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Strangers in Their Own Fatherland A Study of Emigrants in Italian History and Literature (1860–1920)

1. Introduction

This article will outline the mainstream ideological, political and intellectual discourse on Italian emigration and emigrants from the first decades after the unification of Italy (1861) until the first years of the twentieth century. The reason for choosing this period is that mass emigration due to the high percentage of people who left the country during that time impacted not only on Italian society, but also had a great influence on the collective imagination of successive generations with respect to emigration in general. Furthermore, this essay will consider some novels of the Italian literature of emigration¹ related to the mass movement of Italians to North and South America in the aforementioned period of the so-called “great emigration”. The works accounted for in this article were published between 1870 and 1914. Their reception among readers was generally positive, but apart from a very few cases, critics today tend to consider these works as minor literary productions. Nevertheless, the authors of this kind of fiction remain the most representative Italian writers on emigration. The aim is to show that, by corroboration

¹ In this paper I adhere to the distinction made by Emilio Franzina, who differentiates between Italian emigrant literature (It. *letteratura italiana dell'emigrazione*) and Italian literature of emigration (It. *letteratura italiana di emigrazione*). The former is the product of the literary activity of emigrants and their descendants, while the latter is the corpus of literary works written in Italy or abroad whose topic is emigration (Franzina 1996: 2).

rating – even unintentionally – the policies and propaganda of the state and governments, these authors displayed a unilateral image of the phenomenon. This image was fundamentally negative, since it represented and described emigration as an act which would lead to pain and affliction both for the migrant himself, and those who, for various reasons, decided to stay behind and not to follow the migratory stream.

During the second half of the twentieth century, a number of Italian works were published in which emigration was considered and represented as a complex question.² Nevertheless, even in recent years, emigration is very often portrayed as if only belonging to the post-unification period (Franzina 1996: 29–30). The dominant image of Italian emigration is still partly connected to this first period, although in later times Italian emigration took on a different character and moved in different directions.

2. Italian Emigration: the Origin of Prejudice

Any historical analysis of Italian emigration must begin with the impressive raw statistics from the post-unification years, 1876–1915. In a time span of forty-five years, the number of Italian emigrants surpassed 14 million (Favero and Tassello 1978: 19).³ Studies of Italian emigration have generally focused on this period (at least until the 1990s) because of the pure weight of numbers. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries a wide range of political tracts, mainly of Catholic and liberal tendency, focused on the issue. These portrayed emigration as negative and discreditable, bringing disgrace and ruin to those who left and to those who stayed behind. But dominant anti-emigration propaganda and stereotypes originated in the constant but temporary migration of people within the Italian peninsula, which dated back centuries before the unification

2 See, for instance, Cesare Pavese, 1950, *La luna e i falò* (The Moon and the Bonfires), Torino: Einaudi; Giose Rimanelli, 1958, *Peccato originale* (Original Sin), Milano: Mondadori; Mario Rigoni Stern, 1962, *Il bosco degli Urogalli* (The Forrest of the Grouses), Torino: Einaudi, and others.

3 For comprehensive data on Italian emigration between 1876 and 1976, see Favero and Tassello (1976: 9–64).

of Italy. Migratory currents followed traditional itineraries and were well-known in every part of Italy. Internal migration (as well as later emigration to the Americas) was mainly due to conditions of overpopulation and rural poverty⁴, and meant that rural workers frequently had to acquire new skills and adapt to new work situations and places. For instance, people from the Tuscan Apennines did not only go to the Maremma for land reclamation, or to Corsica to work in the charcoal mines; they even went to southern France. Along the migratory line from Lunigiana (situated between Tuscany and Liguria) to the area around Brescia, seasonal agricultural labourers converted themselves from specialised workers in floriculture into small merchants, mostly trading in books (Pizzorusso 2001: 14–15). Certainly, most of the people who periodically moved from place to place belonged to mountain communities (shepherds or fruit-pickers/harvesters) or rural communities (peasants). In order to look at the probable origins of certain post-unification prejudices concerning emigrants, it is worth noting that in a strictly-graduated hierarchy of scorn, Italian society considered these two very categories of citizens as being at the bottom of the scale. In Italian, the offence implicit in the epithet “peasant” (It. *contadino*) was slightly less derogatory than that implied in “mountain man” (It. *montanaro*) – corresponding to “villain”, “pagan”, “unsociable”, “rough”, in contrast with “civilised”, “courteous”, “urban”.⁵ Before the great migration of the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the increasing pressure on the rural classes forced Italian peasants and mountain men to abandon the country and to move abroad (mainly to other European countries, but also to the United States), where some of them engaged in so-called nomadic work in the grey area between vagrancy and mendicancy. Organ grinders, figurine makers and beggars, as well as homeless children were undoubtedly the advance guard of the great rural Italian migration to Europe and to North America (Porcella 2001:

4 As late as the late nineteenth century, according to a mercantilist point of view, population growth and well-being were coincident factors. In peace, under a good government, the population would increase indefinitely. There were no reasons for emigration. The Malthusian model (war-famine-plague) was interpreted by statisticians as a divine punishment brought on by human mistakes, not as an inescapable consequence of demographic growth (Porcella 2001: 19).

5 Barberis 1997, quoted in Porcella (2001: 38, footnote 38).

36). They were relatively few, but they settled in all the major urban centres of Europe (Paris, London and, generally speaking, most of the capital cities of the Old Continent) and in the United States. Those were places where influential newspapers were published, where heads of state met, and therefore the presence of these people, the poorest representatives of the Italian emigrants, did not pass unnoticed but produced a deep impression on the public and the media during that period.⁶ In the early 1880s, the Italian Ambassador in London, Emanuele D'Azeglio, was informed by the Italian Charity Society (It. *Società Italiana di Beneficenza*) that Italy was the only country to have “an organized unit of beggars, like those little children who bring monkeys around, or those street organ grinders who annoy everybody in the streets.”⁷ Other Italian migrant workers, ordinary, hard-working framers, glaziers, carpenters, even confectioners and ice-cream makers did not tarnish the national image; but the others were much more visible and became the dominant image of the Italian emigrant abroad.

That image contributed to the widespread scorn that the Italian ruling classes felt towards emigrants and emigration. During the first decades after unification, when the Italian ruling class was constructing its own political image, the question of the external image became linked to historical memory. Emigration became a clear index of the failure of the development policies of the new

6 An element which contributed to the creation of the stereotype of the Italian emigrant as illiterate was the gap between “expected image and effective reality” (Vedovelli 2011: 57), that is the gap between the ideal image which the ruling classes in countries like the United States had of “Italianness”, an image strongly connected with the noble and ancient intellectual culture of Italy, and the reality of the Italian migrants arriving in huge masses who were ignorant of the existence of that noble and ancient culture.

Nevertheless, the analysis of data indicates that from the 1920s the situation had changed radically. According to the U.S. population census of 1920, among the 16.5 millions of Italians born in the US, just 8 per cent were illiterate; between 1921–1922, on the basis of the evaluation of the Bureau of Immigration, illiteracy rates among Italians decreased even further, or down to 6 per cent. In the course of less than three generations the standards of education among Italian-American became similar to those of other Americans (Rosoli 1999: 130). Still, stereotypes of the illiteracy and ignorance of Italian immigrants in America persist today, particularly in literature and films.

7 Porcella 2001: 39. “Un corpo organizzato di accattoni, come sono quei piccoli ragazzi che portano scimmie e quegli organari che annoiano il pubblico sulle strade”. These young boys and girls were bought or taken from their families and put on the streets of the main European cities as beggars. One of the aims of the Lanza law of 1873 (see footnote 17) was to try to stop this shameful trade. All translations from Italian, both literary and scholarly excerpts, are my own.

state and its governments.⁸ In addition, emigration, which involved the rural classes in particular, caused progressive depopulation of farmlands both in northern and southern Italy. Therefore, landholders faced a shortage of the very labour force they had been exploiting for centuries. Because so many had left, those who stayed behind had greater bargaining power and could demand better pay and better working conditions. Since property owners had significant influence within the political and administrative class in Italy, one can assume that they added considerably to the level of hostility against emigrants and emigration.

3. Emigration Policy

One of the consequences of the prejudice of the ruling class against emigration was the development of what might be called informal state censorship with regards to the issue. In fact, this censorship had as much to do with scant and unreliable information as it did with the elite's intention to change statistics. An extremely inefficient and widespread bureaucratic system was responsible for collecting data. The central offices in charge of the processing of statistical data did not have adequate or reliable links to the regional offices for several reasons, one being the fact that the reassignment of state employees and officers occurred on a regular basis. The national statistics system for emigration, created in 1876, was assigned to an institute, the Directorate of Statistics (It. *Direzione di statistica*), which was neither subordinated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs nor to the Ministry of the Interior, but was a subsidiary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce (It. *Ministero dell'Agricoltura, Industria e Commercio*). This was significant, demonstrating how the emigration issue was regarded as an economic-labour problem rather than a social one. In 1882, the

8 Among the most unpopular and incompetent governmental actions of the post-unification period can be mentioned the so-called tax on bread (It. *tassa sul macinato*). Enacted in 1868, it had devastating consequences on the already disastrous conditions of the Italian peasants especially in the South. The tax was abolished only in 1884. But what testified to both the corruption and the financial ineptitude of the political authorities on a large scale was the bankruptcy of the Banca Romana, a scandal which came to light in January 1893 and caused the collapse of Giolitti's government in November of the same year.

Directorate of Statistics was renamed the General Directorate on Statistics (It. *Direzione generale sulla statistica*), but the methods of collecting data remained vague. In addition, its structure meant that the system was not able to detect the so called “improper emigration”. Grandi claims that improper emigration has too often been overlooked (even by recent studies), while a better knowledge of it is crucial to a social understanding of the phenomenon (Grandi 2007: 34–35). But it is precisely the essential lack of documentation that makes research into this particular aspect of the emigration phenomenon fraught with practical difficulties.⁹ Nonetheless, it is worth noting that in bureaucratic parlance, “improper emigration” really meant “illegal emigration”. The presence of that particular kind of crime in the Italian penal code is emblematic of the general policy regarding emigration at that time.

Since the statistics were unable to state which individuals and even how many Italians emigrated, or where they emigrated to, the entire statistical process amounted to little more than guesswork at least until the first years of the twentieth century and despite an increasingly substantial mass of emigrants (Grandi 2007: 35).

The suppression of any discussion on migration, as well as the inefficiency of the system, coincided with marked indifference to the condition of the emigrants and moreover with the absence of competent authority. Between 1876 and 1900, total expatriations from Italy already amounted to more than five million (Favero and Tassello 1976: 21), but the first framework legislation on emigration, the Pantano, Luzzatti and Lampertico law, was promulgated and thus came into force only in 1901, while the so-called Commissariat of Emigration (It. *Commissariato dell'Emigrazione*) and the Council for Emigration (It. *Consiglio dell'Emigrazione*) were established as late as 1902. In the preceding years the Italian state had relied on prohibitive laws (i.e. the Lanza law¹⁰ against free emigra-

9 In order to grasp a social understanding of the phenomenon, scholars tend rather to focus on sources like letters and other handwritten material that emigrants exchanged with their families or friends in Italy. In particular, see Franzina 2000.

10 The Lanza law was intended to stop the shameful employment of young Italian boys and girls in migratory labour (see above), the so-called child trade, which dated back to the early eighteenth century. Nevertheless, the law was applied to emigration in general (Porcella 2001: 36–37). Prefects were instructed to dissuade citizens from emigrating by informing them of the risk of being caught in a trap set by sly opportunists (Sacchetti 1978: 254).

tion, 1873) (Grandi 2007: 27) and what were essentially police laws.¹¹ These included a law that came into force in 1878, when the government was headed by the left-wing Prime Minister Agostino Depretis, and the Crispi law of 1888, which was designed to regulate the relationship between emigrants and emigration agents but which ignored, for instance, assistance to emigrants in their place of destination (Grandi 2007: 29). At least until the first decade of the twentieth century, Italian governments carried out a general policy of persecution of emigrants rather than protection, even where the infrastructures related to migration were concerned. While other major European ports of emigration adjusted to the latest requirements of emigration and emigrants,¹² in 1890, the port of Genoa, the largest Italian emigration port, still offered just one embarkation place for passengers. In Genoa, Naples and Palermo, once the health treatments were completed, the prospective emigrants could linger on the docks for days waiting for embarkation. In 1916, fifteen years after the first framework legislation on emigration, an article published in “*Illustrazione italiana*” (Italy Illustrated) described the situation in the Port of Genoa as follows: “The emigrants come to town by trains or by ferries and they camp out along the docks, or along the streets which surround the port. They stay put, rain or shine, waiting their turn. The picture is always the same.”¹³ In addition, in spite of state aid which benefitted them, the ship owners, relying on government indifference, generally employed rusty and obsolete vessels for emigration

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- 11 In 1805, during the French occupation of Italy, population censuses – ordered by the imperial government – identified incongruities in the section regarding required compulsory military service within the Italian municipalities. It was discovered that those incongruities were due to the fact that part of the male population (4000–5000 people) had deserted from military service. The Italian prefects were entrusted with the identification of this mass of runaway men. The results which the Italian prefectures sent to Paris between 1810 and 1813 can be considered the first extended recognition of Italian seasonal and internal migration. Since then, modern passports, which came into force in the same period, represented the main, if not the only, means to control emigration. Since the issuing of passports was delegated to police authorities, emigration itself became (and remained for a long time) a police matter. Theoretically, it could be regulated, directed and, if necessary, even prohibited (Porcella 2001: 18–19).
- 12 In Marseille, a new quay had been built in 1844; since 1875, seven new quays had been connected to the railway in Rotterdam; while in 1866, Bremen had been provided with one of the most up-to-date quays in Europe (Molinari 2001: 248).
- 13 Molinari 2001: 249. “Gli emigranti giungono in città in treni speciali o in piroscafi costieri e si accampano lungo la calata, lungo le vie che circondano il porto. Stanno immobili sotto il sole e la pioggia ad attendere il proprio turno. Il quadro è sempre lo stesso”.

routes. In 1895, Giovanni Cantù, responsible for health services in the Port of Genoa, reported to his superiors: “The Italian [merchant] navy is not lacking in good ships. The thing is that a despicable monopoly is created out of our emigration, and in order to profit as much as possible from that business, lousy means of transport are provided, as though the emigrants were commodities of the lowest value.”¹⁴ Still in 1907, a lieutenant colonel navy doctor reported how “the distribution and the modality of consuming meals is particularly humiliating and unhygienic; the meals were consumed in the cabins or on the deck, since the procedures did not make provisions for refectories or any other place equipped for food service.”¹⁵

Politicians erected legislative barriers against emigration, to the point of creating serious problems for jurists in the field of individual rights. Moreover, the aforementioned statements reveal not only a deep-rooted disregard for the emigrants on the part of government authorities, but also their collusion with the powerful lobby of ship owners. Although legislative decrees were in fact promulgated in order to confront the problem of emigration (i.e. the 1901 framework legislation), the success of those decrees often foundered on the unwillingness of the ruling class to put them into effect.

4. Literature of emigration

The repressive stance of the Italian institutions strengthened the perception of emigration as a tragic event, linked to disgrace, sickness, insanity and death. A large part of the anti-migratory scientific publications described emigration as a particularly traumatic and detrimental issue. Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909), a leading representative of positivist anthropology and sociology at that time,

14 Molinari 2001: 240. “La Marina italiana non è priva di buoni piroscafi. Il guaio è che della nostra emigrazione si fa un ignobile monopolio, per trarre dal quale il maggior profitto possibile si adibisce pel trasporto materiale scadente, quasiché gli emigranti fossero merce infima”.

15 Surdich 2006: 329. “Particolarmente umilianti ed antigieniche la distribuzione e le modalità della consumazione del cibo perché i pasti venivano consumati nelle cuccette o sul ponte, dal momento che i regolamenti non prevedevano l’allestimento di refettori o di locali attrezzati per la ristorazione”.

declared that “emigrants produce crimes in a maximum proportion”¹⁶ and, with respect to the United States in particular, “countries that produce a great quantity of immigrants, especially Ireland and Italy, produce great proportions of criminals at the same time”¹⁷. Moreover, “the number of criminal offences due to emigration, is enormous”¹⁸. Probably inspired by Lombroso, Nicolò Riccardo Bonfanti, manager of the department for labour mediation in Trento (It. *Ufficio per la Mediazione del Lavoro di Trento*) and a great expert of mountain migration, reported that “emigrants generally assimilate the bad habits of the foreign populations, not their virtue”¹⁹.

The Italian writers that, in the same period, began to make emigration the central subject of their work used common sources and references, which inevitably influenced their view of the phenomenon. In other words, theories like those of Lombroso had an effect on institutions and academia as well as on the literary environment. The works of fiction were obviously different in terms of style and structure, but what unified the Italian literature of emigration was the fact that the authors considered emigration as a fundamentally negative issue, an act against the natural laws of the community of origin. For this reason emigration could only bring grief and sorrow and was doomed to fail.

4.1 The Italian Novel and Emigration

The Italian bourgeois novel had its inception during the 1870s. It was a literary genre characterised by a combination of post-Risorgimento political ideals and pure adventure. An example of this genre is *Il secolo che muore* (The Dying Century, 1872), a novel by Francesco Domenico Guerrazzi (1804–1873), which only partly deals with emigration. Two young middle class Italians, Curio and Filippo, decide to leave the squalid atmosphere of recently unified Italy and go to America. The representation of the American wil-

16 Lombroso 1897: 45. “Gli emigranti davano una proporzione massima di delitti”.

17 Ibid, p. 45. “Gli Stati che hanno il massimo dell’immigrazione, sopra tutto Irlandese e Italiana, danno il massimo della criminalità”.

18 Ibid, p. 45. “Si hanno grazie all’emigrazione enormi cifre di reati”.

19 Bonfanti 1914: 24. “L’emigrante si appropria in generale di vizi dei popoli fra i quali va a lavorare senza assimilarne le virtù”.

derness of the mid-nineteenth century – with Indians, immense forests and slaves in chains – is central to the novel and similarly to foreign escapist travel literature translated and imported to Italy in this period²⁰. Having experienced all manner of adventures, Curio and Filippo decide to go back to Italy, but when at home, they realize that the Italian political and parliamentary “wilderness” is far worse than the American one. In the end, they leave Italy for good with a group of other young Italians who are ready to risk their lives to make their fortune in Texas. The novel’s innovation consists in the fact that the imported and traditional themes of the wilderness start to mix with the emigration theme – although the latter was treated in a rather marginal way. The protagonists themselves were emigrants, even if they did not belong to the rural class. But the crucial point is that the novel does not display those gloomy and mournful elements which would characterize the majority of later descriptions of emigrants and emigrations in Italian literature. On the contrary, novels like Guerrazzi’s or like *Il Dio ignoto*, (The Unknown God, 1876), by Paolo Mantegazza (1831–1910), underlined the positive aspects of the migratory choice and the benefits that the countries of destination could offer to immigrants. This literary current went hand in hand with several Garibaldian-oriented political writings of the period, which theorised and hoped for the emergence of a sort of rural-colonialist emigration to the Americas and to Oceania and whose aim was to protest against the apathetic and weak rural policy of the Italian ruling class.²¹ However, in Guerrazzi’s and Mantegazza’s works the migratory theme has to be seen as the setting for the plot, rather than its core. That is why neither of the two authors could be considered part of a counter-current as opposed to a general corpus of anti-emigration literature. Moreover, it was slightly too early. Italian writers, as well as Italian politicians, did not have a position on emigration yet,

20 For a comprehensive list of titles on escapist travel literature published in Italy between 1870 and 1880, see Emilio Franzina (1996: 74–75, footnotes 22, 23, 24). According to Franzina, the wide dissemination of this literary genre represented a development of the model launched by Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Among the numerous translations of foreign authors, Italy also had its own great Italian author of the genre, Emilio Salgari (1862–1911).

21 For a comprehensive list of these political publications, see Emilio Franzina (1996: 76, footnotes 25, 26, 27).

since the emigration phenomenon was still limited and its vastness still unfathomed. When, shortly afterwards, it became clear that the actual expatriation and depopulation of rural areas were issues of national proportions, works like Guerrazzi's or Mantegazza's were quickly forgotten, as Franzina claims (1996: 76), and it was the anti-migratory literature that prevailed.

It was by the beginning of the 1880s that emigrants and emigration became key subjects in Italian literary works. Nonetheless, any discussion of the Italian literature of emigration must begin by considering *Sull'Oceano* (On the Ocean, 1889), by Edmondo De Amicis (1846–1908), not because this is the only Italian novel that deals with emigration, as Folco Portinari rather arbitrarily claims (2009: xv), but because *Sull'Oceano* can be considered a paradigmatic book. The novel deals effectively with most of the arguments which would thereafter characterise the literature of emigration. The writer is also the narrator, a wealthy and educated bourgeois, who takes part in a transatlantic voyage. By adopting an attractively ironic and acute first-person narrator's voice, De Amicis explores the question of emigration from different perspectives, including those of the emigrants themselves. Critics have had difficulty categorizing the book, which could be defined as a (partially) fictional report of an actual journey.²² Life on board becomes a metaphor for a nation:

in the third class there were common people, in the second the bourgeoisie, in the first the aristocracy: captain and officials represented the government, the commissioner was the judiciary and the register for complaints or praises which one could find in the dining hall functioned as the press.²³

At times De Amicis associates emigration with fatalism, silence, pain and suffering, elements which in later fiction became common

22 De Amicis sailed to Buenos Aires in 1884 on the ship "North America", which became "Galileo" in the book.

23 De Amicis 2009: 22. "Nella terza classe c'era il popolo, la borghesia nella seconda, nella prima l'aristocrazia; il comandante e gli ufficiali superiori rappresentavano il Governo; il Commissario, la magistratura; e della stampa poteva fare ufficio il registro dei reclami e dei complimenti aperto nella sala da pranzo."

place in Italian literature of emigration, as did his description of emigrants on the third class deck or in the sleeping quarters, which would become an archetypical, hackneyed depiction:²⁴

Most of the emigrants, seasick, lay in a jumbled mess, sprawling all over the benches, as if infirm or dead, with dirty faces and shaggy hair, in the middle of a turmoil of blankets and rags. One could see entire families with the appearance of abandon and dismay, typical of homeless families: a seated man sleeping, his wife with her head against his shoulders and the children on the deck, sleeping with their heads against parents' knees; no faces appeared from other piles of rags, just a child's arm or a woman's braid here and there.²⁵

Nevertheless, the difference between De Amicis and his followers is that in *Sull'Oceano*, the author's point of view is deliberately problematic, and the approach to the question of emigration is generally dialectical. Therefore, even scornful descriptions like the one above call for an investigation of the possible causes of such miserable conditions. The following excerpt demonstrates a severe condemnation of the Italian state and its indifference to the problem of emigration:

I observed them [the Italian emigrants on board] but I refrained from any word of reproach, since I thought about German emigrants. Before board-

24 Even in the last chapter of *Vita* (*Life*, 2003), one of the most recent popular Italian novels on emigration, the description of the pitiful conditions of the Italian emigrants aboard of the English ship named Republic, seems to owe something to De Amicis: "She happened to be assigned to the worst bunk of the sleeping quarters [...] pressed against the ceiling, no more than eighty centimetres between her nose and the stink of the new wood. For ten hours she was cramped for room, with no air, no light, while her stomach was revolted by the stench of urine vomit sweat acid milk and vaginal discharge that poisoned the dormitory." (Mazzucco 2003: 392). "Le tocca la cuccetta peggiore del dormitorio [...] schiacciata contro il soffitto, con neanche ottanta centimetri fra il suo naso e il puzzo del legno nuovo. Dieci ore prive di spazio, di aria, di luce, mentre nel tanfo di piscio vomito sudore latte acido e succo di donna che appesta il dormitorio lo stomaco si rivolta."

25 Ibid.: 11. "La maggior parte degli emigranti, presi dal mal di mare, giacevano alla rinfusa, buttrati a traverso le panche, in atteggiamenti di malati o di morti, coi visi sudici e i capelli rabuffati, in mezzo a un grande arruffio di coperte e di stracci. Si vedevan delle famiglie strette in gruppi compassionevoli, con quell'aria d'abbandono e di smarrimento, che è propria della famiglia senza tetto: il marito seduto e addormentato, la moglie col capo appoggiato sulle spalle di lui, e i bimbi sul tavolato, che dormivano col capo sulle ginocchia di tutti e due: dei mucchi di cenci, dove non si vedeva nessun viso, e non n'usciva che un braccio di bimbo o una treccia di donna."

ing in Bremen, they find board and lodging and a bath to recover from their long journeys to reach the city, while our emigrants sleep on the pavements.²⁶

On the one hand, the novel often indulges in racist representations of emigrants as oafish and illiterate (another frequent stereotype which characterises the emigrant genre). For the third class passengers standing before the magnificence of the ocean, even the perception of beauty is denied: “Ignorance does not admire the sea”²⁷; “I remember I never heard an exclamation of admiration for the ocean coming from those emigrants [...] They are not able to feel curiosity or pleasure for any event, either because they do not believe it or because they misunderstand it.”²⁸ On the other hand, the mass never ceases to awaken the sentimental paternalism of the author, for example when the protagonist and narrator appeals to a group of wealthy Argentines, whose country is going to receive all those Italian emigrants:

Protect them from dodgy traffickers, do justice to them when they ask for it and do not let these poor people feel like intruders barely tolerated among you. Treat them kindly and lovingly. We will be so grateful to you for this! We love them, we are of the same blood. You are a generous people, we entrust them to you with all our soul!²⁹

The supposed wildness of the motley crew of emigrants alternates with a quite rational and logical characterisation of individual members. In his controversial but complex portrait of the phenomenon, De Amicis is in fact one of the very few Italian authors who expresses what Italian literature of emigration in general funda-

26 Ibid.: 55. “Mi trattenni dentro, osservandoli, ogni parola di rimprovero, poiché pensai agli emigranti tedeschi che trovano a Brema, prima d'imbarcarsi, vitto, ricovero e bagni, per rimettersi dal viaggio di terra; mentre i nostri dormono sui marciapiedi.”

27 Ibid.: 126. “L'ignoranza non ammira il mare.”

28 Ibid.: 127. “Non ricordo d'aver mai inteso fra quegli emigranti un'esclamazione ammirativa per l'oceano [...] Quanto a provar curiosità e a pigliar piacere d'altre cose, non possono, o perché le ignorano, o perché non ci credono o le fraintendono.”

29 Ibid.: 229. “Protegeteli dai trafficanti disonesti, rendete loro giustizia quando la chiedono, e non fate sentir loro, povera gente, che sono intrusi e tollerati in mezzo a voi. Trattateli con bontà e con amorevolezza. Ve ne saremo tanto grati! Sono nostro sangue, li amiamo, siete una razza generosa, ve li raccomandiamo con tutta l'anima nostra!”

mentally lacks: that is, emigration as an act of will and rebellion rather than of mere fatalism. A Venetian peasant says to the narrator – partially in dialect – at a certain point in the crossing:

In my opinion, if I may, landowners make a mistake. They spread a lot of lies about America, they say everybody is starving there, everybody comes back home more desperate than before, they say plague is everywhere there, governments are all tyrannical and disloyal, and so on. What happens then? What happens is that when a letter comes from there and the writer says he's doing well and making money then people don't believe a word of what the landowners say, although what they say could be true. People don't believe them at all, people think the landowners are trying to bend the truth. So thousands of people leave their homes and go to America, for the truth is completely the opposite.³⁰

Again, the author does not hesitate to denounce the deceit behind the dominant discourse on emigration, in this case that of the landowners trying to discourage peasants from abandoning their lands.

4.2 Anti-emigrant literature and the silence of other literary movements

In 1880, Antonio Marazzi (1845–1931), who in previous years had been consul in Buenos Aires, published his most relevant work, *Emigrati* (Emigrants)³¹. It is a long novel in three volumes recounting the adventures and misadventures of Silvestro Piantelli and Agostino Codazzi, two northern Italian farmers who emigrate to South America. Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay provide the setting in which the two young men move deftly among military chiefs, ranchers, cowboys, Indians and settlers in the Pampas. After separations and reunions, fights, struggles, weddings, economic achieve-

30 Ibid.: 177–178. “Per conto mio de mi, mi scusi, un torto che hanno i signori è di sparpagnar tante fandonie sull’America, e che muovo tutti di fame, e che tornan più disparai di prima, e che c’è la peste, e che i governi di là son tutti spotici traditori, e cussì via. Cosa succede allora? Succede che quando poi arriva una lettera d’uno di laggiù che fa saper che sta bene e che el fa bessì allora non si crede più niente di quello che i siori dicono, neanche quello che è vero, e sospettano che sia tutto un inganno, e che anzi sia vero tutto il contrario, e i parte a mile a la volta.”

31 This is the first Italian novel whose title explicitly refers to the question of emigration.

ments and failures, the two men meet in the port of Buenos Aires when both are about to return to Italy, one with a mutilated leg, the other a blind eye. The voyage home provides the author with the opportunity for a moralizing and anti-emigration reflection on the destiny of the losers who return from the New World, defeated and discouraged. Exaltation of the simple rural life in the home country goes hand in hand with a mournful invective against people who unreasonably decide to emigrate to the other side of the world, where nothing but trouble awaits them. Another anti-emigration novel from this period – though not as popular as Marazzi’s – is *Quaranta mesi nel grande Oceano Australe* (Forty Months on the Great Southern Ocean, 1880), by Alberto Anselmi (1848–1917). Here, a particularly heterogeneous group of Italian emigrants embarks on a journey to Australia. As a consequence of a mutiny, the group is abandoned on a remote island in the South Pacific. With the help of the discipline and of the practical instruction of Professor Pippo Barosio, who is the actual *deus ex machina* in the story, like so many new Robinson Crusoes, the migrants succeed in taming nature and in transforming a wild environment into a habitable place. The story ends with the group’s rescue and its “canonical” return to the country of origin. “When they left Italy to seek their fortune they were strangers to each other, while now, on their way back home, poor but happy, they are like brothers”.³² Conveniently revised, escapist travel literature, modelled on, but never emulating, Defoe’s masterful satire, *Robinson Crusoe*, thus supported anti-emigration trends in Italian literature for years to come.

As regards Marazzi and Anselmi, their novels were published in the same year and dealt with a very similar subject. The success of Marazzi’s *Emigranti* was probably due to the popularity of the author. In 1866, Marazzi took part in the battle of Bezzacca as a Garibaldian soldier and subsequently undertook a diplomatic career and was nominated as Consul in Buenos Aires precisely during the years of the great Italian emigration (in *Emigranti* he often quotes diplomatic documents without revealing his sources). Anselmi was one of the authors published by the prestigious Agnelli publishing

32 Anselmi 1880: 90. “Estranei gli uni agli altri per andare in cerca di splendida fortuna, vi tornano poveri, ma felici e a guisa di fratelli”.

house. *Quaranta mesi nel grande Oceano Australe* was initially conceived as a novel for teenagers, but later on the explicit intention of the writer was to provide a lighter and more fluent work, compared to the monumental novel by Marazzi. Although Anselmi's book achieved considerable success, the three volumes of *Emigranti* did not seem to discourage the readers of the time, who preferred Marazzi.

Politicians such as Giustino Fortunato (1848–1932) and Francesco Saverio Nitti (1868–1953) took pro-emigration positions in the Italian parliament. Both were socio-political thinkers and “meridionalists” (It. *meridionalisti*), specialists who worked to solve the economic problems of Southern Italy after unification.³³ In the literary field, the authors who belonged to the *Verismo* movement were considered meridionalists. This literary movement originated around 1880 in Milan, which at that time was already a major cultural point of convergence and attracted writers of different backgrounds. The most representative writers of the movement were the Sicilians Giovanni Verga (1840–1922) and Luigi Capuana (1839–1915) and the Neapolitan Federico de Roberto (1861–1927). The “veristi” writers are important in both a literary technical sense (i.e. they introduced innovations in narrative style) and as social critics (i.e. the denunciation of the exploitation of the lower classes in Southern Italy was at the core of their works). Nonetheless, when it comes to the matter of Italian emigration, *Verismo* is largely silent. Apart from Luigi Capuana's novel *Gli americani di Ràbbato* (The Americans from Ràbbato, 1909), the movement did not offer any substantial comment on emigration. On the contrary, its most representative author, Giovanni Verga, distinguished himself in avoiding the question.³⁴ In Capuana's novel the usual equation of emigration with disgrace or death is partly subverted. In America, two

33 In 1888 Francesco Saverio Nitti wrote *L'emigrazione italiana e i suoi avversari* (Italian emigration and its enemies), a work he dedicated to Giustino Fortunato. According to Nitti, all the harmful effects attributed to emigration were false, due to wrong analysis of the phenomenon, but also to deliberately altered analytical results, carried out in the interests of property owners. The essay was written in opposition to Prime Minister Crispi's law of 1887 and against the opinion of several anti-migratory members of the parliament.

34 Pasquino Crupi underlined Verga's silence on emigration (Crupi 1979: 51–71), while Mario B. Mignone showed his innate conservatism (Mignone 1993: 13–14). Both scholars are quoted by Franzina (Franzina 1996: 30, footnote 47).

young Sicilian immigrants, Santi and Menu, find emancipation: “during his year and a half, spent in the busy life of New York, that boy [Menu] seemed to have become a mature man”.³⁵ However, they both come back to stay, since “the fatherland is always the better place”³⁶; “I want to be Sicilian, Italian, not a bastard American!”³⁷ is the emphatic cry that crowns Menu’s, ultimately “conservative”, decision never to leave Ràbbato again.

Among the different and predominantly negative political-ideological views of emigration within Italian society in the late nineteenth century, the Catholic establishment occupied a singular position. Since the occupation and annexation of Rome by the kingdom of Italy in 1870, the Popes considered themselves prisoners within the Vatican. The Church therefore opposed any policy of the Italian state, but it also maintained an anti-emigration stance in conjunction with the landholding class, traditionally close to the Church. On the one hand, parish priests and nuns were proactive in anti-emigration propaganda all over rural Italy. On the other, as the flow of emigration became more and more uncontrollable, the Church began to organise its activity in the countries of destination. That said, for much of the great emigration period, Catholic organisations were the only institutions that dedicated themselves to effective and practical assistance to emigrants. Catholic congregations were particularly active in providing information about and advice on schools and in educational planning in the Americas. In 1875, ten years before Argentina introduced public education, the Salesians of Don Bosco (1815–1888) were already engaged in assisting Italian emigrants in that country, while, in 1889, Sister Francesca Saverio Cabrini (1850–1917) started her teaching activity in New York City, where she subsequently organised an efficient school system for Italian immigrants. In 1909 the Catholic confederation *Italica Gens* was established in Turin, with the aim of coordinating all the Catholic missions, orders and congregations operating on the American continent. According to the Official Catholic Directory,

35 Capuana 2007: 72. “In un anno e mezzo di vita nel fervido affaccendamento di New York quel ragazzo sembrava diventato uomo maturo”.

36 Ibid.: 72. “La patria è sempre la patria”.

37 Ibid.: 72. “Voglio essere siciliano, italiano, non americano bastardo!”

Catholic parish schools in the U.S.A. numbered 4845 in 1910 and in 1919 they increased to 5788 (Rosoli 1999: 119–144). Echoes of this practical assistance to emigrants are found in literature, particularly in the work of one of the prominent Catholic authors of the period, the Jesuit Francesco Saverio Rondina (1827–1897), whose novel *L'emigrante italiano* (the Italian Emigrant, 1891–1892) was published in instalments in the *Civiltà cattolica*, the most influential Catholic review at the time³⁸.

4.3 The nationalist break with tradition: Enrico Corradini (1865–1931)

The break with the traditional literature of emigration is marked by Enrico Corradini's novel *La patria lontana* (The Faraway Fatherland, 1910). Migrants who sail in third class are still depicted as wretched semi-human creatures: "men and women with their sacks full of rags, with their children, with their hearts burdened with thousand-year old superstitions"³⁹; uneducated and miserable "with all their barbarous brutality, all their humiliated humanity"⁴⁰, when "at night they went down to the holds, where they formed a purulent, fermenting horde."⁴¹ These descriptions are no different from those in De Amicis' *Sull'Oceano* or in several other Italian novels of emigration. But Corradini's position on emigration develops in a different direction and his conclusion is totally distinct. The wealthy and educated protagonist of the novel, the fervent nationalist Piero Buondelmonti travels on an emigrant ship where, by regularly mixing with the crowds and paternalistically talking to them, he starts his campaign of imperialist persuasion that he will continue in the new country. Buondelmonti's voyage to South America is due to a woman, but once he gets in contact with the Italians who

38 After a long and complicated sequence of journeys (from the United States to Brazil and to the United States again), romance, revenge, suicides, the novel ends with the usual homecoming. The explicit moral of the story is that emigration to a strange and hostile country always implies uncertain outcomes, against the certainty of solace that the homeland always offers.

39 Corradini 2010: 16. "Uomini e donne col sacco de' loro cenci, con i loro figliuoli, con i loro cuori carichi di superstizioni millenarie".

40 Ibid.: 16. "Con tutta la loro ferocissima bestialità e tutta la loro umiliata umanità."

41 Ibid.: 16. "La notte scendevano giù nelle stive e facevano tutt'un carnaio fermentante e suppurante."

live there, his political conscience prevails over his purpose of seeking a romantic relationship. Buondelmonti meets old entrepreneurs like Lorenzo Berènga, leader of the Italian community in Rio de Janeiro and a model of the successful Italian self-made man:

I am not unhappy, believe me – Berènga confesses to Buondelmonti – but, as an Italian, with all my strength, even after fifty years of work in this country, what will I add to that great thing Italy should be? Italy is not here at all! This is another noble country, which probably will become one of the leading nations of the world, but it is not Italy. I would even live among the Eskimos, if I could say: Here my homeland rules! Oh, how completely different it would be!⁴²

The protagonist of the novel also meets other symbolic characters, who are gradually losing their sense of being Italian:

[the teacher] was a handsome and strong twenty-year old man of Italian origin but he was born in Brazil. When Buondelmonti observed him, it was like he was observing a metamorphosis. The young man's features, his build and nice complexion were still Italian, but a slowness, a sort of indolence already had taken him [...] Buondelmonti seemed to be watching the transformation of the Italian into a man of different latitudes, just like a colour which turns into another. The Italianness was still there but, at the same time, it already was fading away.⁴³

On the one hand, Lorenzo Berènga testifies to the total neglect of the Italian state (“Italy is not here at all!”), which forces its sons and daughters to leave against their will and then, just like a bad parent, abandons them to their own destiny, as strangers in the

42 Ibid.: 55–56. “Io come io, Lei può crederlo, non sono scontento di me stesso. Ma come italiano, che avrò aggiunto con la mia forza, col mio mezzo secolo di lavoro, a quella grande cosa che dovrebbe essere l'Italia? Qui l'Italia non c'è in nessuna maniera! Qui c'è un altro paese, nobilissimo anche questo, che prenderà uno de' primi posti nel mondo, ma non è l'Italia. Io vorrei stare fra gli eschimesi, ma poter dire: - Qui la mia patria domina! – Oh, sarebbe altra cosa!”

43 Ibid.: 43. “Era un giovanotto sui vent'anni, bello e forte, oriundo d'Italia e nato nel Brasile. Il Buondelmonti rimase con gli occhi stupefatti a guardarlo, perché gli parve d'assistere ad una metamorfosi. Il giovanotto aveva tutte le fattezze e la struttura e i bei colori ancora dell'italiano, ma già una lentezza simile a quando prende il sonno, l'aveva occupato [...] Al Buondelmonti parve di assistere al trasformarsi dell'italiano in uomo d'altro clima. Proprio come quando un colore si muta in un altro, l'italianità era ancora e già mancava.”

country of destination but also strangers to their indifferent and beloved fatherland. On the other hand, the teacher (in Corradini's racist tone) represents the consequence of a progressive loss of Italian identity – including certain presumed Italian behavioural and physical characteristics – which occurs among the younger generation.

As a solution, Buondelmonti launches a campaign to make the emigrants aware of the risks of complete de-nationalization. The only way to prevent this from happening is to resort to war. When a providential war involving Italy breaks out, Buondelmonti makes a crucial speech to the crowd of Italian immigrant workers in Rio de Janeiro and he finally succeeds in rousing them and convincing them to take an active part in helping their fatherland. The speech rises to a stylistic crescendo of rhetorical patriotic pathos that is close to invoking mystical inspiration:

The immensity of the nation's soul and the stream of the past generations' river flew into his [Buondelmonti's] heart, which was about to explode. Suddenly, a voice inside him cried out: - You can show them what Italy must do for its best! You can transform tens, hundreds of these migrants into fighters! [...] So, he shouted: - Who is going to leave with me? – Everywhere in the theatre, voices rose up: - Me, me! – And they began to gesticulate to Buondelmonti, each of them was ready to offer his life for the fatherland.⁴⁴

When the ship with four hundred migrants aboard comes in sight of the Ligurian coast, Buondelmonti decides to give his final speech:

All the future Italian generations must be grateful to you. If Italy wins this war [...], your descendants won't need to do what you did, not anymore. They won't emigrate to a strange land, armed just with their arms

44 Ibid.: 151. "L'immensa anima nazionale con tutti i torrenti delle generazioni s'era precipitata nel suo petto, sforzava le pareti del suo petto. Quando incontinentemente una gran voce dentro di lui gli gridò: - Tu puoi creare un segno di ciò che dovrà fare l'Italia per la sua salute! Tu puoi trasformare cento, dieci di questi emigranti in combattenti! [...] Così disse e gridò: - Chi di voi partirà con me? - Da tutte le parti del teatro si levarono voci: - Io, io! – E gesticolavano verso il Buondelmonti offrendo ciascuno la sua vita alla patria."

and their patience, they will emigrate to those countries which the fatherland will be able to conquer.⁴⁵

This is the redemption of the emigrants. From then on, a new kind of emigration opens up: not the degrading, humiliating emigration to the Americas, where Italians had always been living like slaves, but emigration to other countries that have to be conquered as the promised land and by fighting a holy war. The model of a triumphant fatherland and the concept of war as a resurrection of national identity now became a prevalent theme in Italian literature of emigration at least until the end of the 1930s. Corradini's novel, which also influenced Italian cinema and theatre of the period, was adopted by the fascists as a propaganda vehicle, since its message of ethnic pride and a new mystique of sacrifice and heroism were particularly useful to the regime's imperialist policy.

4.4 Emigrant Women and Literature

If emigrants, in general, deserved blame, female emigrants were utterly condemned. They not only refused to be economically exploited, but also refused their own "natural" role of wives and mothers whose destiny had to be fulfilled at home – surely not something they would do in a foreign country where they could support themselves with their own work and free themselves from their reproductive obligations (Grandi 2007: 11). In the survey *Inchiesta sulla donna*, by Guglielmo Gambarotta, published in 1889, the author collected the statements of intellectuals, scientists and cultural figures on the natural inferiority of women. Most of them not only opposed women's political rights but also expressed negative opinions about extra domestic employments for married women who had children (Grandi 2007: 13–14). According to some scholars, women earning a wage could lead to a "third sex", a kind of new female gender situated at an intermediate stage of evolution and characterised by the joint presence of female and male

45 Ibid.: 169. "Tutte le generazioni avvenire d'Italia vi dovranno essere grate. Perché se l'Italia vincerà questa guerra [...] quelli che verranno non avranno più bisogno di fare quello che avete dovuto far voi, d'emigrare in terra straniera, armati soltanto delle braccia e di pazienza, ma potranno emigrare nelle terre che la patria si sarà conquistate."

features. The increasing number of these masculine women could cause a deep disturbance to the natural order on which social and sexual relations were based. The aim of these theories was obviously to justify the relevant gender difference in the wage system, a difference which functioned to reaffirm male hegemony.

The political tendency was to make female emigration invisible or non-existent. Until at least 1905, statistics on emigrants did not make any gender distinction, and often women were not even mentioned in family or group passports. They only emerge from anonymity as they reached the new country, when they had to appear in documents or administrative records. Their names were often modified when they were adapted to a new language (Grandi 2007: 46).

Still, in 1908, in Lamberto Paoletti's collection of migratory statistics based on twenty works on the subject published between 1876 and 1905, the only reference to gender distinction claimed that "the number of emigrant males is much greater than that of females".⁴⁶ This is a trivial reference which ignored the destiny of hundreds of thousands of women. The quality of their choice to emigrate (in terms of reasons, motivations, achievements, for instance) was ignored as well as their actual numbers.⁴⁷

Perhaps as a reflection of reality, Italian emigration literature during this period did not put emigrant women at the centre of the narration. From Guerrazzi to Corradini, female characters essentially had supporting roles, or figured in the more romantic and adventurous aspects of the plot. In those few cases where women appeared as protagonists they were deeply marked by emigration, but their traumas were due principally to an indirect or passive experience of emigration. Instead of leaving their homes and country, they spent long periods of their lives waiting for the men to return (i.e. husbands or sons). Prevailing attitudes within society, as

46 Grandi 2007: 35. "La massa emigratoria maschile è assai maggiore della femminile".

47 Grandi 2007: 60. It is logical that women migrants' lives left very few traces in national historical documentation, while they were evident in medical case histories or arraignments. Histories of women's ordinary life were missing, but not their exceptional events. In the memory of hospitals, mental institutions and courthouses, the presence of women was recorded in detail. It served to strengthen public opinion that female emigration, with its self-determination, implied a moral decline. Between the nineteenth and twentieth century, the same political articles that criticised emigration stereotyped female migrants as poor devils detached from their own people, women who would face a fatal destiny of isolation and slowly lose contact with the real world.

reflected in Italian literature, held that emigrants endangered not only themselves but also their relatives, both if they took them to the unknown world across the sea and if they left them at home. And it was the case that most of the relatives left at home were women. The risk was that they died in poverty and humiliation. In Pirandello's short story *L'altro figlio* (The Other Son, 1902)⁴⁸, Maragrazia, an old Sicilian peasant, irreparably stricken by her long wait for her two beloved sons who had emigrated to America, represents a tragic model of a woman who lives in wait.

It is in the work of Maria Messina that one finds the most notable examples of this kind of woman. Although Messina (1887–1944) cannot be considered a writer of emigration⁴⁹, her *Nonna Lidda* (Grandmother Lidda, 1911) is one of the most moving stories on the subject. After the death of her daughter-in-law and after being abandoned by her son who decides to emigrate to America, Lidda, living a life of deprivation, raises her baby grandson. Five years later, Lidda's son unexpectedly sends a friend to Italy to take the child to America. Although her heart is breaking Lidda has the strength to walk with her grandson all the way to the end of the village and say goodbye properly. Only then does she give in to her pain, and the following day her dead body is found on a river bank.

For the returning emigrants, the first impact of the community of origin was a sort of moral cleansing performed in order to ward off the dreaded change of mind that had occurred and to re-establish the moral obligations of the social system into which individuals had to reintegrate. This moral cleansing consisted of sermons, confessions and benedictions; with the community's help, the reappropriation of local habits and mores was assured. Every returning emigrant was subjected to this kind of ritual, but the moral cleansing was much more scrupulous when the returned was a woman (Grandi 2007: 67). An extreme literary case of this type can be

48 Pirandello's play of the same name, adapted from a short story, was performed for the first time in 1923.

49 Messina's two collections of short stories, *Piccoli gorghi* (Small Whirlpools, 1911) and *Il guinzaglio* (The Leash, 1921), masterly represent the condition of Sicilian women, whose social framework, despite class distinctions, was restricted to the village (sometimes to the house) where they were born and in which they were destined to spend their entire lives and forced to follow repressive rules against which it was almost impossible to rebel.

found in a disturbing short story by Corrado Alvaro (1895–1956), *La donna di Boston* (The Woman from Boston, 1929), in which even the American widow of an Italian emigrant (who, drawn by curiosity, travels to her husband’s Sicilian hometown) is little by little swallowed up by the native women of the village and, in the end, subjected to a sort of surreal ritual of purification and transformed into a Catholic nun.

5. Conclusion

The enormous numbers of Italian emigrants between the unification of Italy and the beginning of the First World War have attracted most of the studies on the Italian emigration. The focus on such a specific period has caused a tendency to study the conservative cultural issues surrounding emigrants rather than the subtler variations of those issues – the first being less complex to analyse (Tirabassi 1990: 142). The consequence is that researchers have paid insufficient attention to relevant individual factors such as personal motivation. Such factors could explain, for instance, why, given the same social and economic context (i.e. same town or village, same job, same “status”), some people decided to emigrate and others did not. In other words, the difficulty in studying the history of emigrations lies in identifying the causal factor of mobility. Yet it is this very factor, in the end, that would enable a completely different approach to the phenomenon. Because of the millions of migrants involved, data analysis has not mentioned the hundreds of thousands of people whose individual reasons for expatriation were *different* from those of the majority. A statistical-based approach to the issue results in an incomplete image, a cliché of emigration. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Italian literary narrative of emigration seems in the main to have followed the anti-emigration positions supported by influential political factions and the Catholic Church. In some cases (i.e. Marazzi, Rondina, Corradini), writers knowingly disseminated the anti-emigration propaganda of the Church and the political elite. But even proper and legitimate

works of social criticism (i.e. Capuana, Pirandello, Messina, Alvaro), unwittingly ended up having the same function. In other words, what prevailed was an irreparable pessimism concerning emigrants and emigration. This leads above all to a unilateral point of view, as Franzina claims (Franzina 1996: 28), while the nature of emigration is characterised by intrinsic bilateralism (i.e. the point of view of the writer and the point of view of the emigrant). Among the authors examined here, perhaps only Edmondo De Amicis tried to understand the counterpart: that is, the emigrant. In the most recent Italian literature of emigration, what generally prevails, even in the most artistically impressive pages, is a simple depiction of the phenomenon at odds with the exceptional complexity and variability of the reality. In particular, apart from Corradini's extreme spiritualistic nationalism (which is in any case another unilateral point of view), Italian literature has not yet produced a work which considers emigration not only a desperate act but also as a revolutionary one, an act of courage, ambition and initiative.

ÚTDRÁTTUR

Útlendingar í eigin föðurlandi
Um fólksflutninga í ítalskri sögu
og bókmenntum (1860–1920)

Greinin fjallar um hina miklu fólksflutninga frá Ítalíu um aldamótin, þ.e. eftir sameininguna (1861) og til upphafs fyrri heimsstyrjaldarinnar. Á þessu tímabili var umfang brottflutninganna augljós vísbending um að stefna hins nýja ríkis og stjórnvalda í þróunarmálum hafði mistekist. Einnig urðu fólksflutningarnir, sem snertu einkum landsbyggðina, til þess að gífurleg fólksfækkun varð í sveitum Norður- og Suður-Ítalíu. Öldum saman höfðu landeigendur arðrænt vinnufólk sitt en stóðu nú frammi fyrir skorti á vinnuafli. Viðhorf ítalskra stofnana til fólksflutninganna var neikvætt og var litið svo á að brottflutningar tengdust skömm, veikindum, geðbilun og dauða. Þeir ítölsku rithöfundar sem notuðu fólksflutninga sem meginefni í skrifum sínum studdust við almennar skoðanir og skírskotanir sem höfðu greinileg áhrif á viðhorf þeirra og túlkun á flutningunum. Þótt skáldverk þeirra væru ólík að stíl og byggingu mátti heyra sama stefnið í þeim öllum: að brottflutningar væru neikvæðir og gengju þvert á lögmál hins upprunalega samfélags. Af þeim sökum gat fólksflutningur ekki haft góðar afleiðingar heldur aðeins leitt af sér sorg og söknuð.

Lykilorð: Ítalía, fólksflutningar, farandverkafólk, bókmenntir, Ameríka

ABSTRACT

Strangers in Their Own Fatherland
A Study of Emigrants in Italian History
and Literature (1860–1920)

This article considers the mass migratory phenomenon which took place in Italy between the decades after unification (1861) and the beginning of the First World War. In this period, the dimensions of the migration were a clear indication of the failure of the development policies of the new state and its governments. In addition, the migration, which involved the rural classes in particular, caused a progressive depopulation of the farmlands both in northern and southern Italy. Landholders faced a shortage of the very labour force they had been exploiting for centuries. The situation originated in a repressive attitude of the Italian institutions which determined the diffusion of the image of emigration as a sad event linked to disgrace, sickness, insanity and death. The Italian writers that started to consider emigration as the central issue of their works at that time used common sources and references, which inevitably influenced their view of the phenomenon. If the works of fiction were obviously different in terms of style and structure, what unified Italian literature of emigration was the fact that the authors considered the emigration as a fundamentally negative issue, an act against the natural laws of the community of origin and for this very reason emigration could only bring grief and sorrow and was doomed to fail.

Keywords: Italian emigration, emigrants, literature, America

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