia B. Edwards, Writer, Traveller and Campaigner for Ancient Egypt* (2006) respectively, some incongruities regarding Amelia Edwards’s biographical information still persist among the material which should be considered reliable and authoritative. For instance, while on the one hand both Rees and Moon utilise Amelia Ann *Blandford* Edwards to indicate the complete name of our writer and Rees mentions *Emma* Braysher as her late-life companion, on the other hand Anna Rosa Scrittori names her as *Amelia Blandford* Edwards and Moon makes reference to a certain *Ellen* Drew Braysher as her housemate;⁴ what is more, the online sources do not

¹ J. Rees, *Writings on the Nile: Harriet Martineau, Florence Nightingale, Amelia Edwards*, London: The Rubicon Press, 1995, p. 69. Rees refers to the 1984 edition of the book, reissued by Century Publishing, London, Sydney, Auckland, Johannesburg.

² R. Y. Jenkins, Rev. of *More Usefully Employed: Amelia B. Edwards, Writer, Traveler and Campaigner for Ancient Egypt*, *Victorian Studies* 49:2, (Winter, 2007), pp. 365-67, p. 365. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4626311>.

³ In addition to Amelia’s personal notes (which now are available mainly in the archives of the Somerville College and the Griffith Institute in Oxford and the Egypt Exploration Society in London) hints on her personality are gained from the testimony of her cousin, Matilda Betham-Edwards, who was five years younger than Amelia and became a reputable writer, too. The two talented cousins seemed to be very close and travelled together, but their relationship was not as idyllic as it might have appeared. As Brenda Moon points out, “[u]nderstandably, she [Amelia] was irked by the popular confusion in the public mind between herself and her cousin and repeatedly tried to dispel it.” B. Moon, *More Usefully Employed: Amelia B. Edwards, Writer, Traveller and Campaigner for Ancient Egypt*, London: Egypt Exploration Society, 2006, p. 28. Moon did not include an appendix cataloguing critical works on Edwards, but for a full bibliography see the notes she has added at the end of each chapter of her book.

⁴ Cf. J. Rees, *Amelia Edwards: Traveller, Novelist and Egyptologist*, London: The Rubicon Press, 1998, pp. 4 and 19. A. R. Scrittori, “Nothing could have been pleasanter than staying – except going: Amelia Edwards racconta I suoi viaggi” in E. Sdegno (ed.), *Per Franco Marucci. Saggi di teoria e di Storiografia Letteraria*, Venice: Cafoscarina, 2013, pp. 77-89, p. 77. Moon, *op. cit.*, pp. 5 and 50.

help to sort the issue out. As far I am concerned, in order to shun this sort of confusion, I will refer to our authoress as Amelia B. Edwards or simply Amelia Edwards, and speak of Mrs Braysher as her old friend.

This chapter is divided into two sections regarding Amelia Edwards's life. The first one deals with Amelia Edwards's stage of life in which she established her public position mainly as a journalist, novelist and travel writer. Whereas the second part highlights how a journey she took to Egypt impacted so much on her late existence that, from then on (precisely from 1882, year of foundation of the Egypt Exploration Society), she decided to commit herself to Egyptology, becoming a well-respected professional. Indeed, she "did not return from her journey as the other did, to resume the life she had led before. Instead she abandoned other activities to devote herself exclusively to working for the proper excavation and recording of the Egyptian monuments."⁵

2.2 Seeking a Public Role: Amelia Edwards's Early Writing Career

Amelia B. Edwards was born in a middle-class family in London on June 7th, 1831. Her father Thomas was a half-pay officer who served under Wellington in the Peninsular War and, after the forced retirement from the army due to ill health, worked as an employee at the London and Westminster Bank in order to make ends meet.⁶ His reserved and detached temperament seemed to be very different from that of Amelia's mother Alice, a "clever and vivacious woman",⁷ who dedicated herself exclusively to the upbringing of her only child. Alice had great expectations for Amelia and did all she could do to let her daughter cultivate her

⁵ Rees, *Writings on the Nile*, cit., p. 69.

⁶ Rees, *Amelia Edwards*, cit., p. 4.

⁷ Rees, *Writings on the Nile*, cit., p. 71.

passions, including not bothering her with the housekeeping. Reading was one of Amelia's first hobbies: "[t]ravel books particularly delighted her and [...], as a very small child, she 'devoured' Sir John Gardner Wilkinson's *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians* and [John Lloyd] Stephens's *Central America*."⁸ In addition, it was thanks to her mother that Amelia made the first of a long series of journeys – both continental and transoceanic – and discovered the excitement of travelling when they took a trip to Ireland in 1841. Edwards could visit many places throughout her life as she travelled as often as she could (France, Switzerland, Belgium and Italy were some of her favourite destinations). Since an early age, she also demonstrated enthusiasm for other artistic activities, including art and music. Indeed, Amelia turned out to be a real *enfant prodige*, as she gave vent to her talents very precociously.

Her first compositions date back to her childhood, as she wrote her first story at the age of four and published a poem titled *The Knights of Old* in a penny paper at the age of seven. Apart from inventing short stories, during her teenage years she took delight also in composing a series of strip-cartoons which revealed her witty imagination and her abilities in drawing and storytelling, two natural gifts which would stand out in her later travel writing. Her sketching skill was so striking as to catching the attention of the artist and editor of a journal George Cruikshank, who "offered to take her as his pupil and train her in his own profession but her parents, prejudiced against the artist life, demurred and the opportunity slipped by."⁹ This episode did not dishearten Amelia's brilliant character and from the age of fourteen to the age of twenty-one she devoted herself, heart and soul, to the study of music (she took piano lessons), practicing

⁸ Rees, *Amelia Edwards*, cit., p. 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

and performing as an opera singer. However, her musical career was hindered by the first of a sequence of physical problems which manifested at irregular intervals throughout the rest of her life; eventually, as she was not so interested in music, she decided to give up this activity “[a]fter failing to gain an organist’s post in 1852 in any of the three churches to which she applied”¹⁰ and “pinned her hopes on a writing career by which she could support herself financially.”¹¹ Indeed, if on the one hand Amelia’s personality was characterised by an ardent, curious, and irrepressible spirit, a constant search for creative stimuli and an urge to carry out her passions, on the other hand she was predisposed to passing moments of weakness, both psychic and physical. Scrittori points out that “[l]a sua esperienza di vita [...] si svolge tra fasi alterne di mobilità e stasi (*going/staying* appunto) perché l’impulso ad agire in pubblico è spesso frenato da malattie e crisi depressive.”¹² Her peculiar emotional nature seemed to be also the cause which have prevented her from getting engaged and then married, since she had abhorred so much the wooing of a first suitor of hers to the extent of feeling constantly sick at the sight of him and, later, renouncing the courtship of one of her cousins.¹³ Actually, Amelia’s sexual orientation is still a debatable question, which goes beyond any gossipy supposition, but, instead, would cast more light on the personal life of the author, and so enabling critics to better understand her career choices. The necessity of earning more income has always been felt by Amelia, both when she lived with her parents and after 1860, the year in which both her father and her mother died within a week and she found herself alone. Nonetheless, throughout her existence, she was able to build a network of distinguished

¹⁰ Moon, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

¹¹ *Ivi.*

¹² Scrittori, “Nothing could have been pleasanter than staying – except going”, *cit.*, p. 77.

¹³ Moon, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

personal relationships¹⁴ and, apparently, her “emotional life was centered around and dependent upon women.”¹⁵ When Amelia’s parents passed away, she decided to move from the lively London to the quieter Westbury-on-Trym and share a house – The Larches – with the educated Mrs Braysher,¹⁶ an acquaintance probably met in London, who was thirty years older than herself and lost both her husband and daughter. The choice of cohabiting might have corresponded to the exigency of keeping each other company, as Mrs Braysher’s presence might have compensated for the loss of Amelia’s adored mother and Amelia’s figure probably reminded that of Mrs Braysher’s daughter. The course of Edwards’s public life, therefore, was probably much influenced by that of her personal one and, “[a]s an unmarried woman without independent means or immediate family, the middle-class Edwards had to rely on her personal abilities and enterprise to earn a living.”¹⁷

Her writing career was characterised by an extraordinary variety of productions and, thanks to her gifted nature, she succeeded in composing different literary texts and gaining respectability as “a distinguished intellectual and public figure of the Victorian period”,¹⁸ before embracing Egyptology during the last decade of her life. Basically, her professional profile encompassed multiple disciplines: she worked as literary critic, translator (from French and Italian), poet, short story writer (renowned are her ghost stories), essayist, journalist (for the *Saturday Review* and the *Morning Post*), historian (she published school books on

¹⁴ Marianne North was one of her intimate friends. In addition, Amelia was also in epistolary contact with Christina Rossetti, William Morris and Matthew Arnold for an anthology she wrote on contemporary English poets. Moon, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

¹⁵ Jenkins, *Rev. of More Usefully Employed*, cit., p. 366.

¹⁶ Moon describes Mrs Braysher as an “accomplished woman”, who probably used to frequent the same circle of erudite friends of Edwards. She even used to exchange correspondence with Giuseppe Mazzini, as she probably was a supporter of his cause. Moon, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

¹⁷ P. O’Neill, “Destination as Destiny: Amelia B. Edwards’s Travel Writing”, *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 30:2, 2009, pp. 43-71, p. 43.

¹⁸ *Ivi*.

the histories of France and England), novelist and travel writer. She also wrote three small books of etiquette, was a constant contributor to anthologies, annuals and a variety of popular magazines, including *The Literary World* and *Household Words*, and was also a collector of famous autographs. It is curious to note that, “[w]hile autograph hunting and bartering was a popular pastime among ladies in the Victorian age”¹⁹ and “in Amelia’s case it is perhaps also indicative of her reverence of fame”,²⁰ “she seems to have deliberately avoided all opportunities to push herself forward as a celebrity.”²¹ As far as suppositions are concerned, “[i]f she felt a natural distaste for self-exposure, her reserve would have been fortified by the fact that she wrote for her living and, later, in order to gather support for the [Egypt Exploration] Found.”²² Indeed, Amelia Edwards might have resented of the emotive side of her character, which was particularly enhanced by the reclusive lifestyle she led while staying in Westbury. However, since the more profound layers of her individuality remain hidden, there are no sufficient clues which allow us to completely understand her nature. Rees explains that “hers was not only a much-gifted and engaging personality but one with hidden depths.”²³ What is sure is that any *proper purpose* was good in order to leave The Larches and go on a trip as soon as she could, if both she and Mrs Braysher were in good health.

The eight novels she published during her lifetime – *My Brother’s Wife* (1855), *The Ladder of Life* (1856), *Hand and Glove* (1859), *Barbara’s History* (1864), *Half a Million of Money* (1865), *Debenham’s Vow* (1870), *In the Days of my Youth* (1872) and *Lord Brackenbury* (1880) – most of the times received

¹⁹ Moon, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

²⁰ *Ivi.*

²¹ J. Tait, “Introduction” to Brenda Moon’s *More Usefully Employed: Amelia B. Edwards, Writer, Traveller and Campaigner for Ancient Egypt*, London: Egypt Exploration Society, 2006.

²² Rees, *Writings on the Nile*, *cit.*, p. 80.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

positive reviews and were quite popular.²⁴ Moon observes that “Amelia Edwards’s place in the nineteenth-century fiction lies closest to that of the ‘sensation novelist’”²⁵, since “[s]ensation is present in all her novels”²⁶ and her narrative is not properly *feminine*, but tends to focus more on situations rather than personalities, reveals a witty imagination and shows a recurring passion for travelling.²⁷ Also Phyllis Grosskurth states that

[w]hat is particularly interesting about these novels is their expression of Amelia Edwards’s craving for adventure, and to an even greater degree, her curiosity about far-off places. Her only knowledge of the locales which are described with such graphic detail was gleaned from travel books, and the writing of these tales provided her with a temporary substitute for her romantic day-dreams.²⁸

On the other hand, Rees explains that “[o]n the whole Amelia Edwards’s novels have been fairly discarded. She shows at all times a gift for scenery and portrays a scene with a keen eye for detail and a relish of dramatic possibility but characterization and plot are hardly gripping or convincing.”²⁹

Despite Amelia Edwards’s fiction is carefully crafted and presents unconventional, unfeminine topics, it is however not entirely impressive and satisfactory.³⁰ On the contrary, what was worth considering was her passion for travelling that permitted her to compose two of the most successful and exciting travel books of the nineteenth century and be identified as one of most outstanding women explorers. Indeed, Edwards “found a new genre which gave her readers a longer-lasting satisfaction”³¹ and, at the same time, she took advantage of the

²⁴ Moon, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

²⁶ *Ivi*.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²⁸ P. Grosskurth, “Amelia Edwards: A Redoubtable Victorian Female”, *Review of English Literature* 6:1, (1965), pp. 80-92, p. 81.

²⁹ Rees, *Writings on the Nile*, cit., p. 75.

³⁰ Rees states that “[h]er own fiction is certainly not ‘ladylike’ in the traditional sense, for novels and short stories alike range in location and sensation far beyond the ‘littleness’ of the domestic sphere. Plot and characterization tend to be weak but the variety of settings and activities covered (engine-driving and lion-taming among them) is remarkable.” *Ibid.*, p. 70.

³¹ Moon, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

popularity that travel literature had in the Victorian period to strengthen her cultural authority. According to Philippa Levine, “Amelia’s best-known works are not the eight novels she penned between 1855 and 1880 nor the histories and archaeological works of her other and considerable career as Egyptologist, but her witty and enthusiastic accounts of her travelling adventures.”³² Amelia Edwards practically and literally combined business with pleasure, establishing her public role in the nineteenth-century literary market. Edwards’s travel accounts are actually the written re-enactment of some of the wanderings she embarked on during her lifetime. Amelia’s first attempt to write a first travel account dates back to 1855, but actually the narrative of *Sights and Stories: Being Some Account of a Holiday Tour Through the North of Belgium* belongs more to the genre of children’s literature;³³ it was published in 1862 and “this was a tyro work [...]. It is addressed to children and concerns a group of boys travelling with their master. There is a minimum of incident and the purpose is overtly pedagogic [...]. Amelia was toying at the time with the possibilities of writing for the juvenile market”.³⁴ Edwards’s initial endeavour to handle travel writing was not so successful because this has to be considered as a work pertaining to Amelia’s experimental stage, that is “to the period when she was still trying to establish a financially viable career as a writer”.³⁵

Amelia Edwards’s two mature and sophisticated travelogues, which are the principle subjects of this dissertation, are *Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys* (1873) and *A Thousand Miles Up the Nile* (1877). These travel books are the

³² P. Levine, “Introduction” to Amelia B. Edwards’s *Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys: A Midsummer Ramble in the Dolomites* (1873), Boston: Beacon Press, 1987, p. xvi.

³³ Moon, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

³⁴ Rees, *Amelia Edwards*, cit., p. 25.

³⁵ J. Rees, “Edwards, Amelia”, in J. Speake (ed.), *Literature of Travel and Exploration: An Encyclopedia*. Vol. 1, Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2013, pp. 378-79, p. 378.

results of two major journeys she undertook together with her friend Lucy Renshaw to two exciting and picturesque sites with very different geographies and histories, namely the Dolomites and Egypt. The two accounts turned out to be very entertaining and instructive about two particular regions which stirred curiosity and demanded a certain amount of courage and stamina on the part of travellers at that time. Amelia Edwards's significant travel accounts will be properly investigated in the following two chapters. Here I just want to highlight the fact that, compared to her travel to the Dolomites, her experience in Egypt revolutionised her public role, since

it was this trip which was to be the germ of her scholarly career; her discovery of the wealth of archaeological treasures which awaited the excavator in Egypt gave fresh interest to her already busy life. When she turned to England in 1874 after that journey, she largely abandoned literature for the study of Egyptology.³⁶

2.3 Consolidating Cultural Authority: Amelia Edwards's Later Career as Egyptologist

Amelia Edwards returned to England on the 29th of June 1874 completely transformed after ten months of the adventures she experienced in Egypt;³⁷ it took her two years to complete *A Thousand Miles*, since she studied and sought advice from the most prominent authorities in order to enhance her entertaining narrative with accurate scientific data regarding Egyptian history and archaeology. Amelia's proverbial perfectionism induced her to revise the 1877 edition *A Thousand Mile* and in 1899 she published a second updated edition of her travelogue, fortified by more specific scientific footnotes. As we have seen in the previous chapter, nineteenth-century travel writing was characterised by a

³⁶ Levine, *op. cit.*, p. xvii.

³⁷ Moon, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

mixture of personal impressions and scientific information, and the most skilful writers managed to balance private thoughts and technical records in order to grasp and maintain readers' attention. As Rees observes, "[Amelia Edwards] offers a well-judged blend of informality, entertainment and information and her capacity to assess the proportions in which scholarship and lighter matter could successfully be mingled was one of her valuable gifts."³⁸ The appearance of new sciences, including Egyptology, was the result of a broader popular increasing thirst for knowledge and Amelia Edwards took advantage of this situation to involve readers in her highly crafted narrative. Subsequently, after the successful publication of *A Thousand Miles Up the Nile*, she was still so fascinated by the exotic memories of Egypt that she courageously dared to raise the bar and thought to "bring the question of Egyptian antiquities into the popular domain".³⁹ The history of ancient Egypt offered an amateur like her the chance to passionately and substantially contribute to the study and protection of its millennial civilization.

In practical terms, Amelia Edwards "was one of the driving forces behind the establishment in 1882 of the Egypt Exploration Fund"⁴⁰ (named Egypt Exploration Society in 1919), whose purpose still consists in the gathering of funds in order to carry on with diligent excavations in the Egyptian archaeological locations, prevent any sort of pillage of those sites, investigate and publish the results of these excavations for its members. As a matter of fact,

Amelia had been deeply moved by the monuments of Ancient Egypt and correspondingly distressed by the irresponsible neglect and despoliation which were adding daily to damage and loss. [...] [E]xcavations needed to be conducted responsibly and expertly, arrangements for the disposal of the finds, acceptable to the Egyptian government and fair to the excavators, had to be agreed and the enforcement of laws forbidding exports without permission of the authorities had to be tightened up. Since money and kudos were involved none of this came easily.⁴¹

³⁸ Rees, *Writings on the Nile*, cit., p. 80.

³⁹ Moon, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

⁴⁰ Levine, *op. cit.*, p. xvii.

⁴¹ Rees, *Amelia Edwards*, cit., p. 54.

From the very beginning, Amelia Edwards worked hard and strove to obtain the subscription, collaboration and respect from the (mainly male) experts and enthusiasts of Egyptology. Not everyone was as excited as she was; for instance, she had to tackle the resistance of Samuel Birch, Head of the Department of Oriental Antiquities of the British Museum, who “was not convinced that Egyptian art could stand alongside classical in importance and at the same time he was reluctant to support a scheme which gave the Egyptian government first call on the excavators’ findings.”⁴² However, generally she quickly succeeded in attaining the support of many new devotees of the Fund and Amelia became “one of its two joint honorary secretaries alongside the renowned archaeologist Reginald Poole”,⁴³ Keeper of Coins and Medals at the British Museum. She was not scared of sharing the experience of the Fund with mostly male colleagues, but excited at the idea of collaborating with eminent scholars and on her part she committed not only to the study of hieroglyphs but broadened her already rich knowledge of ancient Egypt; moreover, for the Fund she wrote several articles and essays, kept the accounts, as well as collected and accounted for subscriptions.⁴⁴ Her contagious fervour even met that of several American backers and during the winter of 1889-90 she toured the United States to give lectures on Egyptology. As Rees points out, “[s]he gave in all some hundred and twenty lectures to universities, colleges and learned societies in centres including Boston, Philadelphia, New York, Baltimore and New Heaven.”⁴⁵ This tour was an immediate success and Amelia was surrounded by fans who had remained fascinated by her expertise and extraordinarily entertaining performances. Barbara Lesko states that “Edwards made a very

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁴³ Levine, *op. cit.*, p. xvii.

⁴⁴ Moon, *op. cit.*, pp. 183-84.

⁴⁵ Rees, *Amelia Edwards*, cit., p. 63.

favourable impression for her speaking ability, her humor, her gracious unassuming personality as well as for her obvious learning.”⁴⁶ It was the first long journey she took after that to Egypt and, according to Moon, although “[t]his was a demanding schedule”⁴⁷ Amelia Edwards was pleased to escape for a period of time the isolation of The Larches and “stay with friends with whom she could feel very much at home.”⁴⁸ After this transatlantic experience, she went on lecturing also on the English soil and in 1891 a collection of her American speeches was published with the title *Pharaohs, Fellahs and Explorers*.

Unfortunately, when Amelia Edwards was still giving talks through the United States, her particularly precarious state of health started to be seriously affected by the stress she went through in the last years ⁴⁹ and, on the 15th of April 1892, she died at the age of sixty “as a result of influenza contracted while supervising the unloading and despatch of antiquities at Millwall Docks.”⁵⁰ The substance of her legacy contributed significantly both to the improvement of the study of Egyptology and the Victorian women’s emancipation. In fact, Amelia Edwards’s will to establish the very first Chair of Egyptology at the University College of London, bequeath her books and collections of antiquities to that College and donate her memoirs to the female College of Somerville in Oxford, may reveal her “support for women education and women’s rights in general”,⁵¹ since also the University College “was the only University Establishment at that time to admit

⁴⁶ B. S. Lesko, “Amelia Blanford Edwards, 1831-1892”, n.d., n. pag. Retrieved from http://www.brown.edu/Research/Breaking_Ground/bios/Edwards_Amelia%20Blanford.pdf

⁴⁷ Moon, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

⁴⁸ *Ivi.*

⁴⁹ According to Rees (*Amelia Edwards*, cit., p. 67), Amelia went through a series of “bouts of illness in her life, including the mysterious ‘pressure on the brain’ of 1871 and the illness of 1887 which lasted months and caused severe headaches”, as well as she gravely fractured her left arm during the USA tour and underwent a breast cancer operation in 1890.

⁵⁰ Rees, *Writings on the Nile*, cit., p. 74.

⁵¹ Rees, *Amelia Edwards*, cit., p. 69.

men and women on equal terms.”⁵² However, as Amelia’s deeper levels of her persona are not comprehensible, she tended to elude controversial issues and did not openly lay claim to her feminist ideas. Moon show that, although Edwards was elected as Vice-President of the Society for Promoting Women’s Suffrage, “she did not have time to give it much more than her name”⁵³ and “her attitude towards the [women’s] cause is somewhat ambivalent”.⁵⁴ Moreover, Also Rees highlights that “she was not one of the movement conspicuous heroines”,⁵⁵ but her heritage “signalled clearly but not obtrusively her views and sympathies.”⁵⁶ Rees’s use of the adverb *obtrusively* is indicative of the general attitude adopted by nineteenth-century women travel writers, which I have previously illustrated in 1.4. As we have seen, Victorian female intellectuals like Edwards tended to prefer a self-effacing way to express their opinions, in order not to jeopardize their hard-earned social position, since they lived in a still patriarchal culture which frowned upon any too overt a stance taken by women. Therefore, it is fundamental to consider the socio-historical conditions in which Amelia Edwards lived, in order to avoid to explain why she did not write “forcefully for women’s rights”.⁵⁷ I think that Lesko’s conclusion of her essay gets to the core of the matter:

[t]o succeed enough to be self-supporting Amelia Edwards had to suppress her liberal views and hide from public glare her own personal habits and history. She was so successful in creating a public persona for herself that she is today an enigma whose biographers despair at knowing the “real” Amelia. [...] She was, as an independent and middle class woman, in many ways a victim of a very patriarchal and class-conscious society in the 19th and early 20th century Britain.⁵⁸

⁵² *Ivi.*

⁵³ Moon., *op. cit.*, p. 216.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁵⁵ Rees, *Writings on the Nile*, cit., p. 79.

⁵⁶ *Ivi.*

⁵⁷ B. Lesko, *op. cit.*, n. pag.

⁵⁸ *Ivi.*

2.4 Conclusion

Amelia B. Edwards was one of the most talented and prolific women authors of the nineteenth century. She can be considered as one of those *women of letters*, that is those women who “were professional in a modern sense: they show an interest in making money, dealing with publishers in a business-like way, actively pursuing a literary career, and achieving both profit and popularity in the literary marketplace.”⁵⁹ Amelia started writing when she was still a child and during her whole lifetime she had been very hard-working, enthusiastic (“[t]here was hardly a field she was not willing to tackle”)⁶⁰ and versatile in her productions. As an unmarried woman, she had to earn her own living and she took advantage of her artistic abilities to write a great of works. However, it was thanks to her fondness for travelling that she “would produce two of the most successful travel books of all time”⁶¹ titled *Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys* (1873) and *A Thousand Miles Up the Nile* (1877), which are two lively testimonies of her wanderings through the Dolomites and Egypt respectively.

Despite being a remarkable Victorian writer, only recently have scholars started paying due attention to Edwards’s audacious spirit and literary achievements. According to these critics like Joan Rees and Brenda Moon, an aura of mystery still surrounds her engaging and fascinating personality. Indeed, if on the one hand she was one of those few unconventional nineteenth-century women “who, supported only by her wits, managed to transcend the confines by which most Victorian spinsters were circumscribed”,⁶² on the other hand her personal traits remain for the most part veiled. A sense of indifference towards fame and a

⁵⁹ L. Peterson, *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009, p. 1.

⁶⁰ Grosskurth, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

⁶¹ B. Lesko, *op. cit.*, n. pag.

⁶² Grosskurth, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

constant need of new stimuli for consolidating her public role seem to pervade especially the phase of her life when she moved from the vivacious London to the secluded Westbury-on-Trim and, instead of benefitting from her hard-earned public role as estimated novelist and travel writers, in the last decade of her life she decided to sacrifice herself for the study of Ancient Egypt and undertake a new scholarly career as Egyptologist. As Jaromir Malek comments,

“[h]er selfless dedication to the Egypt Exploration Fund and the cause of Egyptian archaeology is all the more remarkable. Nevertheless, [...] I do not fully understand Amelia’s motivation. The idea that in the Egypt Exploration Fund she found, at last, an area where she was able to use her formidable talents to the full is attractive, but cannot explain such a complex character entirely.⁶³

Yet, beyond every curious attempt to peek into Amelia’s character, the fact remains that her cultural authority appears to have been fully recognised, and both the obelisk and the Egyptian symbol of life of the ankh which mark her grave at Henbury⁶⁴ seem to prove it.

⁶³ J. Malek, Rev. of *Amelia Edwards. Traveller, Novelist & Egyptologist*, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 85 (1999), pp. 261-62, p. 261. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3822452>.

⁶⁴ Rees, *Writings on the Nile*, cit., p. 74.

Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys:

The Mountain at the Service of Amelia Edwards

3.1 Introduction

Amelia B. Edwards's very first successful travel book was "published in 1873 under the title *A Midsummer Ramble in the Dolomites* and later as *Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys*."¹ Travel and travel writing consented Amelia to enhance and further corroborate her public role within the Victorian society. She had been one of those spinsters abroad labelled as eccentric by the public opinion of the epoch and the ardent desire for travelling has always been part of her character. The Dolomite travelogue takes place during the midsummer of 1872 and the mountains are the main subject of the story together with Amelia, who turned out to be completely mesmerized by their majesty. The volume appears to be very carefully composed, providing a good balance of scientific and cultural information with personal and lyrical depictions of the scenery. The journey through the alpine area was the result of a long solitary trip she began in mid-September 1871 and which took her to different parts of the European continent. Notebook at hand,² Edwards first journeyed to Germany, then she moved to Italy, deciding to spend

¹ Rees, *Amelia Edwards*, cit., p. 25.

² *Reminiscences & Notes of a Tour in Germany, Bavaria, Tyrol and Italy* is the title Amelia Edwards used to collect the personal notes of her voyage. Moon, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

the winter of 1871 in Rome (Moon observes that this stay was interspersed with depressive moments of “numbness and melancholy”).³ Afterwards, she caught up with some friends in Salerno in spring 1872 and “[i]t seems probable that it was at this time, when staying in Salerno, that Amelia first met Lucy, for she is ‘Miss Renshaw’ and not ‘Lucy’ or ‘L’, the initial by which alone she is identified in the published accounts of their travels.”⁴ Salerno marked the beginning of Amelia and Lucy’s lifelong friendship and, very probably, it was thanks to their mutual understanding that they took the decision to travel together. After reaching Bologna, the two *exceptional*⁵ women headed to Switzerland and they

found themselves, about the middle of June, 1872, breathing the cooler airs of Monte Generoso. [...] The streaming lakes, from which we had just escaped – Como, Lugano e Maggiore – lay in still, shining sheets three thousand feet below. [...] [W]e began, somehow, to think and talk less of our proposed tour in the Engadine; to look more and more longingly towards the north-eastern horizon; and to dream in a vague way of those mystic mountains beyond Verona which we knew of, somewhat indefinitely, as the Dolomites.⁶

The destination Amelia chose to travel to in company with Miss Renshaw must have been decided shrewdly. In fact, the alpine region of the Dolomites represented the perfect picturesque site off the beaten path Amelia Edwards was seeking in order to distance herself from mass tourists and produce an original narration. Apparently, The Dolomites was a destination she had been cherishing

³ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁵ The majority of critics of women’s travel writing underline female prowess by employing adjectives which demarcate travellers’ difference from ordinary Victorian women. As a matter of fact, Bassnett (“Travel writing and gender”, cit., p. 226) asserts that many published studies “focus on the unusual life stories of women travellers, on their originality, and on their refusal to conform to social norms of the day.” However, Mills (*op. cit.*, p. 112) highlights that this interpretation of women’s exceptionality can be misleading, because it tends to sanctify Victorian adventuresses: “[w]omen’s travel writing is almost invariably described by critics in terms of exceptional individuals: each travel writer is written about in terms of her strong personality which is manifest in the text. Most critical accounts of women’s travel writing concentrate on describing the difficulties which the individual writer had to overcome to travel; they are not concerned with that individual text’s relation with the rest of the colonial enterprise, and thus the truth-status of the text often depends upon the strength of the narrator figure – which in turn poses problems of credibility because strong women narrator figure conflict with the cultural norms for women.”

⁶ A. B. Edwards, *Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys: A Midsummer Ramble in the Dolomites*. 1873. Reprint, Boston: Beacon Press, 1987, pp. 1-2. Henceforward, quotations from Amelia Edwards’ first travelogue will be given in the text in brackets as (UPUV: page number).

for a long time, as she states “[t]he Dolomites! It was full fifteen years since I had first seen sketches of them by a great artist not long since passed away, and their strange outlines and still stranger colouring had haunted me ever since.” (UPUV: 2) Traditionally, the mountain was one of the Victorians’ favourite landscapes and, in particular, the Alps were thought to be the suitable place which enabled to improve one’s own liveliness and ability to meditate, far from the frenzy of groups of tourists and modern machineries.⁷ As we will see, the very different territorial features of the countries Amelia visited throughout her life played an important part in the way she would write about what was considered *other*. Both the remote area of the Dolomites and, later, the antique land of Egypt impacted differently on Edwards’s personality, and her attitude towards their populations and cultures appears to be dissimilar too. As Patricia O’Neill explains, these places

impinged on Edwards’s consciousness as a woman, a British subject, and a devotee of art and literary culture in its broadest sense. [...] [G]eography is as important in understanding the point of view of travel writers as gender. [...] [W]hile in the Dolomites, Edwards shows little of the British Protestant’s prejudice towards the Italian Catholic population and its religious practices, whereas in Egypt Edwards more often adopts the attitudes of imperial spectator. [...] Thus, although in both of her travelogues Edwards reveals her feelings of cultural superiority, each region challenges her identity in different ways.⁸

In what follows, I analyse some of the most relevant passages and significant literary devices contained in *Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys*, which both characterise Amelia Edwards’s style and are typical of the majority of Victorian women’s travel writing. Moreover, taking into consideration Edwards’s standpoints in the book, I will try to examine how Amelia emotionally reacted and perceived the outer world when being confronted with an alpine region until then unfamiliar to the majority of British travellers and tourists. Indeed, this mountain

⁷ Buzard, *The Beaten Track*, cit., p. 34.

⁸ O’Neill, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-46.

district of “northern Italy bordering on Austria was untamed by roads and comfortable hotels and to most of her contemporaries it was *terra incognita*.”⁹

3.2 Structure and Subject-matter

Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys is a very entertaining travel book which follows Miss Renshaw (“identified always only as L.”)¹⁰ and Amelia Edwards’s route through the Dolomites in a straightforward chronological order, that is to say from the month of June 1872 to approximately autumn of the same year. Unfortunately, while reconstructing the journey, Edwards does not always indicate the precise dates of her own and her companion’s wanderings and I think that, probably, more frequent and accurate temporal references would have facilitated readers to better acquire an overall view of the tour and follow the whirling path of their wayfarings. Indeed, while Amelia recounts her movements, it should be recommendable to have immediately available a map of the area covered by the two lady travellers, in order to keep to her day-to-day jaunts. Providentially, the 1873 Longmans, Green and Co. edition of the book inserted a chart of the locations reached by them (most likely drawn by Edwards herself), and the 1987 Beacon Press edition which I have availed myself of, provides the same original drawing which is at readers’ disposal to understand the incredible itinerary planned by Edwards. The linearity of Edwards’s travel is also conveyed by the titles of each of the fourteen chapters,¹¹ starting from the location of Monte Generoso and ending up in Bolzano. The subtitles which Amelia had added in the contents, instead, make reference to and function as a sort of summary of the main

⁹ Rees, *Amelia Edwards*, cit., p. 26.

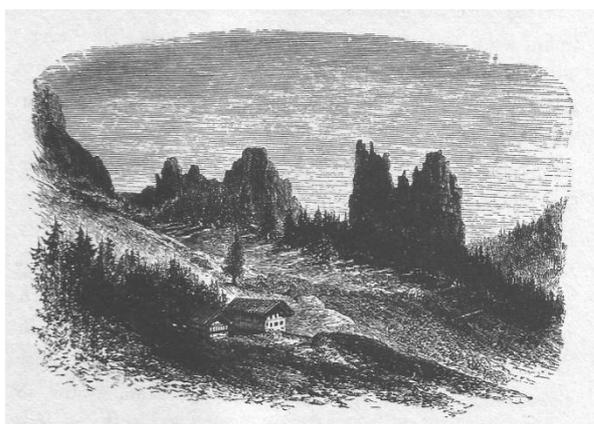
¹⁰ *Ivi*.

¹¹ For instance, Amelia Edwards has titled the first chapter of her work “Monte Generoso to Venice” and the last one “Caprile to Botzen”.

events and funny anecdotes contained in the book (they do not appear inside the text in order to presumably let the narration flow out uninterrupted).

Essentially, the story deals with the adventures both Amelia and Lucy experienced while visiting the Dolomites and, “più che la pratica alpinistica vera e propria”,¹² it presents Edwards’s commentaries on the manners and customs of the native communities, quasi-lyrical reflections on the splendour and uniqueness of the alpine scenery, amateurish scientific observations on the natural elements of the environment and the descriptions of its flora and fauna, and banters between the English authoress and the local people.

What is also important regarding the composition of the *Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys* is Amelia Edwards’s distinguishing quality as an artist. Indeed, the value of the travelogue is increased by a totality of twenty-seven engraved illustrations which demonstrate her ability at drawing. As I have showed in chapter 2, from a very early age Amelia demonstrated to be very talented and her “artistic skills remained with her all her life and she made good use of them in illustrating her travel books.”¹³ I have included some of Amelia’s sketches in my

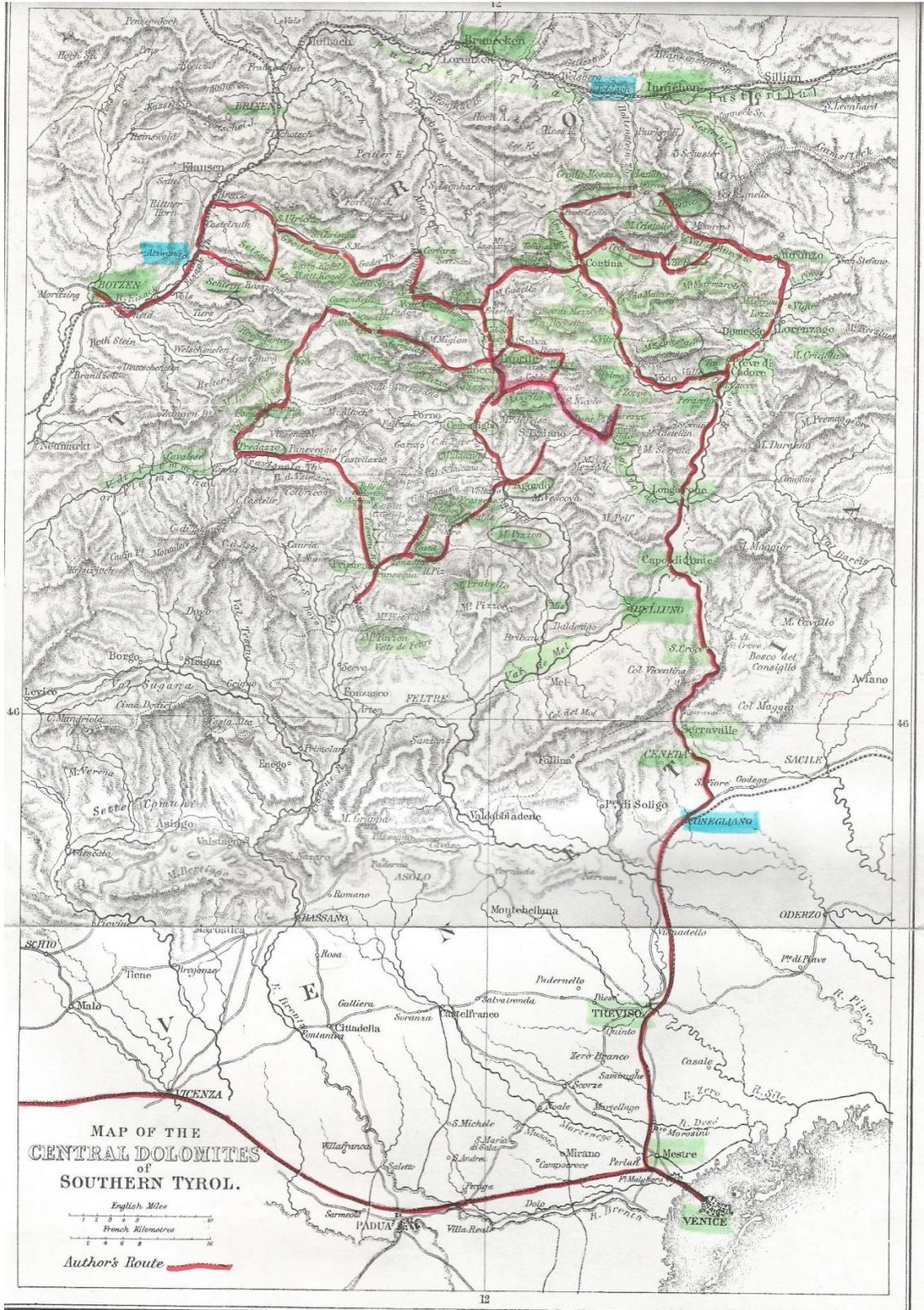


dissertation in order to give evidence of her dexterity with the visual arts and her noteworthy acuity for grasping and transmitting the natural beauty of the surrounding landscape.

2. Unknown Mountains near Cortina

¹² Scrittore, “Nothing could have been pleasanter than staying – except going”, cit., p. 83.

¹³ Rees, *Amelia Edwards*, cit., p. 7.



London, Longmans & Co

3. Author's Route

The red path is original, whereas the highlighted marks are mine.

3.3 The Tie Between Art and Religion

Art plays an important part in Edwards' travelogue, and its significance is not only noticeable in the various sketches realised by the authoress, but also in the descriptions she makes of the artistic treasures she can admire during the journey. In fact, the Dolomites offer Amelia the opportunity to discover precious pieces of art, mostly stored in churches and cathedrals. The most famous local painter is Titian, and, during her strenuous excursions, Amelia does all she can to pursue her desire to see some original works of the painter. Impressive is the mastery with which she describes the paintings and all their features, details and state of conservation. Emblematic is the episode when Amelia and L. go to see the church of Pieve di Cadore, the birthplace of Titian. (UPUV: 112-18) Here they are welcomed by Don Antonio Da Via, the local priest, who accompanies the two English ladies to admire the treasures of his church, that is two original Titians, which are described at full length by the authoress, whose language is very technical and indicative of all her competence on art and art history. The priest also explains his interest and attention to restore and preserve these and other less famous paintings contained in the church, permitting Edwards not only to illustrate unknown works of art in her book, but also pay attention to the kindness, passion and mastery of the clergyman (he shows the two women also embroidered vestments in the sacristy). The way in which Amelia talks about the religious man is indicative of her esteem towards the priest, even if her tone is moderate and ironic, betraying a hint of British cultural superiority: "[i]n point of taste and education he is superior to the general run of Tyrolean pastors. He takes an eager interest in all that relates to Titian and the Vecelli; and believes Cadore to be the axis on which the world goes round." (UPUV: 112-13)

This episode also highlights the bond which exists between art and religion because Edwards, in order to admire some artworks, has to go to Italian places of worship, since Catholicism had always been the major patron of artists. According to O'Neill, "Edwards's narrative perspective [...] permits her to see beyond religious doctrine to the aesthetic value of paintings and artifacts held by local churches and their Catholic pastors."¹⁴ Amelia Edwards never seems to overtly face the question of religion, probably because this was not a matter she wanted to examine in depth (Amelia's personal credo has never been ascertained by scholars). Usually, the sense of British cultural superiority accompanied adventures during the journey and "Protestant travelers often found Catholic religious services particularly strange and Catholic clergyman slovenly and corrupt."¹⁵ As regard the question of faith, Morgan's explanation is very thorough and provides a general overview of how Victorian British travellers perceived foreign religions while travelling abroad. Essentially, Protestantism "became associated with English patriotism and independence"¹⁶ and

[t]o Protestants, Catholic forms of devotion seemed very strange – more like commercial transactions, theatrical performances and operatic evenings than religious experiences. In describing Catholics and their religious practices as well as when representing themselves, Protestant travellers adopted a discourse that recent scholars have termed 'colonial'. For example, depictions of Catholics include such words as 'dark', 'dirty', 'ignorant' and 'strange' which cast Catholic 'others' a subordinate position relative to Protestant gazers. [...] Travellers associated deprivation itself with Catholicism. They saw the Church hierarchy as a tyrannical one which kept the Scriptures and learning from the masses, thus encouraging superstition, ignorance and poverty. [...] The ceremonies, music and sights in Catholic Churches were very strange and sometimes upsetting to Protestant travellers.¹⁷

However, "Protestant travellers did not always see Catholicism as something to criticize and oppose"¹⁸ and "when visiting churches, some confessed to be very

¹⁴ O'Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

¹⁵ *Ivi.*

¹⁶ Morgan, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-84.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 93-96.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

impressed by the art inspired by faith.”¹⁹ This last approach seems to be the one adopted by Edwards, who does not blatantly criticise Catholic religious practices, but instead admires the works of art which the Church was able to patronise over the centuries. However, Amelia’s classical ironic tone and feeling of superiority is always noticeable, and readers could imagine a plausible smirk appearing on the authoress’s face when writing down her impressions of a church service in Cortina:

[e]ight o'clock mass is performed at each church alternately, every morning throughout the year. To-day it happened to be down at the old church, and thither, attracted by their quaint costumes, I followed a party of chattering peasant girls, some of whom had their milk cans and market baskets in their hands. These they carried into the church; taking off their hats at the door, like men, and remaining uncovered throughout the service. The congregation consisted of some three or four score of very old women with scant white polls; a sprinkling of square-headed robust-looking damsels with silver pins in their clubbed and plaited hair; and a few old men, so tanned and gnarled and bent that they looked as if carved out of rough brown wood. Then trooped noisily in some four hundred children of both sexes, and filled the benches next the altar; while the old bell-ringer, having rung his last peal, came hobbling up the aisle in heavy wooden clogs and baggy breeches, and lit the candles on the altar. Presently appeared a priest in black and gold vestments, attended by little red-headed acolyte, like one of John Bellini's angels; the organist (by no means a bad player) led off with "Ah che la Morte " on a tremolo stop; the congregation dropped on their knees; and the service began. Musically speaking, it was one of those performances which one enjoys the more the less one hears of it. A showy operatic mass by some modern Italian composer, a reedy organ, and a choir that might have been better trained, made up an *ensemble* that soon sent the writer creeping towards the door. It was delightful to get out again into the glorious morning. (UPUV: 53-54)

Edwards’s mocking attitude is even more obvious when she takes the chance to narrate the moments immediately following a wedding ceremony. Amelia does not express an explicit opinion regarding the locals’ behaviour, but her sarcasm is indicative of the consideration she has of the Tyrolean religious traditions, that is she suggests a hint of ridiculousness in these practices:

[a]t length, when all was over, and the congregation was about to disperse, the bridegroom got up quite coolly and walked out of the church, leaving his bride still kneeling. Then her mother came up again, and led her away. The bridegroom, without so much as looking back to see what had become of her, went and played at bowls in the piazza; the bride went home with her parents, took off her finery, and shortly reappeared in her shabby, everyday clothes. It is, perhaps, Tyrolean etiquette for newly married persons to avoid each other as much as possible. At all events, the bridegroom loafed about with the men, and the bride walked with her own people, and they were not once seen together all the rest of the day. (UPUV: 91)

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

3.4 Fictional Devices and the Autobiographical Issue

The story is told in the first person and, both in *Untrodden Peaks* and *A Thousand Miles*, Amelia Edwards makes use of a particular literary device to talk about herself: she adopts the pseudonym *The Writer*, creating a sort of distance between herself as the traveller and her own compositions. For instance, while travelling from Venice to Longarone, Edwards and her friend stopped at the village of Santa Croce in the province of Belluno and Amelia relates what appears to be a recurring scene in the book, that is the authoress's intentional break to draw a picture of the charming lake while curiously observed by the local inhabitants:



4. Lake of Santa Croce

certain Maria Rosa whom they all seem to know; whereupon every feature of my face is discussed separately, and for the most part to my disparagement. [...] despite all which impediments, however, I achieve my sketch and by the time the horses are put to, am ready to go on again. (UPUV: 27-28)

[t]he writer, grievously tormented by a plague of flies, makes a sketch under circumstances of untold difficulty, being presently surrounded by the whole population of the place, among whom are some three or four handsome young women with gay red and yellow handkerchiefs, bound round their heads like turbans. These damsels are by no means shy. They crowd; they chatter; they giggle. One invites me to take her portrait. Another wishes to know if I am married. A third discovers that I am like a

As Rees explains, “[t]he creation of a narrative persona through whom everything can be mediated achieves both variety and cohesion and is the key to the success of both books. The extent to which personal history and character are reflected is a question to be handled with care.”²⁰ As I have previously explained in 1.2, the issue of the authorial reliability is a common feature of every travel book and, despite this, readers should try to be “swept along by the narrative”²¹ as much as possible,

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

²¹ Youngs, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

because it seems to be impossible to determine which are the incontestable autobiographical elements contained in a story. Bassnett observes that “many of the works by women travellers are self-conscious fictions, and the persona who emerges from the pages is as much a character as a woman in a novel.”²² A travel writer is authorised to embellish his/her works with fictional components because travel writing is a permeable genre and Amelia Edwards results to be a very skilful narrator of her account, employing devices such as characterisation and dialogue to grasp and keep her audience’s attention. Similarly, Youngs notes that “it is tempting to read travel writing as though it were autobiography. Yet, just as recent theories of autobiographies have emphasised the constructedness of that genre, so travel writers often adopt personae.”²³ He continues his study maintaining that every travel writer is entitled to freely choose his/her stylistic preferences, both when these entail a deliberate stress on the fictionalising processes on the part of the author and an intentional effect of verisimilitude and closeness to the reading public. According to Youngs, in fact,

[t]he choice of whether to acknowledge the temporal difference between the narrator and author is fundamental. Ignoring the separation between them can make for more a direct experience, as though we are experiencing the journey with the traveller. Drawing attention to the time that has elapsed between the performance of travel and the writing of it invites reflection. The narrator may thus be treated as another character about whom the author may comment, rather like an autobiographer’s view of his or her younger self. The presence of that temporal distance, therefore, coincides with a critical space, too, which can lead to a more tangible sense of the writing as a construction.²⁴

That is to say that Amelia Edwards’s decision to craft a character for herself encourages readers to consider her travelogue as a recreation of her journey, as she wanted to “provoke thought about narrative processes and relationships that

²² Bassnett, “Travel writing and gender”, cit., p. 234.

²³ Youngs, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

we normally take for granted.”²⁵ Therefore, if on the one hand the character of *The Writer*, which is a clear reference to Amelia, may produce a sort of distance from the audience and render the reading of the book less sympathetic, on the other hand it is evidence of Edwards’s long-time experience as professional writer, her care for details, her consideration of the importance of stylistic features, but also her typical late tendency to avoid any sort of too overt an exposure of herself to public glare.

Moreover, both Bassnett and Scrittori²⁶ cite one of the most pivotal works on lady travellers, that is Sara Mill’s *Discourse of Difference*, to highlight the complexity of the narration of women’s travel writing. Indeed, Mills affirms that the general criticism of female travel accounts tend to consider these texts as autobiographies, ignoring the plurality of discourses which impinge on women’s works and “with which the author negotiates.”²⁷ As the theorist points out, “[m]any critics see a biographical approach as the only way to read these texts, and they devote themselves to proving or disproving allegations against the writers”,²⁸ at the risk of accusing “the women’s accounts of falsehood or exaggeration.”²⁹ In addition, this simplistic analytical method would potentially confer an aura of exceptionality and idealisation upon these female travellers, seen as exemplar women capable of outstanding performances and impeccable conducts, and, contrary to her male colleagues, always sympathetic towards foreign people, so eluding their complicity with British imperialism. If readers commit the error to consider women’s travel accounts just as autobiographical and factual writing,

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

²⁶ Bassnett, “Travel writing and gender”, cit., p. 234. Scrittori, “Nothing could have been pleasanter than staying – except going”, cit., p. 83.

²⁷ Mills, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

²⁹ *Ivi.*

they would not consider that the prodigious resistance and masculine attribute of force demonstrated by lady travellers in certain episodes of their accounts could have been emphasised by the authoresses in order to both try to equate to male traveller's achievements and accentuate the contrast between their remarkable accomplishments and the tamed living conditions of those confined at home. As Frawley states, "Victorian adventuress helped to perpetuate such representations [of exceptional women] by emphasising in their works the energy and stamina they exerted – and wanted to exert."³⁰

For instance, Amelia Edwards dedicates an entire chapter (twelve) to the ascent of Sasso Bianco, the peak of Monte Pezza, first conquered by her and Lucy.



5. Sasso Bianco

Hereupon Clementi,³¹ àpropos, as it would seem, of nothing, says briskly :—
"Would the Signoras like to make a first ascent?" (UPUV: 190)

On the whole, the thing sounds tempting. (UPUV: 192).

So we go on again, slowly but steadily, up the long slope and on to the foot of the rock-wall aforesaid. Here are no steps ready hewn. We have to get up as best as we can, and the getting up is not easy. [...] Then, quite suddenly, a whole army of distant peaks begins to start into sight; and so, after six hours, we all at one find ourselves upon the top! (UPUV: 285-86)

The women's brilliant physical abilities as climbers are put in evidence, together with aesthetic lyrical descriptions of the summit and the panorama below and "imperfect observations" (UPUV: 294) regarding the measurements of Monte Pezza. O'Neill even ascribes Amelia's possible motivation for writing her travel book to her significant ascent of Sasso Bianco,³² but this remains a supposition, as we cannot know with certainty neither what really encouraged Edwards to

³⁰ Frawley, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

³¹ During their travel, Amelia and Lucy availed themselves of the help of some mountain guide such as Clementi, hired in the hamlet of Caprile. (UPUV: 183)

³² O'Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

composed her travelogue,³³ nor to what extent her act of courage was fictionalised for the success of the book. What has to be highlighted in this episode is the fact that the female prowess has its own stylistic function, because, generally, in nineteenth-century women's travel writing "frailty or invalidism at home were replaced by extraordinary endurance and strength abroad, especially in wilder or more primitive regions where travel was hardly an obvious means of bodily restorations."³⁴ Consequently, if our authoress's already-mentioned typical physical weakness is taken into consideration, I would be inclined to think that more than once Amelia utilized fictional stratagems to enhance her audience's attention, not only with regard to Edwards' veracity of the ascent episode, but also with respect to the incredible stamina exhibit throughout her voyage through the Dolomites. As Frawley observes, "[a]lthough Victorian adventuresses were often represented in the popular press as women with exceptional physical strength and resilience, many were far from healthy while in England".³⁵ I disagree with Foster when she states that the invigorating power of travel would have sufficed to deem all women's extraordinary feats as literally happened: "[t]he transformation from invalidism to vigorous strength effected by the excitement of travel was often only temporary: once away from the stimulus of foreign novelty, the traveller frequently reverted to her previous state of physical debility."³⁶ I am not arguing that the transforming energy of travel did not have an emotional impact on Amelia and that she made up most of her story. However, Foster's point of view seems both to be unrealistic and describe more a kind of bipolar behaviour on the part of

³³ As an independent woman who earned her living by writing, Amelia Edwards carefully pondered on the possibility to seize on the increasing popularity of travel writing to solidify her literary career and finances.

³⁴ Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

³⁵ Frawley, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

³⁶ Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

women travellers, and I do not exclude that Edwards had enriched the narration of her demanding voyage to compensate for her physical limits. Dea Birkett, for instance, describes Edwards's challenging journey in these terms:

[r]ushing up and down mountainsides with uncontrollable energy and speed, the map of her route spirals around and around the small towns and villages lodged amongst the valleys in a remote region wedged between the fashionable resort of Innsbruck and the glory and culture of Venice.³⁷

Indeed, when reading the book, what appears to be improbable about Amelia's travel is her incredible ability to reach, practically without rest and any particular problem, a substantial number of isolated mountain locations, lacking of communication routes.

Apart from characterisation, Amelia Edwards makes use of another technique borrowed from fiction, which is that of the dialogue. According to Bassnet,

the increasing use of dialogue in travel writing has further closed the gap between travel account and fiction, making the travel text resemble the novel much more closely. The protagonist engages in conversations that introduce a range of other characters into the narrative, and the reader is expected to believe that such conversations which apparently transcend any language barrier are recorded rather than invented.³⁸

As a matter of fact, *Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys* is interspersed with occasional conversations between Edwards and the inhabitants of the hamlets scattered through the Dolomites, since she proves to be really interested in its people and their costumes and manners, contrary to "her subsequent lack of engagement with the people of modern Egypt."³⁹ Amelia Edwards's dialogues with locals are for the most part very humorous, and really amusing is also the effect of code-mixing, that is to say the use of sentences which are combinations of two languages, English and Italian. If Amelia Edwards's language skills are taken into

³⁷ D. Birkett, *Spinsters Abroad: Victorian Lady Explorers*. Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2004, p. 55.

³⁸ Bassnet, "Travel writing and gender", cit., p. 235.

³⁹ O'Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

consideration, readers would be inclined to believe that she had no particular difficulty in conversing with the peasants of the Dolomites, since she was able to speak and comprehend German and Italian. The characters which Amelia Edwards introduces in her narrative are common people, such as “albergatori e locandiere, le insostituibili guide locali, i parroci che custodiscono quadri e sculture preziose e gli artisti autodidatti – pittori o scultori che interpretano la vita di montagna in maniera del tutto originale –.”⁴⁰ Generally, Edwards’s behaviour towards the local inhabitants “was invariably friendly, gracious, and polite but she never supposed or pretended to suppose a democratic equality between herself and the mountain people she met.”⁴¹ In particular, there is an episode in the book which both presents a typical droll exchange of words with mountain dwellers and is indicative of Edwards’s consideration of sociological matters. Caustic irony and “evidence of their [British cultural] superiority”⁴² are manifest when Amelia and Lucy encounter a group of women at the village of Selva, who are intrigued by the two foreign female travellers’ presence in such isolated mountains:

The women of the house [...] stand wide-eyed and open-mouthed, in a fever of curiosity, watching all we do, as a party of children might watch the movement of a couple of wild beasts in a cage. They examine our hats, our umbrellas, our cloaks and every individual article that we have laid aside. [...] They are, in truth, mere savages – rosy, hearty, good-natured; but as ignorant and uncivilised as aboriginal. “But have you come like this all the way from Inghilterra?” What she means by “like this,” it is impossible to say. She probably supposes we have ridden the two Nessols⁴³ the hole distance by land and sea, with one small black bag each by way of luggage; but the easiest answer is a nod of the head. “Santo Spirito! All alone? – all alone?” Again, to save explanations, a nod. “Eh! Poverine! Poverine! (poor little things! poor little things!) Are you sisters?” A shake of head this time, instead of a nod. “Are you married?” Another negative, whereat her surprise amounts almost to consternation. “Come! Not married? Neither of you?” “Neither of us,” I reply, laughing. “Gran’ Dio! Alone and not married! Poverine! Poverine!” Hereupon they all cry “poverine” in chorus, with an air of such genuine concern and compassion that we are almost ashamed of the irrepressible laughter with which we cannot help receiving their condolences. (UPUV: 320-22)

⁴⁰ Scrittori, “Nothing could have been pleasanter than staying – except going”, cit., p. 84.

⁴¹ Rees, *Amelia Edwards*, cit., p. 28.

⁴² O’Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

⁴³ Nessel is the name of both of the two lady travellers’ mules.

This is one of a number of scenes where Amelia presents a group of local women, who are usually described in the text very accurately, since Edwards's intent is to illustrate natives' customs and manners.⁴⁴ Foster highlights that Victorian women

travellers were [...] personally drawn to the living representatives of their sex. Their attitudes towards them were ambivalent, however. The Italian women were less evidently 'foreign' than those in more exotic or unfamiliar cultures [...]. But in some respect the indigenous population still offered the visitors an image of the alien with which they had to come to terms. The female peasantry, whose bright clothes, striking head-dresses and unusual ornaments they often remark, embodied for them not only the general gaiety of the Italian scene which they found so appealing, but also all the colour and vitality which the Victorian woman had been taught to distrust. [...] [W]hile on the one hand they leant towards identification with their own sex, on the other they sought to distance themselves from the threat of disorientation which this might involve.

Moreover, this passage offers a clear example of interlingual communication and cultural bias, as well as Amelia Edwards's gender-based discourse of independency, even if "[s]uch experiences suggest that authoring oneself outside of the cultural definitions of appropriate female behaviour could prove debilitating."⁴⁵ Edwards's evident defence of her status as an emancipated woman and self-reliant traveller is thus presented to her readers in a sardonic tone, precisely because Amelia is aware that the matter would not be so easily accepted

⁴⁴ Amelia Edwards seems to seize upon every opportunity to present the women of the Dolomites, how they curiously appear and behave, as for instance when she finds herself in Pieve di Zoldo: "[t]hat evening we wander about the fields and lanes beyond the village, and the writer sketches some wild peaks [...] which are seen from every point of view about the place. There is, of course, the customary difficulty of keeping intruders at bay. One old woman in wooden clogs, having looked on for a long time from her cottage-door, comes hobbling out, and surveys the sketch with a ludicrous expression of bewilderment. 'Why do you do that?' she asks, pointing with one skinny finger, and peering up sidewise into my face, like a raven. I answer that it is in order to remember the mountain when I shall be far away. 'And will *that* make you remember it?' says she, incredulously. To this I reply that it will not only answer that purpose, but even serve to make it known to many of my friends who have never been here. This, however, is evidently more than she can believe. 'And where do you come from?' she asks next—after a long pause. 'From a country you have no doubt heard of many a time,' I reply. 'From England.' 'From England! Jesu Maria! From England! And where is England? *Is it near Milan?*' Being told that it is much more distant than Milan and in quite the opposite direction, she is so confounded that she can only shake her head in silence, and hobble back again. When she is halfway across the road, however, she stops short, pauses a moment to consider, and then comes back, armed with one last question. 'Ecco!' she says. 'Tell me this—tell me the truth—why do you come here at all? Why do you travel?' To this I reply, of course, that we travel to see the country. 'To see the country!' she repeats, clasping her withered hands. 'Gran' Dio! Have you, then, no mountains and no trees in England?'" (UPUV: 312-14)

⁴⁵ R. Y. Jenkins, "The Gaze of the Victorian Woman Traveler: Spectacles and Phenomena", in S. Kristi (ed. and introd.), *Gender, Genre, and Identity in Women's Travel Writing*, New York: Peter Lang, 2004, pp. 15-30., p. 18.

by society. Maybe the authoress hopes that her audience can understand her avant-garde ideas and “appreciate the advantages of her unmarried state.”⁴⁶ On the other hand, I would not agree with Rees’ analysis of this narrative extract, as she takes the chance to investigate what appears to be one of the scholar’s favourite issue, that is Amelia’s sexual orientations and her bond with Miss Renshaw. The critic asserts that “what precisely the true nature of the relationship was is not easily decided. That they were lesbian lovers is a possibility to which”⁴⁷ this episode “may lend some colour.”⁴⁸ Rees suggests that Lucy and Amelia’s ambiguous extended laughter would be a manifestation of insecurity and embarrassment regarding their true nature, as well as an indication of a feeling of superiority towards those peasant women, who would not be able to understand their presumed relationship.⁴⁹ Starting from this event,⁵⁰ Rees continues the investigation of Edwards’s psychological profile as regard to her relationship with women (especially with Marianne North),⁵¹ but I would be inclined to think that the scholar’s speculations on Edwards’s supposed lesbianism are, as Moon has remarked,⁵² as much respectable as dubious. More plausible and recurrent in Amelia Edwards’s travel accounts is her necessity to “distanziare da sé la immagine della femminilità tradizionale, passiva, sottomessa, molto primitiva e di negare al tempo stesso la propria trasgressione di quel codice affermando, con

⁴⁶ O’Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

⁴⁷ Rees, *Amelia Edwards*, cit., p. 32.

⁴⁸ *Ivi.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁵⁰ Rees comments another passage of Edwards’s book, in which the authoress displays her interest for the sentimental situation of a young girl, whose fine-looking features are worthy to be portrayed in one of Amelia’s sketches: “[a]nd you are not married?” I asked. ‘No, Signora.’ ‘Nor betrothed?’ ‘No, Signora.’ ‘But that must be your own fault,’ I said.” (UPUV: 86). Here Rees interprets Amelia’s curiosity as a non-mischievous, disinterested concern for the girl, since marriage would offer her a financial lifeline, while for Edwards “and L. there were other opportunities and they needed no husband to support them.” Rees, *Amelia Edwards*, cit., p. 33.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-35.

⁵² Moon, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

voce quasi virile, la sua indiscussa superiorità culturale di cittadina di un impero.”⁵³ As a result of this, I would state that the question related to Amelia’s sexual tendencies should not be so excessively contemplated by scholars, but rather re-elaborated in terms of the larger theme of gender ambiguity, which is characteristic of all Victorian women’s travel writing. As I have already mentioned in 1.4, if women’s accounts commonly are composed of a multiplicity of discourses, each of which exerting its own force, for Victorian female authoresses “the tension between an assertive opinionated masculine persona and an apologetic ladylike female voice reveals the problems of self-definition”.⁵⁴

3.5 Masculinity Versus Femininity: The Issue of Self-Construction

The issue of gender ambiguity is well-represented by the character of the *Phenomenon* in the last chapter, a traveller Edwards and L. come upon on their way to Bolzano, who “is gabbling German” (UPUV: 334) while recounting her adventures through the mountains to some onlookers in Corvara:

[r]eturning presently to the inn, just as the drizzle thickens and the light begins to fail, we encounter a Phenomenon. [...] It wears highlows, a battered straw hat, and a brown garment which may be described either as a long kilt or the briefest of petticoats. Its hair is sandy; its complexion crimson; its age anything between forty-five and sixty. It carries a knapsack on its back, and an alpenstock in its hand. The voice is the voice of a man; the face, tanned and travel-stained as it is, is the face of a woman. [...] “A guide?” she exclaims, replying to an observation of some by-stander. “Not I! What do I want with a guide? [...] Fatigue is nothing to me – distance is nothing to me – danger is nothing to me. I have been taken by brigands before now, what of that? If I had had a guide with me, would he have fought them? Not a bit of it! He would have run away. Well, I neither fought nor run away. I made friends of my brigands – I painted all their portraits – I spent a month with them; and we parted, the best comrades in the world. (UPUV: 333-34)

Practically, as Scrittore comments,⁵⁵ here Amelia is describing (with her classical hint of irony and abundance of details) a neutralised, half man/half woman version

⁵³ Scrittore, “Nothing could have been pleasanter than staying – except going”, cit., p. 85.

⁵⁴ C. Oliver, *Western Women in Colonial Africa*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996, p. 23.

⁵⁵ Scrittore, “Nothing could have been pleasanter than staying – except going”, cit., p. 86.

of herself, who has the same hobbies of the writer, since Edwards states that “[s]he paints, she botanies and I think they said she writes”; (UPUV: 335) however, at the same time, Edwards appears to distance herself from the Phenomenon and she is relieved when she “learn[s] that this lady is a German.” (UPUV: 335) By dissociating from the German lady adventurer, Edwards in this passage is behaving exactly like British contemporary society towards alternative and nonconformist women possessing masculine attributes of strength, that is to say, she is “voicing androcentric interpretations of the eccentric female.”⁵⁶ As O’Neill explains, “Edwards virtually denies gender to a creature who has apparently infringed upon all boundaries of what is proper and decent for females and males alike.”⁵⁷ Therefore, Amelia is presenting her encounter with the Phenomenon within “socially acceptable patterns of behaviour”,⁵⁸ because, while travelling and then recounting their travels, “[m]any women were faced with the twin desires to remain ‘appropriate’ and still enact their ‘inappropriate’ desires. Many felt compelled to masquerade their intentions or deflect criticism by maintaining a rigorous code of propriety.”⁵⁹ Very interesting is Jenkins’ interpretation given to this episode regarding Amelia’s definition of the self: “[i]ronically, then, Edwards shapes a discourse of her experiences by denying who she is; she constructs her story by adopting a ‘self-destructive’ subject position.”⁶⁰

Amelia’s reaction towards the coarse German traveller⁶¹ is worthy of attention and the emergence of this neutral subject without sexual connotations is

⁵⁶ Jenkins, “The Gaze of the Victorian Woman Traveler”, cit., p. 17.

⁵⁷ O’Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

⁵⁸ Jenkins, “The Gaze of the Victorian Woman Traveler”, cit., p. 17.

⁵⁹ *Ivi.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁶¹ It seems to be impossible to affirm if Amelia Edwards invented or not this caricature of herself in order to enhance her own ladylike qualities as a traveller or rather to present the *Phenomenon*’s manlike attributes she lacks and considers essential for experiencing the Dolomites. O’Neill would solve the question by stating that this ungendered character “appears as a strategic device for

indicative of an issue which afflicted the majority of women travel writers. Indeed, in their travel writings, a tension deriving from the need for self-definition is evident and this episode is a clear instance of women's struggle to establish their own voice within a patriarchal society. If, on the one hand, both Amelia and her contemporary female colleagues sought alternative images of themselves far from the constraints of British Victorian culture, on the other hand they found very difficult to affirm their identities, that is to make their voice heard, and gain authority and respect by means of the *unbeaten path* of travel writing. Until then, the non-fictional genre of travel writing was a male-dominated terrain, therefore women writers felt torn between the acknowledgment of a dominant male authorial tradition and the necessity to have their own unconventional femininity recognised and accepted. As Bassnett points out,

[w]omen travellers had, then, to write about their experiences from within a tradition that denied them a role, for if the image of the coloniser is sexualised as a man bent on raping virgin lands, then a woman from the colonising culture is effectively erased. [...] women have not been silenced, but have chose to write about their experiences in full knowledge of the absence of a tradition into which they could insert themselves with any degree of comfort or familiarity.⁶²

As a result of this internal conflict, both Edwards's and most of Victorian women's travel writings are replete with literary devices, simultaneously showing both their "assertion of femininity"⁶³ and "intellectual insecurity".⁶⁴ Victorian female travel accounts, therefore, presented a mixed-gendered, half male/half female discourse which is a clear manifestation of women's initial awe for a literary genre into which they were taking their first steps.

positioning her own party as the optimal travelers, strong-minded rather than adventurous, cultured and sociable travelers rather than extraordinary or alienating. In presenting a range of female types from the parochial to the 'phenomenal', Edwards makes common cause between the intelligent and cultured female narrator and her implied English readers." O'Neill, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-53.

⁶² Bassnett, "Travel writing and gender", *cit.*, p. 231.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

Hence, on the one hand, assertive female discourse was characterised by, and distinguished itself from male discourse primarily for its “strong emphasis on the personal”,⁶⁵ the presumed sympathy towards foreign cultures, the detailed descriptions of traditions, manners and customs,⁶⁶ and the particular attention to women’s “practical difficulties connected with their journeys”,⁶⁷ such as the “the absence of a side-saddle”.⁶⁸ On the other hand, women travel writers’ lack of confidence is evident when they “had frequently to take on a masculine voice”⁶⁹ and give credit to their male colleagues by presenting episodes which accentuated their stamina, using a great quantity of footnotes which conveyed scientific data, referring to male earlier authorities to support their writings and adopting a self-effacing tone, which is mostly noticeable in female writers’ apologetic prefaces or prologues.

⁶⁵ *Ivi*.

⁶⁶ Amelia takes pleasure in describing the feasts or *sagros* and the traditional dresses of the mountain villages. For instance, in chapter five (“Cortina to Pieve di Cadore”), she narrates that “[t]he costumes of these mountain-folk are still more various than their tongues. The women of San Vito wear breastplates of crimson and green satin banded with broad gold braid and ornamented with spangles. The women of the Pusterthal walk about in huge turbanlike head dresses as becoming and quite as heavy as the bearskins of the Grenadier.” (UPUV: 82)

⁶⁷ Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁶⁸ *Ivi*. Also Amelia Edwards in chapter one (“Monte Generoso to Venice”) relates her difficulty in acquiring this item, which appears to be fundamental for the enjoyment of the tour: “[t]here was yet another point upon which we were severely ‘exercised,’ and that was the question of side-saddles. Mr. R., on Monte Generoso, had advised us to purchase them and take them with us, doubting whether we should find any between Cortina and Botzen. [...] Anyhow, we were unwilling to add the bulk and burden of three side-saddles to our luggage; so we decided to go on, and take our chance. [...] As the event proved, we did ultimately succeed in capturing two side-saddles (the only two in the whole district), and in forcibly keeping them throughout the journey; but this was a triumph of audacity, never to be repeated. Another time, we should undoubtedly provide ourselves with side-saddles either at Padua or Vicenza on the one side, or at Botzen on the other.” (UPUV: 11-12)

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

3.6 The Preface

In the preface Amelia has the chance to outline the mountain location she and L. are going to visit, as well as the remoteness and the anonymity of the region, which would guarantee authentic travellers their protection from hordes of boisterous tourists:

[t]he district described in the following pages occupies that part of the Southern-eastern Tyrol which lies between Botzen, Bruneck, Innichen, and Belluno. Within the space thus roughly indicated are found those remarkable limestone mountains called the Dolomites. [...] Even now, the general public is so slightly informed upon the subject that it is by no means uncommon to find educated persons who have never heard of the Dolomites at all, or who take them for a religious sect, like the Mormons or the Druses. Nor is this surprising when we consider the nature of the ground lying within the area just named; the absence of roads; the impossibility of traversing the heart of the country, except on foot or on mule-back; the tedious postal arrangements; the want of telegraphic communication; and the primitive quality of the accommodation provided for travellers. (UPUV: xxix-xxx)

Before the reader's eyes, Edwards transforms the disadvantages which seclusion could entail into advantages, to the extent that she appears to be as a sort of touristic promoter of the region, since she states that "it is difficult to speak of the people, of the climate, of the scenery, without risk of being thought too partial or too enthusiastic. To say that the arts of extortion are here unknown" (UPUV: xxxi) and "that here one escapes from hackneyed sights, from overcrowded hotels, from the dreary routine of table d'hôtes, from the flood of Cook's tourists" (UPUV: xxxi) would mean that, in Amelia's words, this place is unique and uncontaminated. She goes on to maintain that "life in the South-eastern Tyrol is yet free from all the discomforts that have of late years made Switzerland unendurable; and that for those who love sketching and botany, mountain-climbing and mountain air", (UPUV: xxxi) this mountain district would "offer a 'playground' far more attractive than the Alps." Moreover, Edwards continues her preface by giving advice on how to deal with the difficulties which an arduous land such as that of the Dolomites presents – stamina, proper provisions, spirit of adaptability and familiarity with

German and Italian languages are necessary (UPUV: xxxi-xxxiii) – as well as she lists seven points which intend to summarize Richthofen's coral-reef theory regarding the the geological origins of these mountains. (UPUV: xxxiv-xxxv)

However, in the quotation previously cited, the substantive which indicates Amelia Edwards's reliance on male authorities in order to corroborate her own writing appears. Indeed, the *playground* refers to Leslie Stephen's *The Playground of Europe* (1871), a book in which the author and former president of London's Alpine Club recounts his adventures and mountain climbing in the Swiss Alps. As O'Neill explains, Leslie Stephen's account enthusiastically presents challenging enterprises on the part of its author, whose reward consists in self-congratulatory feelings and romantic, sublime views of the scenery.⁷⁰ His narration is full of hazardous and daring enterprises in the Alps, showing the spirit of the English adventurer who has the world at his disposal for fulfilling his own pleasures. This enthusiasm for mountain adventures was vicariously shared also by those armchair travellers who were eager to know more about these types of alpine activities and, apparently, "[n]o national group in Europe displayed such a passion for peak climbing as the English."⁷¹ However, Stephen's text was probably thought to be addressed to a "more select audience of experienced Alpine climbers"⁷² and when Edwards alludes to him, she not only recognises an authorial voice who has preceded her in the practice of relating mountain ramblings, but she is also underlying "l'originalità del proprio itinerario".⁷³ Indeed, Edwards "reconfigures Stephen's image of the Dolomite region to something more strenuous than a playground. Stressing engagement rather than self-regard, Edwards distinguishes

⁷⁰ O'Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

⁷¹ Morgan, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-59.

⁷² O'Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

⁷³ Scrittori, "Nothing could have been pleasanter than staying – except going", *cit.*, p. 82.

her goals and literary interests from those of the professional mountaineer”,⁷⁴ affirming that either she nor L are “not mountaineers in any sense of the word”. (UPUV:144)

Besides Stephen, in the preface Edwards mentions other male experts who were familiar with the Dolomites region. (UPUV: xxix) She refers to John Ball’s *A Guide to the Eastern Alps* (1868) and Josiah Gilbert and George Cheetham Churchill’s *The Dolomite Mountains: Excursions Through Tyrol, Carinthia, Carniola, & Friuli in 1861, 1862, & 1863* (1864), which were at the time the two reliable, authoritative sources concerning this unknown and savage alpine area. According to O’Neill, Gilbert and Churchill’s volume is the one that seems to have much influenced Amelia’s writing, since the two English travellers (one an artist, the other a botanist) “toured mostly on foot with their wives [named S. and A.], who not only kept up with the men during hikes of up to twelve hours, but also acted as translators, since the men did not speak Italian.”⁷⁵ Unlike Stephen’s account, *The Dolomite Mountains* presents less perilous mountain climbing activities and the two adventures’ choice to ramble through the Dolomites without a proper equipment for climbers⁷⁶ “corresponds to Edwards’s own sense of the physical exertion needed for this region”.⁷⁷ Indeed, she makes reference to the two authors several times in her travelogue, mostly to validate or integrate her statements, for instance when she visits the house of Titian at Pieve di Cadore. At an adjacent house called *Casa Zampieri*, she has the possibility to see an original fresco of the painter: “[t]he subject, which is very simple, consists of only three figures:—a long-haired boy kneeling on one knee, and a seated Madonna, with the Child-Christ

⁷⁴ O’Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

⁷⁵ *Ivi.*

⁷⁶ P. Veronese, (2014, February 16), “1864: La Scoperta delle Dolomiti”, *La Repubblica*, retrieved from http://www.repubblica.it/cultura/2014/02/16/news/la_scoperta_delle_dolomiti-78735025/

⁷⁷ O’Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

standing in her lap. These are relieved against a somewhat indefinite background of pillars and drapery.” (UPUV: 109) Edwards’s artistic competence is instantly recognizable in comments such as this one: “[t]he drawing of this group is not particularly good; the colouring is thin and poor; but there is much dignity and sweetness both in the attitude and expression of the Madonna. The drapery and background have, however, suffered injury at some time or other; and, worse still, restoration.” (UPUV: 109) She concludes the study of the fresco by showing her previous readings: “Mr. Gilbert, who knows more, and has written more, about Cadore than any of Titian's biographers, suggests that the kneeling boy is a portrait of the young painter by himself; and that he ‘commended himself in this manner to the Divine care’ before leaving home in 1486, to become a pupil of Zuccati at Venice.” (UPUV: 110)

With regard to outer sources, it has to be highlighted that Edwards, even if she endeavours to distance herself from any touristy affiliation, betrays her reliance on Murray’s guidebook by mentioning the publisher’s name just once in the whole travel book, when she is talking about what should not be missed according to Murray’s pre-planned itinerary: “Treviso comes next—apparently a considerable place. Here, according to Murray, is a fine Annunciation of Titian to be seen in the Duomo, but we, alas! have no time to stay for it.” (UPUV: 15)

As far as the preface of *Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys* is concerned, it is worth noticing also its last paragraph, where the intrepid Amelia Edwards reveals her unpretentious expectations about the book and a sense of self-devaluation is noticeable when she compares her text to other professional figures:

[i]n conclusion I can only add, that I have tried to give a faithful impression of the country and the people; and as, when on the spot, I endeavoured to sketch that which

defied the pencil, so now I have striven in the following pages to describe that which equally defies the pen. No one knows better than myself how inadequately I have succeeded. Why had I not Mr. Ruskin's power to create landscapes with words? And why, my dear American friends to whom this volume is inscribed, had I not some of those gifts that make your paintings more eloquent than words? Could I have seized the weirdness and poetry of those scenes, VEDDER, as you would have seized them—could I have matched the relative tones of trees, and skies, and mountain-summits, CHARLES CARYLL COLEMAN, with your wonderful fidelity—could I have dipped my brush, TILTON, like you, in the rose and gold of Southern sunsets, what sketches mine would have been, and how nobly this book would have been illustrated! (PREFU: xxxvi-xxxvii)

The overpowering long male tradition of travel writing seems to be the main cause for women's characteristic modest way to propose their travel texts to the reading public. An exhaustive explanation of this common literary device used by women travel writers is given by Mills, who notes that

[w]omen writers are clearly not given the same discursive possibilities to assert as male writers and many are singularly modest in their assertions. [...] The reasons why they make this statement is that women's texts are not supposed to be 'scientific' and authoritative, but rather, supposed to be amateurish. This problematic positioning of these texts often leads to the writing being prefaced with a disclaimer which denies any scientific, academic, literary or other merit; this occurs very frequently with women's travel writing in the nineteenth century.⁷⁸

3.7 The Significance of the Setting

Mills's theory is shared also by Foster, who observes that most female travel texts are "framed by apologia in the form of a preface which appeals for leniency towards any subsequent deficiencies",⁷⁹ and especially Victorian authors were used to recognising their "presumption in daring to tread on what is noted as a well-worn ground. This is especially true in the case of travellers to Italy who see no hope of offering anything new to their readers."⁸⁰ Amelia Edwards was probably worried about the question of originality of her travelogue, and the district she and Lucy decided to travel to was perfectly suitable for Amelia's exigency of showing a part of the Italian landscape adjoining Austria which was

⁷⁸ Mills, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

⁷⁹ Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁸⁰ *Ivi.*

both *untrodden* and *unfrequented*, as the title of Amelia's travel book clearly highlights. As Frawley points out, "Victorian adventuresses [like Edwards] hence willingly chose as their destinations not only the least visited but also the presumably least civilized places, the places about which most new knowledge could be generated."⁸¹ Furthermore, according to Foster, Italy represented both for Amelia and the other Victorian women travellers a *land of dreams*:⁸² "its romantic image was deeply enshrined in England's cultural consciousness and it had become mythologised as a place of enchantment and spiritual transformation".⁸³ Consequently, many authors had already produced numerous accounts concerning the Italian territory, and Amelia's choice to set her story in the secluded Dolomites region was certainly forward-looking in terms of a potential literary success. Edwards tries always to be innovative, even when she describes her stop in Venice in order to prepare for her upcoming rambling;⁸⁴ in fact, she underlines that the city, if compared to a previous visit of hers, in that moment is lively and free from tourists' presence:

somehow, it was less like a dream than a changed reality. It was Venice; but not quite the old Venice. It was a gayer, fuller, noisier Venice; a Venice empty of English and American tourists; full to overflowing of Italians in every variety of summer finery; crowded with artists of all nations sketching in boats, or surrounded by gaping crowds in shady corners and porticos; a Venice whose flashing waters were now cloven by thousands of light skiffs with smart striped awnings of many colours, but whence the hearse-like, tufted gondola, so full of mystery and poetry, had altogether vanished; a Venice whose every side-canal swarmed with little boys learning to dive, and with swimmers of all ages; where dozens of cheap steamers (compared with which the Hungerford penny boats would seem like floating palaces) were hurrying to

⁸¹ Frawley, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

⁸² "Italy: the land of dreams" is the title of the second chapter of Foster's book.

⁸³ Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁸⁴ Amelia's equipment seems to be not that of a climber, but rather that of an English lady determined to preserve her habits. The commodities she purchases are composed by: "two convenient wicker-baskets, and wherewithal to stock them—tea, sugar, Reading biscuits in tins, chocolate in tablets, Liebig's Ramornie extract, two bottles of Cognac, four of Marsala, pepper, salt, arrowroot, a large metal flask of spirits of wine, and an Etna." (UPUV: 11) Probably Edwards simply followed the fashion of the epoch, since, "[a]n array of powder, chemical and spirits clearly was essential for doing battle with the unnerving European entomological world and for dealing with medical matters" and "[t]ravelling stoves known as 'Etnas' were popular with British tourists determined to have their tea." Morgan, *op. cit.*, pp. 18 and 42.

and fro every quarter of an hour between the Riva dei Schiavone and the bathing-places on the Lido (UPUV: 9-10)

However, in the Victorian period, originality was not easy to achieve even in a risky and remote landscape such as that of the Alps, the most important mountain range of the European continent. Recently, Ann C. Colley has demonstrated that, especially from the second half of the nineteenth century, the harmony evoked by those regions apparently unperturbed (railways were about to alter the alpine landscape) started to change. Now an ever-growing quantity of British mountain climbers were invading the Alps: their first preoccupation was not the possible environmental pollution which their massive presence could provoke, but the social consequences which mass tourism and means of transport could generate.

As Colley notes:

[r]eading through the numerous travel narratives, one learns that these tourists, although thrilled to have come to the Alps for a holiday, were often distressed with the crowding that compromised their aesthetic experience. Many were disdainful of the flocks of ridiculous tourists despoiling the scenery. As “the playground of Europe” [...], the Alps were losing the very qualities that had provoked the imagination of the Romantics, whose writings had motivated the recent tourists to come.⁸⁵

Colley does not hesitate to label the tourists of that era as a “contagion, sullyng the original solitude and savagery of the mountains”,⁸⁶ who could have easy access to the territory thanks to Thomas Cook’s package tours, whose quick routes, however, did not consent to contemplate the magnificence of the Alps. Thus, besides the risk of witnessing the distortion of the mountain environment, these Victorian travellers felt that their prerogative to enjoy these uncontaminated zones was put in danger by the new influx of tourists. People of inferior classes, “the so-called *cockneys*[.] were the real pollutants”⁸⁷ and the preoccupation of those early elitist alpine climbers and travellers lay in “the tottering class structure

⁸⁵ A. C. Colley, “Class Pollution in the Alps”, *Victorian Review*, 36:2, Fall 2010, pp. 36-40, p. 37.

⁸⁶ *Ivi.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

surrounding these mountains. The introduction of cheaper excursions threatened to collapse the social framework and upset its sensitive ecosystem.”⁸⁸ Also Ben Anderson observes that the Alps witnessed a democratization of tourism because of a series of interests perpetuated by both British middle-class climbers and the local alpine communities. Anderson maintains that Alpinism was born as an “urban phenomenon”,⁸⁹ since “decisions about the Alps were taken in cities”⁹⁰ and “those ‘bourgeois’, ‘middle-class’ or ‘bürgerlich’ men (and, more problematically, women) who climbed on mountains learnt their performances, and receives their impetus, from urban cultural forms.”⁹¹ However, the Alpine scenery was transformed “into a lucrative tourist domain”⁹² also by those local alpine entrepreneurs who “had a strikingly ‘modern’, profit-orientated relationship to the Alpine tourist.”⁹³

Consequently, it could be plausible that Amelia Edwards might have been affected by this sort of social anxiety which concerned the alpine scenery and, since Italian settings were already much exploited by both traveller and travel writers, she probably preferred the Dolomites district for a number of more or less conscious significant reasons: to escape mass tourism in order to protect her social condition of middle-class British citizen and find a place which permitted her to preserve her ability to contemplate the surrounding landscape undisturbedly; to seek originality in order to enhance her chances of literary success; to put into practice the imaginary visions of the mountains which she had cultivated through

⁸⁸ *Ivi.*

⁸⁹ B. Anderson, *Alpine Communities as Entrepreneurs: Developing the Eastern Alps as an Economic Resource in the mid-Nineteenth Century*, Rural History Conference, 19-22 August 2008, University of Bern. Unpublished conference paper, pp. 1-9, p. 1. Retrieved from http://www.ruralhistory2013.org/papers/6.2.3_Anderson.pdf

⁹⁰ *Ivi.*

⁹¹ *Ivi.*

⁹² *Ivi.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 3. In Amelia Edwards’s travelogue, the figure who more resembles the forward-looking local entrepreneur is Mr Ghedina, who profits from the tourism business. In fact, he and his son are the owners of the famous inn *Aquila Nera* in Cortina, where Amelia and L lodge (see chapters three and four).

her previous readings. Contrary to her second travel book, in *Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys* Amelia Edwards does not mention any official legitimate reason for journeying abroad. As I have explained in 1.4, the *proper purpose* was a typical device of women travel writers to divert any possible suspicion on the part of the public opinion of the epoch that they were travelling just to fulfill their own pleasures, abandoning the home duties. However, it is likely the case that Amelia's public role pushed her to justify her going abroad in order to acquire experience, so that later she could improve both her knowledge and increase "the enlightenments of others through communication of this knowledge. This [propagandistic] motivation impelled those women who explored foreign countries ostensibly in order to collect 'facts' – sociological, botanical, medical or, less frequently, political."⁹⁴

On the one hand, this explanation offered by Foster can be suitable to interpret Edwards's official motivation to discover and write about an uncharted mountain region as an "intrepid explorer" would do,⁹⁵ since she takes particular care to (1) inform readers about the alpine culture; (2) accurately present its flora and fauna; (3) describe as many geological and geographical features of the district as possible, and (4) insert in her account defined measurements of the mountain range.⁹⁶ Edwards is very skillful at mixing the narration of her and L.'s ongoing wayfaring with very precise records concerning the natural environments; for instance, while walking around the Marmolada during a rainy day, they are able to collect some flowers and "secure some specimens of the *Orobus lutens*, *Dryas*

⁹⁴ Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

⁹⁵ Frawley, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

⁹⁶ Bassnett detects colonising intentions also in these activities, as she states that "the process of mapping the natural world, of labelling flora and fauna, ran parallel to the process of mapping territories. Naming the new and labelling it became a means of marking ownership, in both physical and intellectual terms." Bassnett, "Travel writing and gender", *cit.*, p. 231.

octopetala, Primula Farinosa, Pinguicula grandifora, Cynanchum Vincitoxicum, Orchis nigra, &c., &c.; besides several varieties of cyclamen, gentians, and ferns.”

(UPUV: 270) Moreover, while admiring the scenery from above Sasso Bianco, she meticulously reports on the surrounding summits:

[f]inally, above and beyond all these, ranging from North-West to North-East, in the only direction where the horizon is permanently clear, we look over towards a sea of very distant peaks reaching far away into the heart of Northern Tyrol. To the North-West, a little above and to the left of the Sett Sass ridge, we recognise by help of the map the highest summits of the Zillerthal Alps:—the Füss Stein near the Brenner pass, 11,451 feet in height; the five peaks of the Hornspitzen, ranging from 10,333 feet to 10,842 feet; and Hochfeiler, 11,535 feet. Due North, exactly above the Sett Sass, a long snow range glowing in the mid-day sun identifies itself with the Antholzer Alps beyond Bruneck, the highest points of which are the Wildgall (10,785 feet), the Schneeige Nock (11,068 feet) and the Hochgall, still, I believe, unascended, and rising to 11,284 feet. Beyond these again, to the N.N.W., Clementi believes that he recognises the Drei Herrn Spitz (11,492 feet) and the Grosse Venediger (12,053 feet); these last being full forty-five miles distant as the crow flies. (UPUV: 291-92)

Concerning the transmission of scientific information, it has to be highlighted that this was considered a male prerogative, therefore women writers who dare to emulate their male colleagues were considered presumptuous in invading a domain they were not entitled to enter. Also Edwards’s “contributions to scientific knowledge through travel writing were not welcome”,⁹⁷ since generally “women’s travel writing is criticised and accused of falsehood because very often the representations in the text do not fit in with a stereotypical conception of what women can do.”⁹⁸ Hence, again “the difficulty for a woman to write with recognized authority, even about her own experiences, required a writing strategy that was both modest in tone and presented within a carefully researched and verified framework of facts drawn from already established [mostly male] sources.”⁹⁹

However, apart from any possible official, declared proper purpose, I would be inclined to think that Amelia’s private motivation to travel could have been that of accomplishing a personal desire she had been nurturing for a long time, since, at

⁹⁷ O’Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁹⁸ Mills, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

⁹⁹ O’Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

the very first sight of the Dolomites, she exclaims enthusiastically: “[t]he announcement [of the carriage driver] is so unexpected that for the first moment it almost takes one's breath away. [...] there they are, so unfamiliar, and yet so unmistakable! One feels immediately that they are unlike all other mountains, and yet that they are exactly what one expected them to be.” (UPUF: 26-27) Amelia's declaration seems to be the one of a passionate traveller who has previously read about the magic grandeur of the Dolomites, craved to see them, and finally finds herself in front of her long-cherished desire which has come true.

The significance of the setting is brought to the fore by scholars. For instance, Frawley insists that the landscape has its own function for the construction of women travellers' identities: “they used the depictions of scenery to highlight their unique position. [...] [M]any adventuresses positioned themselves in wildernesses evocative of power and change, in spaces that could not be mapped or charted.¹⁰⁰ As a matter of fact, the lady adventurer perceived the wild zone as “a place to align one's identity to the Victorian hero—the spirited, wilful, and successful conqueror of foreign place. At the same time, [...] it was a place to construct identity without the institutional and psychological barriers imposed on that identity in England.”¹⁰¹ Also Morgan dedicates a chapter of her study on Victorian travel writing¹⁰² to the matter of how landscape impinged on British travellers. There, the scholar gives a definition of the explorers' favourite perspective to admire a scenery, which seems also to be the one adopted by Amelia Edwards (it is enough to think of her ascent to Sasso Bianco) and reminds us of the position of the British coloniser seeking new lands to conquer: “natives of Britain shared attitudes about how best to view an outdoor scene, whether in the

¹⁰⁰ Frawley, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-25.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

¹⁰² Morgan, “Landscape and Climate”, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-82.

city or countryside. They preferred looking down, and thus trekked up to high ground, especially when travelling through hilly, mountainous terrain.¹⁰³ Morgan continues her investigation indicating that “Alp-high mountains’ capacity for producing danger and adventure was unattractive to some English travellers, particularly to women. The mountains challenged the quiet, relatively risk-free life so highly cherished by English men and women.”¹⁰⁴ This statement is not true for Edwards, who even seems to find pleasure in embarking on perilous adventures through the Dolomites.

In this respect, very interesting is the analysis offered by Elaine Freedgood in the fourth chapter of her book titled *Victorian Writing about Risk: Imagining a Safe England in a Dangerous World*.¹⁰⁵ According to Freedgood, in fact, “[m]ountaineering memoirs disturb canonical stories of risk by suggesting that the pain of risk has its own pleasures and uses”.¹⁰⁶ In Amelia Edwards’s travelogue, therefore, risk and pleasure appear to be strictly connected, as without pain she could not have achieved the fulfilment of her own pleasures; and very probably Edwards’s pleasures were linked to the Romantic visual experiences of the sublime and the picturesque. For Edwards, the alpine Dolomites represented a “useful geographical other”,¹⁰⁷ that is, a perilous place able to arouse extreme emotions and which was in sharp contrast with the safer landscape of the native England, whose hilly and flat environment infused tranquillity on its people. Freedgood explains that a possible explanation for the fascination exerted by the dangerously beautiful alpine mountains can be provided by psychology, since mountaineering

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹⁰⁵ E. Freedgood, “The uses of pain: cultural masochism and the colonization of the future in Victorian mountaineering memoirs”, in E. Freedgood, *Victorian Writing about Risk: Imagining a Safe England in a Dangerous World*, Port Chester: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 99-131.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

could be considered as a type of masochism: “[t]he climber suffers no matter what: by looking at the scenery he can risk death; by not looking at it he can proceed along his arduous path, knowing that he is missing the superb view that justifies the risk he is taking. He can thus punish himself by looking or not looking”.¹⁰⁸ Also Amelia Edwards’s language sometimes conveys disconcerting images of the Dolomites, and they can be as fascinating as dangerous like weapons:

the mountain [Antelao] consists apparently of innumerable jagged buttresses, huge slopes of shaley débris, and an infinitely varied chain of pallid peaks and pinnacles. Some of these are almost white; some of a pale sulphurous yellow streaked with violet; some splashed with a vivid, rusty red, indicating the presence of iron. One keen, splintered aiguille, sharp as a lance and curved as a shark’s tooth, looked like a scimitar freshly dipped in blood. (UPUV: 41)

Freedgood is right when she shows that the use of violent similes “indicates some authorial anxiety – both in regard to her own safety in such a landscape and perhaps about her self-presentation as a level-headed female mountaineer.”¹⁰⁹ Edwards is willing to put her safety at risk in order to satisfy her own aesthetic pleasures; moreover, she conceals her agitated feelings in order to give prominence to the descriptions of the scenery in her narrative and equate herself to her male colleagues. Exemplary is the narration of an excursion to the Ponte dello Schios on Monte Vederne, when she endangers her life in the interest of a rewarding vista:

[a]t length, when we have mounted to a height of perhaps fifteen hundred feet above the valley, we pass under an impending roof of rock, and find ourselves at the mouth of a gigantic cavern which looks as if it might have been scooped out by some mighty water-power ages ago, when the world was yet unfinished. Beyond this cavern there rises a semi-circular wall of vertical precipice, at the end of which a small cascade leaps out over the ledge and is dispersed in mist before it reaches the brown pool below. Our path turns abruptly into and round the inside of the cavern, and then along a giddy wooden shelf supported on pine-trunks driven into the face of the rock-wall opposite. This is the Ponte dello Schios. The shelf looks horribly unsafe, but is extremely picturesque; and the whole scene, though on a grander scale, reminds one of the cavern and wooden gallery at Tivoli. A little carved and painted Christ under a pent-house roof is fixed against the rock, just at the beginning of the bridge; and an old white-haired man coming down that way, pulls off his hat and stays to mutter an Ave as we pass. (UPUV: 242)

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 104-105.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

According to Freedgood, “[i]n Edwards’s memoir, she suppresses or denies her subjectivity in what seems like a gesture of deference to the world around her. She would bring the Alps to her readers without any authorial meditation or interference.”¹¹⁰ Edwards’s abandonment to the grandeur of the Dolomites, therefore, would be noticeable in the long and recurrent detailed descriptions she makes of the mountain district. For instance, while she and Lucy are in Cortina, Amelia describes the view from the bell tower of the local church in such a specific way:

[t]he panorama, though it included little which we had not seen already, was fine all round, and served to impress the main landmarks upon our memory. The Ampezzo Thal opened away to North and South, and the twin passes of the Tre Croce and Tre Sassi intersected it to East and West. When we had fixed in our minds the fact that Landro and Bruneck lay out to the North, and Perarolo to the South; that Auronzo was to be found somewhere on the other side of the Tre Croce and that to arrive at Caprile it was necessary to go over the Tre Sassi, we had gained something in the way of definite topography. The Marmolata and Civita, as we knew by our maps, were on the side of Caprile; and the Marmarole on the side of Auronzo. The Pelmo, left behind yesterday, was peeping even now above the ridge of the Rochetta; and a group of fantastic rocks, so like the towers and bastions of a ruined castle that we took them at first sight for the remains of some mediæval stronghold, marked the summit of the Tre Sassi to the West. (UPUV: 59-60)

Freedgood maintains that “[t]o the true Alpinist the pain, danger and risk of mountaineering were essential elements; those who experienced mountains without sufficient suffering were tourists.”¹¹¹ Freedgood is not the only critic to highlight how a dangerous landscape impacted on women travellers’ identity. In fact, Foster states that “Italy provided another source of pleasurable fearfulness. [...] [S]uch travel still represented for them an encounter with the unknown, a chance to walk the tightrope between caution and foolhardiness which [...] opened up possibilities of self-exploration and self-testing”.¹¹² Additionally, Birkett observes that “[o]vercoming threats and imagined threats enhanced the women

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

¹¹² Foster, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-52.

travellers' feeling of physical competence in sharp contrast to the illness and lethargy they often suffered at home."¹¹³ Therefore, as for Amelia Edward, deciding to take the risk of travelling in such arduous, unknown mountains paths meant not only to reach the land of her dreams, but also the land which could offer her aesthetic pleasures to present later to her audience, to the detriment, however, of a personal, subjective narrative which might have revealed any possible hesitation regarding the difficulty of the track. Probably Amelia endeavored to conceal her fears, adopting in her account what appears to be a forced self-assured tone – typical of men's travel writing – which objectively portray to readers the Dolomite terrain as much accurately as possible.

3.8 The Aesthetic Pleasures of the Dolomites

Foster underlines the fact that female adventuresses travelling to Italy in the nineteenth century were still influenced by the aesthetic traditions of the sublime and the picturesque to portray the natural scenery they were able to admire, and even “[l]ater in the period, when such vocabulary was becoming increasingly outworn, the women travellers continued to rely on it for their effects.”¹¹⁴ As a matter of fact, in the first chapter of the book titled *Victorians in the Mountains: Sinking the Sublime*,¹¹⁵ Colley examines that aesthetic category of the sublime, which was well-beloved by the Romantics and had always been associated with the contemplation of a panorama, whose intensity, however, started to decline from the second half of the nineteenth century. Colley lists a series of reasons why the concept of the sublime was no more spontaneously felt

¹¹³ Birkett, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

¹¹⁴ Foster, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-57.

¹¹⁵ A. C. Colley, *Victorians in the Mountains: Sinking the Sublime*, Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2010, pp. 13-55.

by the Victorian spectators,¹¹⁶ who now turned out to be too absent-minded to let them be absorbed by the surrounding mountain landscape. Substantially, this emotional state (which can be synthesized as an overwhelming wonder mixed with awe and delight) was now seriously compromised by a series of causes: the bother caused by the hordes of tourists who invaded the mountains and, therefore, altered the conditions for the sublime to be perceptible; the fact that many alpine regions had become charted and familiar (that is, they were less surprisingly exciting to let people experience the sublime); the priority now conferred to the enterprise of climbing and conquering unknown summits, which gave greater prominence to the motor abilities of the climbers rather than to their sensory capacities of surrendering to the aesthetic authority of the sublime; the enhanced sense of British national pride which affected climbers when a new region was conquered, to the detriment of a reduced attention towards a personal research of the sublime; a greater interest for the equipment which, rather than functioning as the backdrop of the expeditions, now occupied pages and pages of many travel books, in place of depictions concerning the sensational emotions aroused by a sublime scenery. Colley observes that the concept of the sublime was judged obsolete by the end of the nineteenth century, and even many literary figures such as Dickens and Butler preferred not to take into consideration in their writings that mystic power once the travellers surrendered themselves to. Moreover, in the third chapter dedicated to lady travellers¹¹⁷ Colley underlines that, in the nineteenth century, a great number of women went in search of adventures and aesthetic pleasures high in the mountains, and the scholar mentions the figure of

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-55.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, "Ladies on High", pp. 101-142.

Amelia Edwards among those brave Victorian female climbers who “frequently benefited from an admiration for their mountaineering ambitions.”¹¹⁸

Consequently, as Colley has showed, if the aesthetic category of the sublime was no longer so recurrent in the depictions of the mountain sceneries from mid-nineteenth century, this tendency is evident also in Amelia’s travelogue, since the authoress is inclined to neglect this adjective. On the other hand, our writer draws upon the category of the picturesque to portray the Dolomites landscape, as Lori N. Brister rightly observes: “[t]hroughout *Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys*, Edwards uses the term *picturesque* nearly two dozen times to describe everything from panoramic views to towns, ravines, and bridges.”¹¹⁹ Amelia’s reliance on the language of the visual arts is patent in the extended descriptions of the panorama such as this one, when she refers to the hamlet of Cadore:

[p]ictorially speaking, it is a purely Italian subject, majestic, harmonious, classical; with just sufficient sternness in the mountain forms to give sublimity, but with no outlines abrupt or fantastic enough to disturb the scenic repose of the composition. In the foreground we have the ravine of the Molina spanned by a picturesque old bridge, at the farther end of which a tiny chapel clings to an overhanging ledge of cliff. In the middle distance, seen across an intervening chasm of misty valley, the little far-away town of Cadore glistens on its strange saddle-back ridge, watched over as of old by its castle on the higher slope above. Farthest of all, rising magnificently against the clear afternoon sky, the fine pyramidal mass of Monte Pera closes in the view. For light and shadow, for composition, for all that goes to make up a landscape in the grand style, the picture is perfect. Nothing is wanting—not even the foreground group to give its life; for here come a couple of bullock trucks across the bridge, as primitive and picturesque as if they had driven straight out of the fifteenth century. It is just such a subject as Poussin might have drawn, and Claude have coloured. (UPUV: 119-20)

As Malcom Andrews points out, “the word [picturesque] is a valuable coin in the currency of tourism. It means ‘like a picture’ and implies that each scene fills some pictorial prescriptions in terms of subject-matter or composition.”¹²⁰ Therefore, William Gilpin’s “rules were absorbed into the culture of tourism and circulated

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

¹¹⁹ L. N. Brister, *Looking for the Picturesque: Tourism, Visual Culture, and the Literature of Travel in the Long Nineteenth Century*, PhD diss., 2015, p. 84. Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1671785761?accountid=17274>

¹²⁰ M. Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760-1800*, Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1989. p. vii.

through discourse”¹²¹ and, even if Amelia Edwards “does not mention Gilpin explicitly, she does invoke his perpetual touchstones, Poussin and Claude”¹²² to present to readers her impressions of the Dolomites environment.

3.9 Conclusion

In Amelia Edwards’s text, therefore, the effect of the picturesque seems to be preferred over that of the sublime; it is important to remember that Amelia, besides being an accomplished writer, was also a skilful artist, therefore her propensity probably was that of catching and then narrating pictorial aspects of the Dolomites district. It was also likely that, as a mountaineer, her audacity also pushes her to seek sublime mountain sites, as Scrittori suggests: “[l]’itinerario geografico del viaggio di Amelia [...] le offre in primo luogo la possibilità di misurarsi con il ‘sublime’ delle montagne”.¹²³ As we have seen, pain and risk were common components of the lives of Victorian women adventuresses. As Clare Roche maintains, these “[m]iddle class women journeyed in increasing numbers to the Alps during the last half of the nineteenth century; a substantial minority climbed. [...] [They] ignored contemporary medical advice to avoid strenuous exercise and challenges the notion that climbing and the high Alps were a uniquely male place.”¹²⁴ However, Amelia was not a climber in the proper sense of the word. It is true that Edwards ascended and conquered Sasso Bianco for the first time, but I am inclined to think of her not as a extreme climber constantly risking her life in order to grasp sublime views, but rather as an enthusiast and curious

¹²¹ Brister, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

¹²² *Ivi.*

¹²³ Scrittori, “Nothing could have been pleasanter than staying – except going”, *cit.*, pp. 83-84.

¹²⁴ C. Roche, “Women Climbers 1850–1900: A Challenge to Male Hegemony?”, *Sport in history* 33:3 (2013), pp. 236-259, p. 236. DOI: 10.1080/17460263.2013.826437.

mountaineer, whose passion for visual arts led her to search for picturesque sites and views of the Dolomites. The result of Amelia's wanderings through the mountains consists in a carefully composed travelogue, which presents to her reading audience elements of originality (the Dolomites were still an unchartered region of the Alps, far from the tracks beaten by tourists), fictional devices (entertaining dialogues and characterizations enrich her narrative) and a tension which is characteristic of the majority of Victorian women's travel writing (she intersperses her personal descriptions of the mountain scenery with more detached, scientific observations typical of the long tradition of male travel writing).

A Thousand Miles up the Nile:

Amelia Edwards Depicts Egypt

4.1 Introduction

Not much time passed between the voyage Amelia Edwards undertook to the Dolomites and her long journey to Egypt. In fact, “Amelia Edwards arriva al Cairo, prima tappa del suo viaggio sul Nilo, nel febbraio del 1874 e, dopo tre anni, ne pubblica il resoconto in *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*.”¹ Once again, Edwards decided to embark on her travel through Egypt accompanied by her faithful companion Lucy. While during their previous Dolomites tour the two English lady explorers practically travelled undisturbed through the isolated mountain routes, in Egypt they have the chance to encounter some other fellow adventurers, who share Amelia and Lucy’s idea to sail the Nile and admire the magnificent archaeological masterpieces of the ancient Egyptian civilization down the long course of the enchanting African river. Contrary to the Dolomites region, Egypt was a destination which a great number of Victorian travellers chose to visit, probably encouraged by the control exerted over the country by the British colonial government. That is to say, in the nineteenth century the wilderness of the country was made accessible to those well-off English travellers who could afford a

¹ Scrittori, “Nothing could have been pleasanter than staying – except going”, cit., p. 86.

strenuous trip to this renowned country, reassured to obtain, in any case, the protection from their homeland. In Egypt, British explorers could find the right amount of exoticism and remoteness, and Amelia Edwards was probably conscious that the site she would have later narrated of was considered alluring to a great number of readers of travel literature. Most likely, Edwards could count on the popularity of the subject-matter in order to capture the reading audience's attention, make the travelogue a successful publication and enhance her public role as an authoritative personality. According to John Marx, in fact, "in the 1870s and 80s the Nile Valley was on the minds of a great many Britons. Up river, Britain and France vied to control the Nile's source in the end game of African partition. Back in London, meanwhile, the frenzy for ancient artifacts and a passion for Egyptian style had made anything 'Egypt' a singularly hot commodity."²

For Amelia this journey was of particular significance, since it represented the springboard for her later career as an Egyptologist. As O'Neill explains, "[i]n *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*, her employment of the dominant discourses of her culture reveals how Edwards used the travel genre to effect her transformation from a 'lady novelist' and intrepid traveler to a public intellectual."³ By employing Julia Kuehn's terms, through the pages of her text, Amelia Edwards is eager to present to readers her "picturesque views"⁴ of the Egyptian land. As a matter of fact, compared to her previous travelogue, "[i]n *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*, Edwards uses *picturesque* even more frequently, describing landscapes, caravans,

² J. Marx, *Modernist Novel and the Decline of Empire*, Cambridge [etc.]: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 101.

³ O'Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

⁴ J. Kuehn, "Amelia Edwards's Picturesque Views of Cairo: Touring the Land, Framing the Foreign", *Nineteenth-century Gender Studies*, 5:3, Winter 2009, pp. 1-30. Retrieved from <http://www.ncgsjournal.com/issue53/kuehn.htm>

bazaars, cities, and other visual spectacles.”⁵ Amelia’s second travel book is also enriched by a totality of eighty perfectly executed illustrations and drawings made by the authoress, which visually captivate the readers’ imagination and translate into images the authoress’s pictorial descriptions of the country. As Billie Melman notices, through images, in fact, Amelia is able to “capture the emotionally charged landscape of the East.”⁶ However, as Kuehn points out, an imperialistic hue is noticeable in this apparently naïve activity: the foreign reality is at Amelia’s disposal, who catches and tries to aesthetically appropriate, organize and depict the Egyptian exotic territory for the English audience’s use and consumption.⁷ In this respect, Melissa Lee Miller points out that “Edwards’ career up until the trip as a well-published novelist [...] suggests that she was already interested in transforming her experiences into a literary commodity”.⁸ It seems that Edwards wants to decipher the Egyptian reality in order to make it comprehensible for her English readers, like when, for instance, she has to describe the size of a hieroglyphed sarcophagus contained in a chamber of the Sarapeum (temple) at Sakkârah: “[f]our persons might sit in it round a small card-table, and play a rubber comfortably.”⁹ In this regard, according to Rees, Amelia “understands perfectly that the aid of the familiar is required to ease understanding of the strange and the alien”.¹⁰

⁵ Brister, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

⁶ B. Melman, *Women’s Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918: Sexuality, Religion and Work*, Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1992, p. 215.

⁷ Kuehn, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

⁸ M. L. Miller, *The Imperial Feminine: Victorian Women Travelers in Late Nineteenth-Century Egypt*, PhD diss., 2000, pp. 93-94. Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304603744?accountid=17274>

⁹ A. B. Edwards, *A Thousand Miles Up The Nile*. 1889. Reprint, London: Century Publishing, 1982, p. 57. Henceforward, quotations from Amelia Edwards’ second travelogue will be given in the text in brackets as (TMUN: page number).

¹⁰ Rees, *Amelia Edwards*, cit., p. 47.

4.2 Amelia Edwards's Perspective: The Use of the Picturesque

In Egypt, Amelia Edwards is able to convey the magic of the land through the language of the visual arts, as she has already done in *Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys*. Amelia's artistic ability permits her to observe the landscape which surrounds her through the artist's lens and the outcome of this inclination on the part of the writer is a narration filled with terminologies used in the domain of art. It is true that the book is "largely scholarly in purpose and heavily weighted, especially in the later editions,¹¹ with authenticating material."¹² This is immediately discernible when Amelia loads her text with prolonged descriptions of the monuments and finds of ancient Egypt (her erudite intentions are traceable also in the fifteenth chapter dedicate to the story of the most important Pharaoh, Ramses the Second). However, Edwards also enriches her narrative with lyrical portrayals of the panorama, and she depicts Egypt as if she was describing a series of paintings representing this exotic land. What emerges before Amelia's eyes seems to be an interrupted picturesque scenery and she appears to be enthusiast to display to her reading audience all her knowledge concerning the Egyptian land and culture. According to Marx, in fact,

¹¹ According to Rees (*Writings on the Nile*, cit., pp. 80-81) Amelia Edwards "took the informative part of the book very seriously. Far from rushing into print when she came back from Egypt, she spent two years in confirming and extending her knowledge and taking pains to consult the best authorities. In the following years she developed her knowledge further and a revised edition of *A Thousand Miles* in 1889 came ballasted with footnotes correcting and bringing-up-to-date the 1877 text." In fact, the 1889 edition of Amelia's travelogue begins with a "Preface to the Second Edition" which is signed by Edwards and reports as place and date of composition "Westbury-on-Trim, October 1888." In such preface the writer states her intentions, as she warns readers of the changes she has made to her book and clearly distances herself from the role of guide-book writer: "FIRST published in 1877, this book has been out of print for several years. I have therefore very gladly revised it for a new and cheaper edition. In so revising it, I have corrected some of the historical notes by the light of later discoveries; but I have left the narrative untouched. Of the political changes which have come over the land of Egypt since that narrative was written, I have taken no note; and because I in no sense offer myself as a guide to others, I say nothing of the altered conditions under which most Nile travellers now perform the trip. All these things will be more satisfactorily, and more practically, learned from the pages of Baedeker and Murray." (TMUN: n. pag.)

¹² O'Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

Amelia Edwards was among those whose writing effectively captures for English readers the local colour of the colonial world depicted by picturesque art. Her speciality was rendering the small but telling differences of life abroad, differences that the British colonial government was attempting to subsume and modernize.¹³

Amelia Edwards's use of the picturesque is particular and out of date, as Brister observes: "Edwards is writing a century after Gilpin, long after the romantic landscapes of Claude have fallen out of vogue, and after photographic realism captured the visual imagination; furthermore, she is writing about a landscape that does not correspond to the eighteenth century ideals of the picturesque."¹⁴ Brister continues her analysis maintaining that "Edwards's turn from the Dolomites to the desert marks the shift in popular usage of the term, away from Gilpin's formulae towards its current popular usage as simply a poetic, albeit it trite [sic], synonym for beautiful".¹⁵ Despite Edwards's most likely odd use of the aesthetic category of the picturesque, this is the term upon which the authoress relies, and this is evident, for instance, when she recounts her first days in Cairo, the place of departure and arrival of Amelia and Lucy's journey. Here the writer is keen on examining from a picturesque point of view the Cairene bazaars, which are the local markets of the city:



6. Carpet Bazaar, Cairo

The carpet bazaar is of considerable extent, and consists of a network of alleys and counter-alleys opening off to the right of the Muski, which is the Regent Street of Cairo. The houses in most of these alleys are rich in antique lattice-windows and Saracenic doorways. One little square is tapestried all round with Persian and Syrian rugs, Damascus saddle-bags, and Turkish prayer-carpets. The merchants sit and smoke in the midst of their goods ; and up in one corner an old "Kahwagee," or coffee-seller, plies his humble trade. He has set up his little stove and hanging-shelf beside the doorway of a dilapidated Khan, the walls of which are faced with Arabesque panellings in old carved stone. It is one of the most picturesque "bits" in Cairo. The striped carpets of Tunis ; the dim grey and

¹³ Marx, *Modernist Novel and the Decline of Empire*, cit., p. 101.

¹⁴ Brister, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

¹⁵ *Ivi.*

blue, or grey and red fabrics of Algiers ; the shaggy rugs of Laodicea and Smyrna ; the rich blues and greens and subdued reds of Turkey ; and the wonderfully varied, harmonious patterns of Persia, have each their local habitation in the neighbouring alleys. One is never tired of traversing these half-lighted avenues all aglow with gorgeous colour and peopled with figures that come and go like the actors in some Christmas piece of Oriental pageantry. (TMUN: 8-10)

As far as the aesthetic representation of a foreign reality is concerned, very interesting is the analysis offered by Kuehn. According to the scholar, the principal features of the sublime scenery reside in “roughness, ruggedness, convoluted and broken forms, a jungle-like profusion and an overall complex, yet playful and harmonious, variety.”¹⁶ Moreover, Kuehn explains that the picturesque “assortment of varied components appealed to the roving eye”.¹⁷ This is exactly what we can find in the pages of *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*: the Egyptian land, characterised by its irregular, puzzling, crumbling but extremely appealing cultural, environmental, ethnographic and historical attractions, is able to firmly grasp the curious and witty attention of Amelia Edwards, who remained so much fascinated by Egypt that not only decided to dedicate an entire book to the journey undertaken in this country, but, from then on, unsettled her existence, devoting her last chapter of her life to the cause of Egyptology. For instance, this is how Amelia expresses her emotional state after having visited the temple complex of Philae:

I look ; I listen ; I promise myself that I will remember it all in years to come – all the solemn hills, these silent colonnades, these deep, quiet spaces of shadow, these sleeping palms. Lingered till it is all but dark, I at last bid them farewell, fearing lest I may behold them no more. (TMUN: 389)

Amelia’s portrayal of the Egyptian country is a fine combination of detailed, empirical information and passionate, aesthetic reflections, practically what constitutes on the whole her unique picturesque approach. In other words, Edwards’s extended observations of whatever falls under her notice appear to be extremely meticulous descriptions of animated paintings. As I have showed before,

¹⁶ Kuehn, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹⁷ *Ivi.*

this is the way in which Amelia narrates her first reactions to the chaotic Cairene markets:



7. Cairo Donkey

[b]ut in order thoroughly to enjoy an overwhelming, ineffaceable first impression of Oriental out-of-doors life, one should begin in Cairo with a day in the native bazaars; neither buying, nor sketching, nor seeking information, but just taking in scene after scene, with its manifold combinations of light and shade, colour, costume, and architectural detail. Every shop-front, every street corner, every turbaned group is a ready-made picture. The old Turk who sets up his cake-stall in the recess of a sculptured doorway ; the donkey-boy with his gaily caparisoned ass, waiting for customers ; the beggar asleep on the steps of the mosque ; the veiled woman filling her water jar at the public fountain – they all look as if they had been put there expressly to be painted. Nor is the background less picturesque than the figures. (TMUN: 3)

Amelia Edwards's method to describe the foreign reality, therefore, is not limited to objective descriptions typical of the guide books, but her style is characterised also by picturesque observations. According to Kuehn, in fact,

Edwards's frequent turn to interpretation, metaphor and comment [...] are better understood through her hybrid, namely scientific and romantic approach to Egyptology: she describes detail, perhaps even catalogues it, but with an eye on synthesising her description and analysis of components in a more meaningful composition and totality. [...] Edwards, by describing and distinguishing the individual parts, produces a harmonious effect of the whole, which cannot merely be rationalised but must also be sensed. The detailed account of all the different trade-specific bazaars [...] thus contributes to creating the impression of the aesthetic whole and sum of Cairo's markets.¹⁸

¹⁸ Kuehn, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

4.3 About the Book: Structure and Itinerary

Amelia Edwards's second travelogue is structured more or less in the same way as her previous travel book. Edwards's formula does not seem to have changed much. For my dissertation I have availed myself of the 1982 edition of the memoir issued by Century Publishing, which contains the revisions made by the authoress to the 1877 publication of *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*. Consequently, it refers to the modified edition of 1889, which not only presents the already mentioned "Preface to the Second Edition", but also the "Preface to the First Edition", which illustrates to the reading audience the writer's initial declarations and acknowledgments.

As it happened with *Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys*, Amelia has arranged the book in chapters (twenty-two in total), whose titles report the various places and cities visited by the two intrepid English travellers. Their boldness is underlined by Quentin Crewe, who asserts that "it is surprising that two ladies could, in 1873, undertake a journey up the Nile in a flat-bottomed, wooden boat. [...] It is true that Thomas Cook had already started steamer trips up the river [...] but it was still a great adventure."¹⁹ By looking at the contents, the round-trip itinerary of Amelia's journey is evident: in fact, the first chapter is titled "Cairo and the Great Pyramid", while the last one bears the title "Abydus and Cairo".

Contrary to the Dolomites travelogue, the Egyptian memoir presents also four detailed appendices concerning the history of ancient Egypt. Appendices and extended footnotes demonstrate the academic intent on the part of the authoress

¹⁹ Q. Crewe, "Introduction" to Amelia B. Edwards's *A Thousand Miles up the Nile* (1889), London: Century Publishing, 1982, p. xxiv.

and the consequent aim to elevate her public role within the patriarchal field of Egyptology.

Unfortunately, this time readers cannot count on the aid of an illustrative map which would help them to keep up with Amelia and Lucy's numerous movements along the country. I personally think that the difficulty to follow their path is also enhanced by the unfamiliarity of certain names of places, some of which have completely changed or disappeared from contemporary geography (for instance, the site of Bedreshayn, cited in chapters three and four, is not traceable in any modern-day chart). Another little flaw in Amelia's narration is the scarcity of temporal references, but, as we have already seen in her mountain tale, hers is not a journal in its proper sense and dates are not so recurrent. As Edwards herself admits, in Egypt "we had lost all count of the true time. [...] The confusion became at last so great that [...] we decided to establish an arbitrary canon ; so we called it seven when the sun rose, and six when it set". (TMUN: 326) Anyway, the story recounts the journey along the Nile in a linear succession, and Cairo represents for Edwards the place where her travel begins and ends. Again, Amelia takes advantage of her alter ego, that is *The Writer*, and the account is told in the first person.

Amelia and Lucy start their trip in Egypt in the winter of 1873, after a European journey which saw them passing through France and Italy. In fact, Moon reports that the two ladies went to several cities and towns, including Paris, Vichy, Clermont-Ferrand, Royat, Murat, Le Puy, Nimes, Marseilles, Genoa, Bologna and Brindisi.²⁰ From Brindisi "[t]he crossing to Alexandria on board the *Simla* was indeed rough, and took three days, and after berthing they still had to endure three

²⁰ Moon, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-15.

days of quarantine before they could land.”²¹ After such tiring journey, the two friends “without definite plans, outfit, or any kind of Oriental experience, [...] arrived in Cairo on the 29th of November 1873, literally, and most prosaically, in search of fine weather.” (TMUN: 3) Actually, the travelogue does not finish in Cairo,



8. Sphinx and Pyramids

but in the close Giza, where they have the opportunity to ascend the Great Pyramid (Amelia’s physical agility and stamina is highlighted during her oriental voyage as well) and from there

enjoying the breathtaking vista “to the measureless desert in its mystery of light and silence ; to the Nile where it gleams out again and again, till it melts at last into that faint far distance beyond which lie Thebes, and Philæ, and Abou Simbel.” (TMUP: 492) The last date reported in Amelia’s memoir refers to a menu of a dinner organised on the 31st of March, 1874 at the British Consulate in Luxor. (TMPN: 456) As a result of this, Edwards’s travel across the Egyptian soil should have lasted approximately four months.

After the significant Egyptian experience, Amelia and Lucy did not repeat the route of their outward journey to Egypt, but they “left Cairo for Ismailia, travelled the next day by steamer to Port Said, and then on 3 May boarded a French steamer for Beirut.”²² Moon explains that the two women during the month of May, 1874 traversed “Lebanon, camping at nights in tents”²³ (prudently escorted by a male

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 131.

²³ *Ivi.*

guide),²⁴ in order to arrive at Damascus. Indeed, “Lebanon, Syria and Palestine were frequently visited by European travellers before or after Egypt”.²⁵ After having returned to Beirut, the English ladies reached Turkey by steamer, where they had the chance to see Constantinople. Athens was their next destination, along with the Greek island of Corfu. The spinning itinerary of Amelia and Lucy’s return journey took them to Trieste, then Vienna, Frankfurt and finally “London, which they reached at 11 p.m. on 29 June 1874.”²⁶

4.4 Amelia Edwards’s Proper Purpose

As I have shown in 1.4, in the nineteenth century women travellers had to find a legitimate excuse for their travels, because leaving their homelands meant neglecting their home duties: this, for a Victorian woman, was considered very unusual, or even dishonourable. As Birkett points out, “[a]fter crossing new horizons into a fresh mental and physical world, women travellers looked for a part to play in these foreign landscapes which would at once legitimize and prolong their travels.”²⁷ Therefore, declaring one’s own proper reason to travel abroad was a typical device adopted by female explorers, and it is not difficult to find in their writings opening intentional statements for going out of the country. The proper purposes asserted by women travel writers were various. According to Frawley,

[o]ne of the most characteristic strategies invoked by adventuresses to domesticate their activities abroad²⁸ was to conceptualize them as health-related. Although many of these women aligned their identities to imperial (and hence male) heroes, they

²⁴ His name is Tolhamy, who is the same guide who chaperoned Amelia and Lucy during their Nile travel. *Ivi*.

²⁵ *Ivi*.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

²⁷ Birkett, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

²⁸ In other words, making their expeditions abroad conventionally accepted by Victorian British society.

capitalized on those components of the domestic ideal that assigned them special abilities that served imperial interest. Most often, they featured their “natural” competence as supervisors of their family’s moral and physical health. But they moved the sphere for this activity from the English hearth to places where people—for example, the natives—were ostensibly more in need of their care, places where morality was assumed to be absent. [...] By finding ills abroad and by helping to attend to and cure those ills, women who constructed identities as Victorian adventuresses went some way toward justifying their status as women working outside of the home.²⁹

On the one hand, it is true that in Egypt Amelia Edwards has several occasions to confront herself with the poor living conditions of the local people. She does not hesitate to comment upon the difficulties that women and children, above all, have to endure. For instance, when Amelia finds herself in Minieh, she states that

[i]t may be that ophthalmia especially prevailed in this part of the country, or that being brought unexpectedly into the midst of a large crowd, one observed the people more narrowly, but I certainly never saw so many one-eyed human beings as that morning at Minieh. [...]Not being a particularly well-favoured race, this defect added the last touch of repulsiveness to faces already sullen, ignorant, and unfriendly. A more unprepossessing population I would never wish to see – the men half stealthy, half insolent ; the women bold and fierce ; the children filthy, sickly, stunted, and stolid. Nothing in provincial Egypt is so painful to witness as the neglected condition of very young children. Those belonging to even the better class are for the most part shabbily clothed and of more than doubtful cleanliness ; while the offspring of the very poor are simply encrusted with dirt and sores, and swarming with vermin. It is at first hard to believe that the parents of these unfortunate babies err, not from cruelty, but through sheer ignorance and superstition. Yet so it is ; and the time when these people can be brought to comprehend the most elementary principles of sanitary reform is yet far distant. [...]For my own part, I had not been many weeks on the Nile before I began systematically to avoid going about the native towns whenever it was practicable to do so. (TMUN: 85-86)

In this passage, Amelia Edwards presents to readers the desperate state of health of those Egyptians who live in the peripheral regions of Egypt. However, Amelia’s concern for the native population is not as sincere as it appears to be. Actually, the authoress’s tone is unequivocal: her “mock sympathy and barely masked superiority”³⁰ reveal that even Amelia Edwards cannot escape that “imperialistic rhetoric”³¹ which characterises most Victorian travel writing. Moreover, Frawley points out that “Victorian adventuresses repeatedly returned in their accounts to observations designed to corroborate a ‘survival of the fittest’ paradigm. [...]

²⁹ Frawley, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-15.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

³¹ *Ivi.*

[D]istance was a necessary ingredient of travel writing because it enables the author/ ethnographer to preserve a sense of difference.”³²

Edwards’s mission is not that of helping others, even if this humanitarian purpose on the part of women travellers appears to have been a customary practice acknowledged by the locals as well. As a matter of fact, Amelia highlights how Egyptian natives would take for granted the medical competence of Europeans, and she does not miss the opportunity to underline the locals’ inferior status: “[t]heir trust in the skill of the passing European is [...] unbounded. Appeals for advice and medicine were constantly being made to us by both rich and poor ; and there was something very pathetic in the simple faith with which they accepted any little help we were able to give them.” (TMUN: 108) Additionally, as Birkett notices, “[a]t Ayserat, outside Cairo, Amelia Edwards was begged by a wife of Ratab Aga, a local notable, for medicines for her little boy.”³³ However, Edwards reports that “[i]t was in vain to tell her that we knew nothing of the nature of his disease and had no skill to cure it. She still entreated, and would take no refusal ; so in pity we sent her some harmless medicines.” (TMUN: 479)

Therefore, Amelia Edwards’s proper purpose for reaching Egypt is not to “administer health”³⁴ to others. The target of Amelia’s mission is not the most deprived Egyptian inhabitants, but herself. Indeed, Edwards’s reason for departing England is the one declared in the first pages of her book:

[w]e intended, of course, to go up the Nile ; and had any one ventured to inquire in so many words what brought us to Egypt, we should have replied: – “Stress of weather.” For in simple truth we had drifted hither by accident, with no excuse of health, or business, or any serious object whatever ; and had just taken refuge in Egypt as one might turn aside into the Burlington Arcade or the Passage des Panoramas – to get out of the rain. And with good reason. Having left home early in September for a few weeks’ sketching in central France, we had been pursued by the wettest of wet weather. Washed out of the hill-country, we fared no better in the plains. At Nismes, it

³² *Ibid.*, p. 124.

³³ Birkett, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

³⁴ Frawley, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

poured for a month without stopping. Debating at last whether it were better to take our wet umbrellas back at once to England, or push on farther still in search of sunshine, the talk fell upon Algiers – Malta – Cairo ; and Cairo carried it. Never was distant expedition entered upon with less premeditation. (TMUN: 2)

It is striking that, in this initial statement, Amelia appears to be so frank and careless of the public opinion of her epoch. Contrary to what readers would have expected from a Victorian woman's travelogue, in *A Thousand Miles up the Nile* the motivation adopted by Edwards turns out to be very shallow. I am inclined to think that Amelia's escape from the French bad weather could be a possible way to preserve her own and Lucy's health, "since certain locations or circumstances were obviously curative – a long-sea voyage, well-accredited spas, healthful mountain resorts or warm tropical climates, for example."³⁵

Nevertheless, recent criticism has demonstrated that the writer's excuse of the weather, passed off as the official one by Edwards, would not be her most sincere motivation for reaching Egypt. Personally, I believe that it is hard to consider her Egyptian travel as unplanned. I do not agree with Rees, who takes for granted the fact that Amelia's journey to Egypt "was quite unpremeditated and almost accidental."³⁶ The critic also asserts that "[t]he visit soon acquired a mission, however, for Longman, Amelia's publisher, no sooner heard where she was than he commissioned a book."³⁷ On the contrary, I agree with Moon, who suggests that Amelia had been wishing to see Egypt for a long time.³⁸ As it happened for her Dolomites travel, again Amelia has read intensely about Egypt. Indeed, she acknowledges the impact exerted on her by previous readings:

³⁵ Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

³⁶ Rees, *Writings on the Nile*, cit., p. 70. Rees confirms this theory by stating that Amelia and Lucy "[o]n the spur of the moment and with no plan in mind, they decided to go to Egypt." J. Rees, "Amelia Edwards's Nile Journey", in B. Bijon and G. Gâcon (eds.), *In-between two worlds: narratives by female explorers and travellers, 1850-1945*, New York: Peter Lang, 2009, pp. 143-49, p. 143.

³⁷ Rees, *Amelia Edwards*, cit., p. 37.

³⁸ Moon, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

[a]s a child *The Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians* had shared my affections with *The Arabian Nights*³⁹ I had read every line of the old six-volume edition over and over again. I knew every one of the six hundred illustrations by heart. Now I suddenly found myself in the midst of old and half-forgotten friends. Every subject on these wonderful walls was already familiar to me. Only the framework, only the colouring, only the sand under-foot, only the mountain slope outside, were new and strange. It seemed to me that I had met all these kindly brown people years and years ago – perhaps in some previous stage of existence ; that I had walked with them in their gardens ; listened at the music of their lutes and tambourines ; pledged them at their feasts. (TMUN: 415)

Moreover, Amelia might have been influenced also by the tourist trend of the epoch and by the adventures of her female colleagues as well. As a matter of fact, in the nineteenth century other remarkable books on the Egyptian land were written by women travellers,⁴⁰ for instance Harriet Martineau's *Eastern Life, Present and Past* (1848), Florence Nightingale's *Letters from Egypt: A Journey on the Nile 1849–1850* (1854), Lucie Duff Gordon's *Letters from Egypt 1863-1865* (1865) and Emmeline Lott's *The English Governess in Egypt, Harem Life in Egypt and Constantinople* (1866). They all focus on Egypt and demonstrate the fact that, after all, in the nineteenth century “[a] visit to Egypt was certainly not a completely novel idea.”⁴¹

Hence, I would argue that, on the one hand, Amelia's travel to Egypt satisfied her imaginations, since she probably craved to see that ancient land she had read much about. On the other, being Egypt also a Victorian fashionable destination, the narration of the country could meet the tastes of a considerable number of readers. Commercially speaking, Amelia probably was aware that, thanks to the subject-matter of her travelogue, she could conquer a broad market share, and therefore enhance the probabilities to augment her finances.

³⁹ John Gardner Wilkinson is the author of *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians* (1837). *The Arabian Nights* is the alternative title for the old collection of Arabic tales known as *One Thousand and One Nights*.

⁴⁰ In her travelogue, Amelia Edwards mentions both Harriet Martineau (TMUP: 354) and Lucie Duff Gordon (TMUN: 454).

⁴¹ Moon, op. cit., p. 112.

4.5 Not a Touristy Book: Amelia Edwards's Pursuit of Originality

According to Frawley,

Africa and other regions of the world associated with imperial interest were populated during the century by missionaries, soldiers, merchants, and explorers, and Victorian adventuresses were associated with this activity. That many of these women continued, despite the widespread activity in these regions, to represent them as if they had hitherto been 'unknown' suggests the extent to which they wanted to marshal evidence of their own contributions to geographic knowledge.⁴²

Consequently, when well-off middle- and upper-class British travellers did not have the chance to visit Egypt, they could, in any case, vicariously experience the country through the pages of the many books composed on the topic. Therefore, Amelia, in order to gain literary success, has to compose an original literary product to capture readers' interest. Edwards's writing turns out to be very different from a guidebook. Indeed, the authoress does not only give useful information, but enriches her account with subjective descriptions of the foreign reality. Actually, in *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*, she sometimes refers to Murray in order to corroborate her own text,⁴³ but she also underlines some deficiencies in Murray's handbook:

[t]his being so, the traveller is ill equipped who goes through Egypt without something more than a mere guide-book knowledge of Rameses II. He is, as it were, content to read the Argument and miss the Poem. In the desolation of Memphis, in the shattered splendour of Thebes, he sees only the ordinary pathos of ordinary ruins. As for Abou Simbel, the most stupendous historical record ever transmitted from the past to the present, it tells him a but half-intelligible story. Holding to the merest thread of explanation, he wanders from hall to hall, lacking altogether that potent charm of foregone association which no Murray can furnish. (TMUN: 263)

In this way, Amelia is suggesting her readers to go beyond the conventional guidelines of any Murray or Baedeker handbook and discover the foreign world from an unusual, different perspective. In other words, the authoress is advising

⁴² Frawley, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

⁴³ For instance, while Amelia Edwards is visiting the ancient Egyptian city of Thebes, she suggests readers to avail themselves of Murray's account in order to obtain further information on the temple of Ramses III, that is Medinet Haboo: "[i]n the present instance, therefore, I will note only a few points of special interest, referring those who wish for fuller particulars to the elaborate account of Medinet Habu in Murray's *Handbook of Egypt*." (TMUN: 423)

her audience not to be content with factual, detached information on the country, but prefer a sentimental, subjective prose which characterises her account and would permit to see Egypt from a truer and more intensive point of view.

Moreover, "*A Thousand Miles* depicts Edwards sailing conventionally southward up the Nile, towards Nubia and what is now the Sudan".⁴⁴ That is to say, in the Victorian period, foreign explorers were used to following a standard track to discover the country, but even if, during the century, Egypt became a well-travelled destination and so much described by travel writers, Amelia Edwards tried to catch the reader's attention offering them a narrative as much original as possible. The fact that Egypt was then an overcrowded country is highlighted by Edwards, who betrays a hint of annoyance while she has to admit the unavoidable presence of mass tourists in this exotic land. In fact, more than once does the authoress underline that she is not part of those insensible tourists, who keep themselves busy by incessantly purchasing more or less authentic local products from Egyptian salesmen swarming about the numerous tourist sites.⁴⁵ For instance, in Philae she reports that

[t]he amount of "bazaar" that takes place whenever we enter one of these villages, is quite alarming. The dogs first give notice of our approach ; and presently we are surrounded by all the women and girls of the place, offering live pigeons, eggs, vegetable marrows, necklaces, nose-rings and silver bracelets for sale. The boys pester us to buy wretched half-dead chameleons. The men stand aloof, and leave the bargaining to the women. (TMUN: 238-39)

Mass tourists are accused of apathy by Amelia, since they are not able to appreciate the greatness of the civilization of Ancient Egypt, whose monuments and statues are constantly damaged by weather, plunderers and unscrupulous researches:

⁴⁴ Marx, *Modernist Novel and the Decline of Empire*, cit., p. 101.

⁴⁵ Travellers' compulsive purchasing is highlighted by Edwards, who denounces the fact that even graves are subject to despoliation. Indeed, Egyptian explorers, "[s]hocked at first, they denounce with horror the whole system of sepulchral excavation, legal as well as predatory ; acquiring, however, a taste for scarabs and funerary statuettes, they soon begin to buy with eagerness the spoils of the dead ; finally they forget all their former scruples, and ask no better fortune than to discover and confiscate a tomb for themselves." (TMUN: 51-52)

[s]uch is the fate of every Egyptian monument, great or small. The tourist carves it all over with names and dates, and in some instances with caricatures. The student of Egyptology, by taking wet paper "squeezes," sponges away every vestige of the original colour. The "collector" buys and carries off everything of value that he can get ; and the Arab steals for him. The work of destruction, meanwhile, goes on apace. There is no one to prevent it ; there is no one to discourage it. Every day, more inscriptions are mutilated – more tombs are rifled – more paintings and sculptures are defaced. The Louvre contains a full-length portrait of Seti I, cut out bodily from the walls of his sepulchre in the Valley of the Tombs of the Kings. The Museums of Berlin, of Turin, of Florence, are rich in spoils which tell their own lamentable tale. When science leads the way, is it wonderful that ignorance should follow? (TMUN: 353)

Therefore, Amelia Edwards distances herself from the concept of mass tourism, and in her text she blatantly declares her preoccupations regarding the state of conservation of Egyptian pyramids and temples. On another occasion, the authoress declares that

this is all that remains of Memphis, eldest of cities – a few huge rubbish-heaps, a dozen or so of broken statues, and a name! One looks round, and tries in vain to realise the lost splendours of the place. Where is the Memphis that King Mena came from Thinis to found – the Memphis of Ouenephes, and Khufu, and Khafra, and all the early kings who built their pyramid-tombs in the adjacent dessert? Where is the Memphis of Herodotus, of Strabo, of 'Abd-el-Latîf? Where are those stately ruins which, even in the middle ages, extended over a space estimated at "half a day's journey in every direction"? One can hardly believe that a great city ever flourished on this spot, or understand how it should have been effaced so utterly. Yet here it stood – here where the grass is green, and the palms are growing, and the Arabs build their hovels on the verge of the inundation. (TMUN: 66)

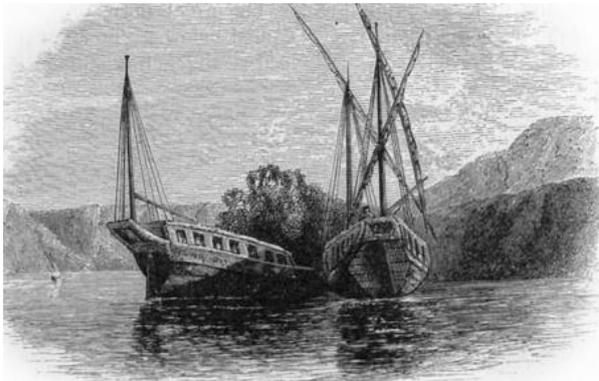
These assertions are indicative of the writer's future commitment in the field of Egyptology.

Amelia Edwards's pursuit of originality is evident from the very first pages of her travel book, when she has the chance to compare herself to the flow of tourists arrived in Cairo at Shepheard's Hotel:

[h]ere assemble daily some two to three hundred persons of all ranks, nationalities, and pursuits [...]. So composite and incongruous is this body of Nile-goers, young and old, well-dressed and ill-dressed, learned and unlearned, that the new-comer's first impulse is to inquire from what motives so many persons of dissimilar tastes and training can be led to embark upon an expedition which is, to say the least of it, very tedious, very costly, and of an altogether exceptional interest. His curiosity, however, is soon gratified. Before two days are over, he knows everybody's name and everybody's business ; distinguishes at first sight between a Cook's tourist and an independent traveller ; and has discovered that nine-tenths of those whom he is likely to meet up the river are English or American. The rest will be mostly German, with a sprinkling of Belgian and French. [...] Here are invalids in search of health ; artists in search of subjects ; sportsmen keen upon crocodiles ; statesman out for a holiday ; special correspondents alert for gossip ; collectors on the scent of papyri and mummies ; men of science with only scientific ends in view ; and the usual surplus of

idlers who travel for the mere love of travel, or the satisfaction of a purposeless curiosity. (TMUN: 1-2)

Moreover, “[t]hroughout the narrative, Edwards stresses how she and L. regularly frustrated local guide’s expectations by refusing to follow popular tracks carved out by tourists”⁴⁶ and underlines the originality of their river journey, as they actually could visit Egypt careless of “the weather and of Nile winds and currents”:⁴⁷



9. Native Cangias

[s]uch is the *esprit du Nil*. The people in dahabeeyahs⁴⁸ despise Cook's tourists ; those who are bound for the Second Cataract look down with lofty compassion upon those whose ambition extends only to the First ; and travellers who engage their boat by the month hold their heads a trifle higher than those who contract for the trip. (TMUN: 36)

Finally, if in *Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys* we see Edwards ascending the top of Sasso Bianco for the first time, in *A Thousand Mile up the Nile* the authoress emphasises another of her achievements, which contributes to render her account more original. Indeed, chapter thirteen is dedicated to Amelia’s discovery of an adytum, that is a sanctum “of a partly-built, partly-excavated monument coeval in date with the Great Temple [of Abou Simbel]”. (TMUN: 336)

⁴⁶ Kuehn, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴⁸ The dahabeeyah was a type of vessel which travellers used to cruise the Nile before the steamboat was introduced. The two English women travellers’ dahabeeyah is called “Philæ”, and Amelia does not hesitate to furnish it with commodities: “[a]nd now we are on board, and have shaken hands with the captain, and are as busy as bees [...]. It is wonderful, however, what a few books and roses, an open piano, and a sketch or two will do. In a few minutes the comfortless hired look has vanished, and [...] the Philæ wears an aspect as cosy and home-like as if she had been occupied for a month.” (TMUN: 36) In this respect, Lynn Parramore observes that “the Philæ is a floating emblem of English domesticity – only its inhabitants are not a cozy married couple but a pair of ambiguously situated independent women.”

L. Parramore, *Shegyptology: Encounters with Ancient Egypt in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture*, PhD diss., 2007, p. 164. Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304841564?accountid=17274>.

The whole process of excavation is recounted with fervour and abundance of detail⁴⁹ by Edwards, who enthusiastically states that “the place contained, when we opened it, no record of any passing traveller, no defacing autograph of tourist, archaeologist, or scientific explorer.” (TMUN: 351) However, as far as this episode is concerned, Birkett observes that Amelia does not deserve all the credit for this accomplishment. In fact, she “barely mentions that she had the assistance of one hundred Arab labourers. [...] While the women still claimed these achievements as their own, their real and as important success was in exercising power over large numbers of non-European peoples”.⁵⁰

4.6 British Travelling Companions

When Amelia and Lucy’s dahabeeyah arrives at Minieh, the authoress recounts:

IT is Christmas Day. [...] [T]he crew are treated to a sheep in honour of the occasion ; the new-comers are unpacking ; and we are all gradually settling down into our respective places. Now, the new-comers consist of four persons:- a Painter, a Happy Couple, and a maid. The Painter has already been up the Nile three times, and brings a fund of experience into the council. He knows all about sandbanks, and winds, and mooring-places ; is acquainted with most of the native governors and consuls along the river ; and is great on the subject of what to eat, drink, and avoid. The stern-cabin is given to him for a studio, and contains frames, canvases, drawing-paper, and easels enough to start a provincial school of art. He is going to paint a big picture at Aboo-Simbel. The Happy Couple, it is unnecessary to say, are on their wedding tour. In point of fact, they have not yet been married a month. The bridegroom is what the world chooses to call an idle man ; that is to say, he has scholarship, delicate health, and leisure. The bride, for convenience, shall be called the Little Lady. Of people who are struggling through that helpless phase of human life called the honeymoon, it is not fair to say more than that they are both young enough to make the situation interesting. (TMUN: 88)

As a matter of fact, Rees explains that

Amelia and L. had the boat to themselves when they set out from Cairo but they planned to pick up four other travellers at a point further south. One of these, Andrew McCallum, was a painter and already known to Amelia. [...] The others were friends of

⁴⁹ The partition of the adytum is thoroughly scanned by Amelia, who dedicates some sections of her chapter to the meticulous descriptions of the northern, southern, eastern and western walls.

⁵⁰ Birkett, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

his, not previously known to Amelia, a Mr and Mrs Ayr who were accompanied by their maid.⁵¹

Hence, unlike her voyage through the Dolomites, in Egypt Amelia and Lucy choose to surround themselves with travelling companions, and share part of their adventure with them. Apparently, this decision seems to be of no particular significance, since there is the possibility that Amelia wanted to share the costs of hiring the boat to traverse the Nile. However, leaving suppositions aside, the presence of other English travellers aboard the *Philae* has its implications and the analysis suggested by Miller⁵² is very helpful to investigate the roles played by the Painter, the Idle Man and the Little Lady (the Happy Couple's maid is only mentioned by Edwards and has no relevance in the story).

By deciding to welcome aboard three other passengers, Amelia Edwards, consciously or not, further distances herself from the Egyptian world. Indeed, “[b]oth her narrative and her literal experience are grounded in Euro-British society, and it is this society – specifically, the group of English companions aboard the *Philae* who will spend the next seven weeks together – that”⁵³ significantly impacted on the authoress's way of describing the foreign reality. According to Miller,

[t]he five primary British occupants of the *Philae* [...] constitute not just a mini-empire, but a community of imperialists textually orchestrated and represented by a female author(ity) and are vaguely enough named so as to allow readers optimum opportunities to envision themselves in their stead.⁵⁴

The nationality of the Painter and the Happy Couple, therefore, has its own weight within the narration, because, by choosing to journey with other British friends, Amelia Edwards has transformed the *Philae* into a more eloquent floating symbol of nineteenth-century British empire and society. From the beginning of the

⁵¹ Rees, *Amelia Edwards*, cit., pp. 37-38.

⁵² See chapter “White Commodities” in Miller, *op. cit.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 95-96.

writing process, probably Edwards wanted to draw the attention of a huge number of readers in order to make *A Thousand Miles up the Nile* a successful book. Consequently, the authoress had to cater to her British audience's interests, that is, she had to translate a foreign reality into familiar terms. As Miller points out, "[w]hen Edwards refuses to name either herself or her companions – referring to them only by type – she creates a discursive system wholly open to such identification, and in fact, inviting it."⁵⁵

Through the pages of the travelogue, Amelia identifies her dahabeeyah as "home", that is to say, when she embarks on her Egyptian journey, she is not willing to renounce the notion of British racial superiority and dive into the exotic land free from prejudices. Amelia and her companions are travelling representatives of the Victorian British society and they have Egypt at their disposal for their own purposes. As Miller asserts, "[t]he functional aspect of the patriarchy on board the *Philae* consists of two men: the painter and the idle man."⁵⁶ While the Painter shares with Edwards an artistic propensity, the Idle Man is portrayed as a conceited English man devoted to hunting. Interesting is the role covered by Lucy and the Little Lady and how Amelia is related with them. In fact, they both represent the stereotypical Victorian woman possessing maternal instincts and devoted to domestic activities, such as looking after the animals aboard (TMUN: 90-91), playing the piano (TMUN: 178-79), knitting (TMUN: 333) and writing "no end of letters." (TMUN: 382) Lucy and the Little Lady are "images of femininity created by another woman. Edwards may differentiate herself from them by means of her profession and role during the journey, but it is she who in

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

turn replaces the white female figure into a position of subordination”.⁵⁷ However, “[t]here is no hint of frustration on the part of the women and they are apparently quite pleased and contented with the patriarchy they have established.”⁵⁸ Therefore, while on the one hand Amelia Edwards stresses her active role as professional writer and researcher, on the other hand she always tries not to disconcert her precious English readers by offering them familiar contexts into which they could identify themselves.

4.7 Imperialistic Implications

As O’Neill pertinently points out, “[i]n her account of the trip to Egypt, [...] Edwards’s assumption on the role of educator and scholar of ancient Egypt sometimes blinds her to the concerns of modern Egyptians”.⁵⁹ According to O’Neill, in fact, Edwards is so enraptured by the wonders of ancient Egypt – in other words, she is totally committed to bringing the past alive through her narrative – that she generally considers Egyptian inhabitants as mere decorations of the whole picture she is observing. Compared to the previous experience in the Dolomites, in Egypt Amelia seems to take further distance from the native population. Indeed, when she has the chance to talk about the locals, she considers them only as “figures that come and go like actors in some Christmas piece of Oriental pageantry” and which form part of the landscape. (TMUN: 10) Only once Amelia appears to be conscious of her imperialistic attitude, but through the pages of *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*, her relationship with the Egyptian is always cold and distant:

[i]t is all so picturesque, indeed, so biblical, so poetical, that one is almost in danger of forgetting that the places are something more than beautiful backgrounds, and that

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁵⁸ *Ivi.*

⁵⁹ O’Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

the people are not merely appropriate figures placed there for the delight of sketchers, but are made of living flesh and blood, and moved by hopes, and fears, and sorrows, like our own. (TMUN: 201)

Edwards's imperialistic attitude is more accentuated in Egypt and her way of narrating cannot avoid that sense of superiority which characterises most of Victorian travel writing. As a matter of fact, in *A Thousand Miles up the Nile* there are fewer occasions for Edwards to interact with native people, also due to the problem of the language barrier. In this respect, among the crew who journeys with Amelia aboard the *Philae*, there is also a dragoman, that is, an interpreter/translator/guide who helps Edwards to understand Arabic.

When Amelia Edwards talks about the members of her crew,⁶⁰ it is not difficult to imagine her adopting the typical stance of the imperial bystander, as her tone seems always to be mocking. For instance, Amelia stresses the steersman's and the sailors' naive and childish attributes, as well as their generosity, altruism, fidelity and physical vigour. These are all characteristics which belonged to the myth of the noble savage, who was considered socially and psychologically inferior to the colonizer:

[m]ore docile, active, good-tempered, friendly fellows never pulled an oar. Simple and trustful as children, frugal as anchorites, they worked cheerfully from sunrise to sunset, sometimes towing the dahabeeyah on a rope all day long, like barge-horses ; sometimes punting for hours, which is the hardest work of all ; yet always singing at their task, always smiling when spoken to, and made as happy as princes with a handful of coarse Egyptian tobacco, or a bundle of fresh sugar-canes bought for a few pence by the river-side. We soon came to know them all by name – Mehemet Ali, Salame, Khalifeh, Riskali, Hassan, Mûsa, and so on ; and as none of us ever went on shore without one or two of them to act as guards and attendants, and as the poor fellows were constantly getting bruised hands or feet, and coming to the upper deck to be doctored, a feeling of genuine friendliness was speedily established between us. [...] There are, of course, good and bad Mohammedans as there are good and bad churchmen of every denomination ; and we had both sorts on board. [...] Coffee and tobacco are, indeed, the only luxuries in which the Egyptian peasant indulges ; and our poor fellows were never more grateful than when we distributed among them a few pounds of cheap native tobacco. (TMUN: 41-43)

⁶⁰ Amelia Edwards's crew is thus composed: "[t]he Reïs, or captain, the steersman, and twelve sailors, the dragoman, head cook, assistant cook, two waiters, and the boy who cooked for the crew, completed our equipment." (TMUN: 41)

Evidence of Amelia's strong sense of British cultural superiority is traceable when she and Lucy, "[b]eing told that it was customary to provide musical instrument, [...] had given them leave to buy a tar and a darabukke⁶¹ before starting." (TMUN: 44). However, when the sailors used to play their traditional instruments, Amelia recounts that they

all united in one long, shrill descending cry, like a yawn, or a howl, or a combination of both. This, twice repeated, precluded their performance and worked them up, apparently, to the necessary pitch of musical enthusiasm. [...] We thought their music horrible that first night, I remember; though we ended, as I believe most travellers do, by liking it. [...] The singer quavered; the musicians thrummed; the rest softly clapped their hands to time, and waited their turn to chime in with the chorus. Meanwhile the lantern lit up their swarthy faces and their glittering teeth. The great mast towered up into the darkness. The river gleamed below. The stars shone overhead. We felt we were indeed strangers in a strange land. (TMUN: 45-46)

According to Parramore, Edwards's final recognition of the pleasant harmony of Egyptian traditional music "serves as both a reassurance to readers who might find the country too exotic for travel and a suggestion of the author's urge to identify with alterity."⁶² The domestication of the otherness is a tool which Amelia uses to present to her audience a foreign reality which, otherwise, would be intimidating and incomprehensible. Therefore, Egyptian world turns out to be filtered and interpreted through the colonial lens for Western public consumption.

In the book, there are other passages which show Edwards's tactlessness towards modern Egyptians. Actually, sometimes Amelia's tone borders on racism:

[e]ven in Egypt, it does not answer, as a rule, to go about on shore without an escort. The people are apt to be importunate, and can with difficulty be kept at a pleasant distance. But in Nubia, where the traveller's life was scarcely safe fifty years ago, unprotected Ingleezeh are pretty certain to be disagreeably mobbed. The natives, in truth, are still mere savages *au fond* – the old war-paint being but half disguised under a thin veneer of Mohammedanism. (TMUN: 255)

An episode which highlights Amelia Edwards's ambiguous position towards Egyptian natives is the one in which the Idle Man is directly involved. Even in Egypt, he is unwilling to renounce his Englishness, that is to say, his hobby of

⁶¹ The tar is similar to a lute, while the darabukke resembles a bongo.

⁶² Parramore, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

hunting. However, during one of his expeditions, instead of shooting a quail, he accidentally, but not seriously, wounds a native child, who, in that moment, finds himself in a barley field with his mother. Amelia's reaction is quite baffling: "Hapless Idle Man! – Hapless, but homicidal. If he had been content to shoot only quail, and had not taken to shooting babies! What possessed him to do it?" (TMUN: 382) The episode triggers the indignation of the villagers; in fact, they instantly surround the Idle Man, who "had the gun wrenched from his grasp, and received a blow on the back with a stone. Having captured the gun, one or two of the men let go. It was then that he shook off the rest, and came back to the boat." (TMUN: 384) What follows is the response of the English, who "felt justified in assuming an injured tone, calling the village to account for a case of cowardly assault, and demanding instant restitution of the gun." (TMUN: 384) Eventually, readers come to know that the child's injuries are treated onboard the *Philae* and the kid's father is compensated with some money. As far as the supposedly criminal man is concerned, he is accused of the "treacherous blow dealt from behind, at a time when the Idle Man [...] was powerless in the hands of a mob" (TMUN: 385-86), and then he is "sentenced to the one hundred and fifty blow" (TMUN: 387) by the local governor. In regard to this incident, O'Neill points out that it "is another moment in which the narrator seems oddly detached from the sympathetic persona of the typical woman traveler."⁶³ Additionally, Rees highlights that "[n]o word of sympathy with the horror of the mother or the terror of the child or the indignation of the crowd appears anywhere in the telling of this story."⁶⁴

⁶³ O'Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

⁶⁴ Rees, *Writings on the Nile*, cit., p. 86.

Amelia Edwards's "disposition to seize [...] on the pictorially rich and the dramatic without necessarily thinking of the human situations involved"⁶⁵ is noticeable also when the authoress eagerly asks the Governor of Assuan if slave-trade still exists in Egypt. The Governor, offended by Amelia's question, replies that "there is no slave market in Egypt" (TMUN: 178), and it is quite disconcerting to read the shallow motivation behind Amelia's desire to see such an annihilating reality: "[w]e endeavoured to explain that in making this inquiry we desired neither the gratification of an idle curiosity, nor the furtherance of any political views. Our only object was sketching." (TMUN: 178) As far as this episode is concerned, Miller observes that "Edwards portrays no outrage, no empathy, and further, no hesitation in indulging her curiosity about the trade"⁶⁶ for the sake of the success of her book.

Furthermore, Melman suggests that Edwards's callousness towards the Egyptian population is also evident when she demonstrates "lack of interest in domestic life and the material life of contemporary women [...], the very fabric of the ethnographic female literature on harems. In the whole of *A Thousand Miles* there is not a single description of the interior of a modern Egyptian house."⁶⁷ Indeed, generally "many female travel accounts give fascinating details about this much speculated-on feature of Middle Eastern culture".⁶⁸ On the contrary, Edwards dedicates only a couple of pages to the hasty portrayal of two harems (one located in Ayserat, the other in Luxor) and the living conditions of the women who inhabit them,⁶⁹ as if these two visits were "apparently enough for her."⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Rees, *Amelia Edwards*, cit., p. 41.

⁶⁶ Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

⁶⁷ Melman, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

⁶⁸ Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

⁶⁹ TMUN: 479-80. While visiting the harem in Luxor, Amelia depicts the living condition of one of the wives of a middle-class Arab: "[s]he literally never went out. As a child, she had no doubt

Amelia Edwards's imperialistic implications are a topic of discussion among scholars. Melman's opinion seems to be very radical, since she notices that "Edwards's obliviousness to life and people in 'modern' Egypt is striking even in an archaeologist. [...] The very few obligatory passages in *A Thousand Miles* on everyday life in Egypt are stiffly clichéd and reveal Edwards' cultural and racial prejudices."⁷¹ In this respect, Frawley shows that women could write in a detached way as well, since she adds that "[l]ike their male counterparts, some Victorian women adopted with apparently little hesitations disciplinary and domineering behaviour and language, much of which sought to depict foreign culture as both 'primitive' and tractable."⁷²

Moreover, O'Neill suggests that Edwards's narrative is characterised by a strong contrast between the highly poetical and sentimental descriptions of the landscape and historical treasures of Egypt and the disinterested depictions of its inhabitants.⁷³ The coexistence of these two approaches is the hallmark of Amelia Edwards' travel writing and

"[t]here is, then, a double consciousness behind Edwards's description of Egypt: a fascination with the ancient origins of human culture and civilization and a desire to participate in the structures of knowledge that will enable Edwards to achieve her own ambitions as an intellectual within the academic institutions of science."⁷⁴

Consequently, Amelia's double method of recounting Egypt (that is, the concurrence of a sensitive feminine discourse with an impersonal masculine one) would inevitably generate that sort of tension and confusion which distinguishes

enjoyed some kind of liberty ; but as a marriageable girl, and as a bride, she was as much a prisoner as a bird in a cage. Born and bred in Luxor, she had never seen Karnak ; yet Karnak is only two miles distant. We asked her if she would like to go there with us ; but she laughed and shook her head. She was incapable even of curiosity. It seemed to us that the wives of the Fellahîn [peasant] were in truth the happiest women in Egypt. They work hard and are bitterly poor ; but they have the free use of their limbs, and they at least know the fresh air, the sunshine, and the open fields." (TMUN: 480)

⁷⁰ Moon, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

⁷¹ Melman, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

⁷² Frawley, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

⁷³ O'Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

Victorian women's travel account. According to Foster, in fact, this tension appears when women have to "adopt a position of gender ambiguity, taking on the 'masculine' virtues of strength, initiative and decisiveness while retaining the less aggressive qualities considered appropriate to their own sex."⁷⁵

Foster's consideration is shared by Melman, who points out that Edwards probably consciously decided not to tackle issues regarding Egyptian society and politics for the good of her own scientific reflections: "Edwards' prejudices and ethnocentric views should be related to the deliberate attempt to de-gender the account of travel. Hence the avoidance of utterances, gestures and behaviours which in her own society are identified as 'feminine' and which reveal sympathy and emotion."⁷⁶ Therefore, by de-gendering her own text (that is, by rendering her discourse more masculine) Amelia Edwards can "participate in the scientific discourse of her male contemporaries"⁷⁷ and assume the role "of the first female professional Egyptologist in an age of proto-feminist activity."⁷⁸

Furthermore, Marx explains that Amelia Edward's style of writing could be also affected by the foreign policy of nineteenth-century Britain, since "[i]n the 1880s [...] in order to fit into Britain's world system, Egypt was de-industrialized and its population primitivized in precisely the fashion Edwards prescribes in her travelogue."⁷⁹ Hence, if by the end of the nineteenth century it was normal to consider Egyptians as a population subjected to British imperialist goals, this may have influenced Amelia Edwards's writing as well.

⁷⁵ Foster, *op.cit.*, p. 11.

⁷⁶ Melman, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

⁷⁷ O'Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

⁷⁸ Kuehn, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁷⁹ J. Marx, "Modernism and the Female Imperial Gaze", *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 32:1 (Autumn, 1998), pp. 51-75, p. 62. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1346056>

4.8 Conclusion

By the second half of the nineteenth century, Egypt was an exotic destination already visited by a substantial number of tourists, who could count on the comforts provided by Thomas Cook's pre-packaged trips. Furthermore, several travel books on Egypt were written, since Egyptian history and culture turned out to be appealing topics for British readers.

Conscious of the popularity of the subject-matter, Amelia Edwards published *A Thousand Miles up the Nile* as a result of an extended journey the authoress and her friend Lucy Renshaw made through Egypt in 1874. In order to capture British readers' interest and make her account a successful volume, Amelia, who was an already accomplished writer, was able to craft an original story, different from all those volumes which had Egypt as their central topic. It is the authoress herself, in fact, who specifies that her text is not a travel guide conceived for tourists. Edwards's second travelogue proves to be a thoroughly composed book, replete with very didactic but, at the same time, passionate observations concerning the monumental and artistic treasures of ancient Egypt. In this way, Amelia tried to elevate her public role as a Victorian intellectual within the patriarchal field of Egyptology, offering to her reading audience an academic but personal account on Egypt.

However, in order to preserve her educational intent, Edwards tends to focus more on the Egyptian monuments and temples rather than contemporary Egyptian "customs, manners and morals, society and politics."⁸⁰ Amelia's travel text, in fact, is characterised by a gender ambiguity; that is to say, Edwards adopts contemporaneously both a masculine discourse charged with British superiority

⁸⁰ Melman, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

and prejudices to talk about Egyptian population and a feminine discourse stuffed with sentimental remarks when she has to present to readers the remains of ancient Egypt. Consequently, Amelia Edwards's controversial behaviour towards Egyptian native population would be the result of the sum of forces which impinged on her way of writing, that are (1) the authoress's will to contribute to the academic field of Egyptology, which forces her to adopt a masculine voice to the detriment of her female and more sympathetic one, and (2) the particular socio-historical context in which Amelia Edwards lived, which considered as conventional the British subjugation of colonised countries and people.

Conclusion

My thesis has focused on women's travel writing in Victorian literature by analysing two travel books written by Amelia B. Edwards. I have showed how tricky can be the task of a contemporary researcher who has to deal with travel writing, since it is such a vast subject that it is restrictive to adopt just one theoretical approach. As a matter of fact, travel writing is a permeable genre and, besides recognising its very basic features, it is more purposeful to concentrate on the author's way of writing, since, generally, non-fictional travel accounts can reveal much of his/her persona. Therefore, the approach I have used to present travel writing has consisted in outlining its essential elements especially thanks to Tim Youngs's critical works, and delineating the historical and cultural background in which Amelia Edwards operated. In fact, it was during the nineteenth century that the concept of mass leisure travel developed as a result of improved means of transport and a greater affordability by British people (mostly belonging to the middle- and upper-classes). The popularity of travel literature was a consequence of this democratisation of travel and a substantial number of Victorian women writers decided to broaden their literary productions by embarking on what was until then the male-dominated domain of travel writing. As the title of my dissertation suggests, women writers sought cultural authority in the unbeaten path of travel writing. However, this emancipation process was gradual and female writers struggled to distinguish themselves from their male colleagues. Frequently,

Victorian women's accounts were "more self-effacing"¹ and characterised by a more personal narration and a closer relationship between authors and readers (the use of humour and irony is typical of female writers). Nevertheless, nineteenth-century authoresses also adopted a masculine voice in order not to be discredited by members of the Victorian literary intelligentsia, with the result that their texts presents a gender-based tension caused by the contemporaneity of feminine and masculine discourses. The study of the significance of Victorian female travel writing is quite a recent phenomenon (1970s), but, unfortunately, many scholarly works are inclined to generalise about nineteenth-century women's travel books, running the risk of neglecting individual authorial distinctiveness. In fact, critics tend to consider female writers as exceptional and eccentric people, who refused to conform to Victorian social conceptions, who needed to break away from social and family constraints, who were openhearted towards foreigners and therefore extraneous to the practices of imperialism. However, not all lady travellers shared the same exact background and their travelogues mirrored distinctive opinions and aspirations. Since oversimplification should be avoided, I have investigated Amelia Edwards's travel books with a twofold approach, considering both their common gender characteristics and their individual characteristics.

Even though Amelia Edwards was considered as one of the major female intellectuals by her contemporaries, after her death she was almost forgotten and until recently her figure has been quite neglected by critical studies. However, Edwards's contributions to the Victorian cultural milieu had garnered great acclaim from Victorian readers and critics alike. Indeed, at the time of the

¹ Roche, *op. cit.*, p. 252.

publication of *Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys* (1873) and *A Thousand Miles up the Nile* (1877), Amelia, who was already considered an accomplished journalist and novelist, became a successful travel writer as well. Her multiple interests and talents pushed her to look for new cultural stimuli (she became also a professional Egyptologist), but, although Amelia earned a living by writing, she never pursued fame. As Roche explains, “attracting attention to the self was not something most women would entertain; it was unfeminine and ran against social mores.”² Rather, “[b]ehind public refutations of ambition and claims to self-importance lay a personal world of women’s demands and search for self-fulfilment.”³ Edwards, too, was considered as an exceptional and nonconformist Victorian woman, but “[t]he labelling of women [...] as unusual, ‘oddities’ or eccentrics was an effective way of further separating and ridiculing a subset of women who potentially threatened the cultural sense of male power and control.”⁴ As Birkett notices, “[t]he recognition women sought was not as extraordinary and unique women travellers [...] but as professionals, regardless of their sex.”⁵ Hence, Amelia often adopted a masculine voice in order to appear convincing and authoritative; however, a personal, subjective tone also emerges in her narrations. Edwards also made use of several defensive devices, as she knew well that she did not benefit from the same authority and privileges as her male colleagues. Therefore, apologetic prefaces and justifying explanations for going abroad (that is, for deserting the domestic duties) are also recurrent components of Amelia’s travel writing. It was as if she had preferred to take the first steps into the *unbeaten tracks* of travel writing slowly and humbly, without imposing herself. As

² *Ivi.*

³ Birkett, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

⁴ Roche, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

⁵ Birkett, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

Birkett point out, “[w]omen’s cultivation of a passive and conservate [sic] façade was a sophisticated response to a political environment which encouraged short term self-censorship in order to gain long term goals and recognition.”⁶

Consequently, both *Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys* and *A Thousand Miles up the Nile* present a narration characterised by gender ambiguity, that is the co-presence of both a supposedly imperialistic, masculine discourse and a sympathetic feminine one,⁷ since when

women travellers journeyed alone through lands which had been or were under threat of colonization and subjection, it was the colour of their skin, their dress, their identity as [British] Europeans which held importance. When in all-white societies, where gender was an important element of their identity, women travellers had silently rejected the trappings of colonial life. Outside the colonial compound, however, they exploited and exaggerated these same trappings to their own advantage, donning in the bush the symbols of colonialism they had shunned amongst [British] Europeans. They used them to stress their difference, based on race, from the local population – differences on which their status as white rulers rested. For here, they recognized, lay the freedom and prestige; here lay their newfound power.⁸

The very different realities of the Dolomites and Egypt were craftily and originally illustrated by Amelia Edwards, who managed to compose two books replete with pictorial, passionate and informative descriptions of the landscapes and the local artistic and historical treasures. Yet, recurrent belittling remarks about native populations remind readers that Amelia was also a citizen of the British colonising

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

⁷ The hypothetical lady travellers’ passionate inclination towards foreign populations should not be taken for granted. For Victorians, it might have been natural to think of women as those kind-hearted, self-sacrificing creatures who naturally possessed enough empathy for the others. Yet, as Frawley (*op. cit.*, p. 31) explains, “[t]ravel both eliminated and exacerbated the traveler’s sense of cultural difference. By going abroad to the extent that they did, women became more familiar with foreign cultures; for some this lack of distance diminished their sense of wonder at the ‘other’. For others, it merely underscored their sense that foreign populations were foreign.” Furthermore, Mills is the scholar who, above any others, highlights Victorian women travellers’ involvement into the colonial discourse: “[i]n the colonial context, British women were only allowed to figure as symbols of home and purity; women as active participants can barely be conceived of. This is because of social conventions for conceptualising imperialism, which seem to be as much about constructing *masculine* British identity as constructing a national identity *per se*. For this reason, women as individuals and as writers are always seen to be marginal to the process of colonialism. [...] Because of the way that discourses of femininity circulated within the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women travel writers were unable to adopt the imperialist voice with the ease with which male writers did.” Mills, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁸ Birkett, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

empire, therefore we always should take into consideration the socio-historical conditions in which Edwards lived and worked.

I hope my study on Amelia Edwards's travel writing can trigger further investigations on Victorian women's travel texts, since it would be worthwhile to continue the study started in the 1970s. It would be definitely interesting to analyse other well-known or less popular female works, maybe taking into account destination as a criterion for comparison.

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