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Atti e memorie dell'Ateneio Veneto



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APPENDICE: organigramma, pubblicazioni

Fiorella Guerra

«FROM THE OLD WORLD TO THE NEW»: MARY SHELLEY'S *RAMBLES IN GERMANY AND ITALY* AND SAMUEL ROGERS'S *ITALY*

I was about to break a chain that had long held me – cross the Channel – and wander far towards a country which memory painted as a paradise.
(Mary Shelley, *Rambles in Germany and Italy in 1840, 1842, and 1843*, 1844)

Introduction

The nineteenth century redefined British travel on the Continent with special regard to Italy, a preferred destination ever since the Grand Tour: the reprise of circulation after the end of the Napoleonic Wars (1815) marked the birth of mass tourism, guidebooks¹, and numerous travel accounts on the subject. *Italy, A Poem* (1822-1828, 1830) by Samuel Rogers, a renowned poet and banker in his time, occupies a prominent place in this context. Based on his 1814-1815 tour from Switzerland to Italy, the poem is «a key text in understanding the symbiotic relationship between literature and the visual arts during the nineteenth century», a «highly visual age»². Indeed, while its first edition went unsold, the 1830 one, illustrated by Joseph Mallord William Turner's and Thomas Stothard's vignette engravings of the main destinations, served as a guide to Italy for British travellers³, along with Canto IV of Lord Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1818), also il-

¹ On travel guides to Italy in nineteenth-century British culture, see DAVID M. BRUCE, *The Nineteenth Century 'Golden Age' of Cultural Tourism*, in *The Routledge Handbook of Cultural Tourism*, edited by Melanie Smith and Greg Richards, 2013, pp. 11-18.

² MAUREEN MCCUE, *Reverse Pygmalionism. Art and Samuel Rogers' Italy*, «Romantic Textualities. Literature and Print Culture, 1780-1840», 21 (2013), pp. 108-123, 109.

³ On the importance of *Italy* for its contemporaries, see the "Samuel Rogers (1765-1855)" entry in *the Dictionary of National Biography*, 49, edited by Sidney Lee, London, Elder Smith & Co., 1984; PETER WILLIAM CLAYDEN, *Samuel Rogers and his Contemporaries*, London, Smith, Elder & Co., 1889; JAMES BUZARD, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to 'Culture', 1800-1918*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993. On Turner's vignettes, see ADELE HOLCOMB, *Turner and Rogers' Italy' Revisited*, «Studies in Romanticism», 27 (1988), 1, pp. 63-95; MCCUE, *Reverse Pygmalionism. Art and Samuel Rogers' Italy*.

illustrated by Turner at a time when guidebooks and travelogues had no pictures. Mary Shelley's last work – the travelogue in epistolary form *Rambles in Germany and Italy in 1840, 1842, and 1843* (1844), centred on her return to Italy seventeen years after Percy Bysshe Shelley drowned in the Gulf of La Spezia – is dedicated «to Samuel Rogers, author of “The Pleasures of Memory”, “Italy”, etc [...] as a slight token of respect, gratitude, and affection».

As a matter of fact, *Rambles* and *Italy* share not only part of the itinerary but also the same publisher, Edward Moxon, who started his own firm in 1830 on a loan from Rogers⁴, following the success of the illustrated poem. An 1840 letter by Shelley to Moxon attests its influence: «I was very happy during my two months residence at Cadenabbia – on the shores of the lake of Como, opposite to Bellagio, and close neighbour to Tremezzio [*sic*], names rendered classical by our dear Rogers»⁵. Whereas the resurgence in critical studies on Shelley's travels has drawn attention to the pictorial quality of her travel writing and her representation of Lake Como⁶, few critics have mentioned her relationship with Rogers, and have yet failed to notice the common publishing history of *Italy* and *Rambles*. According to Campbell Orr⁷, *Rambles* may be considered a prose-poem sharing with *Italy* the themes of death and memory; moreover, Shelley refers to Turner's vignettes of Venice and Amalfi. If Mary Shelley's father – William Godwin – introduced her to Turner, the very Rogers frequented the Godwin house, and she remained close to the poet breaking her isolation to attend his breakfasts in later years: «he is the *only* person in London who shews me any attention», she wrote to her stepsister Claire Clairmont in 1842⁸. Albeit the letters of *Rambles* are

⁴ *Dictionary of National Biography*, 49, edited by Sidney Lee, London, Elder Smith & Co, 1894, pp. 239-240.

⁵ *The Letters of Mary W. Shelley*, 2, edited by Frederick Lafayette Jones, Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1944, p. 147.

⁶ ANTONELLA BRAIDA, *Nature, the Picturesque, and the Sublime in Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's Travel Narratives*, «Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies», 24 (2018), 2, pp. 415-430; VALENTINA VARINELLI, *Return to Paradise: Lake Como in the Works of Mary Shelley*, «L'analisi linguistica e letteraria», 3 (2019), pp. 71-80.

⁷ CAMILLA CAMPBELL ORR, *Mary Shelley's Rambles in Germany and Italy, the Celebrity Author, and the Undiscovered Country of the Human Heart*, «Romanticism on the Net», 11 (1998), pp. 1-63, 33.

⁸ *The Letters*, ed. by Frederick Lafayette Jones, p. 531. On M. Shelley's relationship with Rog-

probably based on Shelley's correspondence with Clairmont, and the epistolary form is a literary device to engage with readers, for Ożarska the addressee may be Rogers on account of «the narratee's general familiarity with certain facts from her life and his readiness to mentally follow her itinerary»⁹.

Moving from these premises, the present essay focuses on Mary Shelley's account of the journey she undertook from the Alps to Lake Como in 1840, and to Venice in 1843, in relation both to *Italy* and Turner's vignettes, as well as to Shelley's female precursors in travel writing to Italy, namely Lady Montagu, Lady Morgan, and Frances Trollope. The latter authors' representation of the route that marked the fame of *Italy* can shed light on the changes and similarities in British travel to Italy in the first half of the nineteenth century.

«*The Barriers of a World*»

For British travellers the crossing of the Alps was a momentous experience from an emotional, aesthetic, and practical viewpoint, especially during the Romantic and Victorian eras. The Napoleonic rule in northern Italy from 1797 and the Napoleonic Wars (c. 1800-1815), followed by the Austrian rule in the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia, marked a watershed in the travel conditions of the passage since Napoleon ordered the construction of transalpine roads to transport his artillery: until then, travellers had to traverse the Alps on foot or by mule (portable chairs were affordable only by the wealthy). The crossing of the Swiss Alps in Rogers's and Shelley's travelogues, mostly based on their respective 1814 and 1840 journeys to Italy¹⁰, epitomise this evolution. Albeit Rogers travelled through the Simplon, the subject of the Alps is introduced in the "Great St Bernard" section of *Italy*:

ers, see also *The Journals of Mary Shelley. 1814-1844*, edited by Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert, Baltimore-London, The John Hopkins University Press, 1987; EMILY W. SUNSTEIN, *Mary Shelley: Romance and Reality*, Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, 1989.

⁹ MAGDALENA OŻARSKA, *Mary Shelley's 'Rambles in Germany and Italy in 1840, 1842, and 1843' as a Digressional Specimen of the Italian Tour Sub-Genre*, «Roczniki Humanistyczne», 60(5) (2012), pp. 263-277, 271.

¹⁰ «A major factor which shaped *Italy* was the timing of Rogers's trips to the peninsula: first in October 1814 and again in the autumn of 1821. With Napoleon's escape from Elba, Rogers [...] left just six weeks before the battle of Waterloo» (McCUE, *Reverse Pygmalionism*, p. 112), and began *Italy* «around 1818, using as raw material the journal of his 1814-15 tour» (HOLCOMB, *Turner and Rogers' 'Italy' Revisited*, p. 79).

Night was again descending, when my mule,
 That all day long had climbed among the clouds,
 Higher and higher still, as by a stair
 Let down from Heaven itself, transporting me,
 Stopped¹¹.

Besides the lyrical voice's descent by mule, the dangers of the enterprise are exemplified by the rescue of an old man and a boy who eventually died after crossing the Alps on foot, as shown in Turner's vignette (fig. 1)¹², which depicts the corpses being carried to the mortuary. Rogers's decision to focus on the Great St Bernard is not coincidental in view of the hospice on its summit, a famous rescue place for travellers, and because Napoleon crossed the pass in 1800 to reach Marengo, the site of his victory over the Austrians. Indeed, "The Descent" is opened by Turner's majestic vignette *Marengo* (fig. 2), and a member of the hospice recounts how he saw «Napoleon himself» and his army – «down among the brink he led / To Victory!»¹³.

In "The Alps", Rogers draws on the imagery of the sublime as codified in Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) to express his awe before the scenery: «who first beholds those everlasting clouds» and «those mighty hills, so shadowy, so sublime»¹⁴, «instantly receives into his soul / a sense, a feeling that he loses not [...] To me they seemed the barriers of a World, / Saying, Thus far, no farther!». This sight provokes in the lyrical voice «a strange delight [...] mingled with fear, / a wonder»¹⁵, precisely the effects of the sublime for Burke, i.e., «astonishment» and «delightful

¹¹ SAMUEL ROGERS, *Italy, A Poem*, London, T. Cadell & E. Moxon, 1830.

¹² Turner's twenty-five illustrations, painted in 1826-1827 and printed in black-and-white engravings, are held by the Tate. The vignettes here included were published separately: in *Italy* they appeared as headpieces to the corresponding sections of the poem.

¹³ ROGERS, *Italy*, p. 18.

¹⁴ These lines call to mind the opening of Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem "Mont Blanc", published at the end of *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* (Mary Shelley's first book and travel narrative, mostly written by her): «the everlasting universe of things / flows through the mind», causing «a trance sublime and strange» (MARY SHELLEY, PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY, *History of a Six Weeks' Tour Through a Part of France, Switzerland, Germany, and Holland*, London, T. Hookham & C. and J. Ollier, 1817, pp. 175-177).

¹⁵ ROGERS, *Italy*, pp. 29-30.

horror»¹⁶. A few lines later, the poet indirectly hints at the roads built in the early 1800s («o'er the Simplon, o'er the Splugen winds / A path of pleasure»), yet he is keen to represent the old way of traversing the Alps: «Not such *my* path! / The very path for them that dare defy / danger»¹⁷.

On the one hand, Mary Shelley's crossing of the Splugen with her son Percy Florence and two Cambridge friends of his, related in the first volume of *Rambles*, closely recalls Rogers's depiction of the Alps as «the Barriers of a World»: «the giant wall of the Alps shuts out the Swiss from Italy. Before the Alp itself (the Splugen) is reached, another huge mountain rises to divide the countries»¹⁸. On the other hand, Shelley acknowledges the extent to which travel conditions differed prior to the road built between 1818 and 1823 by the Austrians, although she refers to its construction through an impersonal form: «a few years ago, [...] [the mountain] was only traversed by shepherds and travellers of the country on mules or on foot. But now, a new and most marvellous road has been constructed [...] on the face of the precipice»¹⁹. Since Shelley states in the Preface that she found it pleasant «while travelling to have in the carriage the works of those who have passed through the same country»²⁰, it does not seem unreasonable to suppose that *Italy*, which she cited in the dedication to Rogers, as well as in her letter to Moxon and in *Rambles* itself, was among these works. «One of the most popular books of the 1830s and 1840s», the poem was often carried as a guide «to the sentiments of the tour»²¹. If so, Shelley might have seen the Alpine landscape and its past hardships through such a lens²². Similarly, in *Italy* (1821) Lady Morgan quotes a

¹⁶ EDMUND BURKE, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, London, J. Dodsley, 1793, p. 41.

¹⁷ ROGERS, *Italy*, p. 31

¹⁸ MARY SHELLEY, *Rambles in Germany and Italy, in 1840, 1842, and 1843*, London, Edward Moxon, 1844, 1, p. 56.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ivi*, p. 1.

²¹ BUZARD, *The Beaten Track*, p. 118.

²² In *Modern Painters I* (1843) John Ruskin, whose first encounter with Turner's art occurred by means of *Italy*, regards his Alpine vignettes as a "window" to the truth. See EMMA SDEGNO, *Ruskin's Optical Thought: Tools for Mountain Representation*, in *Pictures of Modernity: The Visual and the Literary in England, 1850-1930*, edited by Loretta Innocenti, Franco Marucci and Enrica Villari, Venezia, Cafoscarina, 2008, pp. 29-50. Young Ruskin also carried *Italy* to his 1833 trip to Lake Como and Venice via the Splugen.

passage from Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Letters*, published posthumously in 1763, as a prime example of the dangers that in the past the traveller encountered on crossing «those *dreadful Alps*»: «If I come to the bottom, you shall hear of me. We began to ascend Mount Cenis, being carried on little seats of twisted osier fixed upon poles, upon men's shoulders»²³. However, sixty years later, in 1820, Lady Morgan found a «broad, smooth, magnificent road», which prompted her to declare: «all that had been danger, difficulty, and suffering but twenty years back, was now [...] secure beyond the chance of accident, sublime beyond the reach of thought»²⁴.

Due to the mutated circumstances, and with Burke's reference work in mind, Rogers, Lady Morgan, and Shelley all refer to the aesthetics of the sublime. «It may be imagined how singular and sublime this pass is», we read in *Rambles*, and «you [...] see the country you had left, through the narrow opening of the gigantic crags, like a painting in this cloud-reaching frame. It is giddy work to look down over the parapet»²⁵. Such feelings, reminiscent of the «strange delight mingled with fear» experienced by the lyrical I of *Italy*, evoke Burke's remark that sublime objects, if admired «at certain distances», are «delightful»²⁶. Nonetheless, while both Rogers and Lady Morgan evoke Napoleon's hazardous crossing of the Alps when approaching Italy²⁷, Shelley omits any mention to him in this instance. By contrast, in *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* – Mary Shelley's first travelogue, published anonymously in 1817 – she deplored the consequences of the Napoleonic Wars in France during her Continental tour with P.B. Shelley in 1814 and 1816, and the Shelleys opposed the natural sublime of Mont Blanc to Napoleon's military sublime. In *Rambles*, however, the pictorial aspect of the Alpine landscape prevails over historical or political allusions: Shelley's journey across the Alps in 1840 is reported in terms of an aesthetic and emotional experience, devoid of any external digression²⁸.

²³ LADY MORGAN, *Italy*, 1821, p. 34.

²⁴ Ivi, pp. 36-37.

²⁵ SHELLEY, *Rambles*, 1, p. 56.

²⁶ BURKE, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 60.

²⁷ «From such a site as this [the Alps towards Italy] Napoleon Bonaparte [...] pointed to the plains of Lombardy» (see LADY MORGAN, *Italy*, pp. 44-46).

²⁸ Cfr. BRAIDA, *Nature, the Picturesque, and the Sublime in Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's Travel Narratives*. According to Moskal, Shelley also avoids mentioning Napoleon in the Preface be-

Upon her arrival at Chiavenna, Shelley asserts that «all Italian travellers know what it is, after toiling up the bleak, bare, northern, Swiss side of an Alp, to descend towards ever-vernal Italy»²⁹. Not by chance, the epigraph of *Rambles* is a quotation from Giovanni Battista Niccolini's *Arnaldo da Brescia* (1843) on the joy at the change of scene from the Alps – «vedovate da perpetuo gelo / Terre» (lands widowed by perennial frost) like Mary Shelley, who signed *Rambles* as “Mrs Shelley”³⁰ – to «d’Italia il paradiso». Indeed, for the writer Italy is both a Paradise lost and a Paradise regained, tinged with memories of her life there with P.B. Shelley from 1818 until his death in 1822 and her return to England in 1823³¹. Letter I introduces both this idea and Mary Shelley’s aesthetic perception of Italy: «I was about to break a chain that had long held me – cross the Channel – and wander far towards a country which memory painted as a paradise»³², and in Letter V the Bel Paese is depicted as a Golden Age or an Earthly Paradise: «flowery and green, and clothed with radiance [...], Italy opened before us. Thus, [...] after [...] the sickening pass of death, does the saint open his eyes on Paradise»³³. This is a topos Rogers significantly contributed to establish. In *Italy* he employs a similar metaphor for his arrival in «the promised land», likened to the awakening «from a terrible dream» and introduced by the initial «but» marking a turning point:

cause, for many Britons, he «generated the Risorgimento by giving the Italians a taste of loyalties larger than regional ones» (JEANNE MOSKAL, *Travel Writing*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, ed. by Esther Schor, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 242-258, pp. 247-248), and would have hindered her aim of persuading the British audience to support the Risorgimento cause: the publication of *Rambles* was motivated by Shelley’s desire to financially assist the exile nationalist Ferdinando Gatteschi.

²⁹ SHELLEY, *Rambles*, 1, p. 60.

³⁰ She could use her married name instead of “the author of Frankenstein” since her father-in-law’s death in 1843 ended his prohibition to mention the Shelley name (MOSKAL, *Travel Writing*, p. 251). Significantly, *Rambles* recounts Mary Shelley’s return as a widow to the places she had visited with Shelley.

³¹ See also GIULIA BOCCHIO, *Going South: Mary Shelley’s Representation of Italy in Rambles in Germany and Italy*, «de genere. Rivista di studi letterari, postcoloniali e di genere», 7 (2021), pp. 11-22; CAMPBELL ORR, *Mary Shelley’s Rambles in Germany and Italy, the Celebrity Author, and the Undiscovered Country of the Human Heart*.

³² SHELLEY, *Rambles*, 1, p. 2.

³³ ROGERS, *Italy*, p. 60.

But now 'tis passed,
 That turbulent Chaos; and the promised land
 Lies at my feet is all its loveliness!
 To him who starts up from a terrible dream,
 And lo, the sun is shining, and the lark
 Singing around for joy, to him is not
 Such sudden ravishment as now I feel
 At the first glimpses of fair Italy³⁴.

«*Could I recall the ages past*»

In the opening paragraph of *Rambles*, the narrator informs her addressee, i.e., the reader and possibly Rogers, that in the summer she was to accompany her son and two university friends to the shores of Lake Como, the destination of their 1840 journey to Italy. Lake Como became a popular destination for the Britons in the Romantic age, as attested by Wordsworth's *Descriptive Scenes* (1793) and by the very *Italy*, which Shelley quoted in her letter to Moxon on the «names rendered classical by our dear Rogers» – the towns of Bellagio and Tremezzo. Hence, in the 1840s the lake benefited from a consolidated literary fame³⁵, and in the Preface Shelley declares that her travelogue was inspired by «spots often described, pursuing a route such as [...] the common range of the tourist – I could tell nothing new, except as each individual's experience possesses novelty»³⁶. While she did not travel off the beaten path, *Rambles* is «characterised by a temporal oscillation between past and present which sets it apart from the more factual contemporary tourist accounts».³⁷ Indeed, the writer's two-month stay at Cadenabbia, recounted in Part I of *Rambles*, marked her first return to Como since her 1818 visit with P.B. Shelley³⁸.

³⁴ ROGERS, *Italy*, p. 31.

³⁵ LUCA BANI, *La rappresentazione del turismo sul Lario nella letteratura tra Otto e Novecento*, in *La cultura del turismo sul Lario e nelle sue valli*, a cura di Marco Sirtori, Milano, Cisalpino, 2010, pp. 103-119.

³⁶ SHELLEY, *Rambles*, 1, p. VIII.

³⁷ VARINELLI, *Return to Paradise*, p. 76.

³⁸ The centrality of Lake Como in *Rambles* is reflected in the Italian translation of vol. 1, entitled *A zonzo sul lago di Como* (2020), ed. by Claudia Cantaluppi and Pietro Berra as part of the project "Mary Shelley a zonzo sul lago di Como". See <https://sentierodeisogni.it/project/a-zonzo-per-la-germania-e-litalia/>. Vol. 2 was edited by Simonetta Berbeglia as *A Zonzo per la Germania e l'Italia* (2004); to this day, there is no joint Italian edition of the travelogue.

Shelley's perception of Lake Como is ambivalent: the excursions on the lake arose her fears that a boat accident might prove fatal to Percy Florence as it had happened to his father in La Spezia, but she also experienced a religious ecstasy by its shore, quoting Dante's *Paradiso*. In a letter dated 30th August (Mary Shelley's birthday, although there is no mention of it in *Rambles*)³⁹, she recalls feeling the presence of «lovely spirits», amongst whom may be counted «the beloved dead», i.e., her late husband and their children Clara and William, who died in Venice and in Rome in 1818 and 1819 respectively: «on such an evening, I have felt [...] that this world [...] is peopled also in its spiritual life by myriads of loving spirits [...]. Whether the beloved dead make a portion of this holy company, I dare not guess; but that such exists, I feel»⁴⁰.

The "Como" section of *Italy*, opened by Turner's *Lake of Como I* (fig. 3), starts with a declaration that relates to Shelley as well, «I love to sail along the Larian Lake / Under the shore». «Though not [...] to visit Pliny», continues Rogers:

Could I recall the ages past
And play the fool with Time,
I should perhaps reserve
My leisure for Catullus on *his* Lake,
[...] or Virgil at his farm⁴¹.

These references to ancient authors who lived on the banks of Lake Como seem to confirm its evocative ability to conjure up the past, albeit Rogers's perspective here is more historical than personal. «But such things cannot be», he declares, «so I sit still, / And let the boatman shift his little sail». The next lines describe the scenery in early morning, with the sun «o'erflowing with his glorious light / This noble amphitheatre of hills»⁴².

³⁹ Shelley did mention it in her journal entry of that day, written mostly in Italian with prayers for her son's safety (Varinelli, *Return to Paradise*, pp. 78-79). Varinelli has examined the representation of Lake Como in Shelley's novels *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*.

⁴⁰ SHELLEY, *Rambles*, 1, p. 94.

⁴¹ ROGERS, *Italy*, pp. 32-33.

⁴² Ivi, p. 33.

Shelley also would attempt to render the view in the morning, yet «descriptions with difficulty convey definite impressions, and any picture or print of our part of the lake will better than my words describe the scenery around us»⁴³. Her preference for the visual mode of communication to represent the «fair lake» is subsequently reiterated:

I wish I could by my imperfect words bring before you [...] every minute peculiarity, every varying hue, of this matchless scene. [...] When I rise in the morning and look out, our own side is bathed in sunshine, and we see the opposite mountains raising their black masses in sharp relief against the eastern sky [...] on the fair lake beneath⁴⁴.

Considering that Shelley deems «any picture or print of our part of the lake» better than her words, and that she had in mind *Italy* during her stay at Cadenabbia, Turner's vignette of Lake Como may be precisely the visual solution she is invoking. Furthermore, Turner probably based it on the sketches he made during his 1819 visit to Como, a year after Mary Shelley's journey there with Percy, and «the villas, skiffs, and majestic mountain scenery [...] reappear in idealised form in the delicate vignette»⁴⁵. The same applies to Shelley's picturesque depiction of Lake Como; for instance, she likens the view surrounding Villa Serbelloni and Villa Sommariva to «a picture [...] set in a frame»⁴⁶.

Among the «names rendered classical by our dear Rogers» of her letter to Moxon, Shelley cites Tremezzo. In fact, in the «Como» section of *Italy* we find the nearby Tremezzina, erroneously called «Tramezzina»: the lyrical voice crosses its bay and lands «where steps of purest marble met the wave [...]. Soft music came as from Armida's palace, / Breathing enchantment o'er the woods and waters»⁴⁷. Armida is the Saracen sorceress of Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*, who seduces the

⁴³ SHELLEY, *Rambles*, 1, p. 66.

⁴⁴ Ivi, p. 67.

⁴⁵ MEREDITH GARNER, *Lake of Como (I), for Rogers's 'Italy' c. 1826-7 by Joseph Mallord William Turner*, in *J.M.W. Turner: Sketchbooks, Drawings and Watercolours*, edited by David Blayney Brown, Tate Research Publication, 2012.

⁴⁶ SHELLEY, *Rambles*, 1, p. 78.

⁴⁷ ROGERS, *Italy*, p. 35.

Christian knight Rinaldo in her enchanted garden. Although Rogers does not name the actual place, it is most likely one of the villas overlooking Lake Como. In particular, if we consider the steps on the lake and the indirect reference to gardens, it could be Villa Melzi in Bellagio, or Villa Carlotta on the opposite shore, in Tremezzo, called Villa Sommariva in *Rambles* after its owner until 1843, the secretary general of the Cisalpine Republic Giovanni Battista Sommariva. Both villas were visited by Mary Shelley and Lady Morgan⁴⁸. The place in the poem is hosting a celebration,

where a Fairy-Queen,
 [...] Led in the dance, disporting as she pleased.
 Under a starry sky – while I looked on.
 [...] reading in the eyes that sparkled round,
 The thousand love-adventures written there⁴⁹.

Interestingly, Shelley mentions an episode of *Gerusalemme Liberata* concerning Rinaldo and the enchanted forest which is very similar to Rogers's above-quoted description but for the fact that Lake Como reflects Shelley's new religiosity, as argued by Varinelli (2019)⁵⁰: «there are stanzas in Tasso that make themselves peculiarly felt here. One, when Rinaldo is setting out by starlight on the adventure of the enchanted forest, full of the religion that wells up instinctively in the heart amidst these scenes, beneath this sky»⁵¹. The narrator's last letter before leaving Como for Bergamo (the very same route followed by the lyrical I of *Italy*) further links the two travel accounts, as Shelley writes: «I [...] have retired to a shady bower of the gardens of the villa Sommariva, where the hum of many thousand voices falls softened on my ear. "Eyes, look your last!" Soon the curtain of absence will be drawn

⁴⁸ I am grateful to Pietro Berra for suggesting that the place described in *Italy* could be Villa Melzi, on account of the lyrical I's departure from Bellagio. For Shelley, both Bellagio and Tremezzo gained fame thanks to *Italy*. On 3rd September 2023 a section of the Lake Como Greenway, in Tremezzina, was named "via Mary Shelley" by local authorities. See "Mary Shelley innamorata del lago di Como. Tremezzina le dedica la passeggiata". «ilgiorno.it», 2 Sept. 2023. <https://www.ilgiorno.it/como/cronaca/mary-shelley-tremezzina-passeggiata-09da71d6>.

⁴⁹ ROGERS, *Italy*, pp. 35-36.

⁵⁰ VARINELLI, *Return to Paradise*, p. 78.

⁵¹ SHELLEY, *Rambles*, 1, pp. 95-96.

before this surpassing scene»⁵². Not only does the distant hum recall the «soft music» coming «as from Armida's palace», but “Como” also ends with a reference to the «Fairy-Queen», whose voice accompanies the poet as much as the hum of many voices constitute one of Shelley's last memories of the lake:

Night lingered still,
 When, with a dying breeze, I left Bellaggio;
 But the strain followed me; and still I saw
 Thy smile, Angelica; and still I heard
 Thy voice – once and again bidding adieu⁵³.

Finally, Shelley uses the same expression as Rogers's to mark her departure from Lake Como: «sadly *I bade adieu* to its romantic shores and the calm retirement I had there enjoyed»⁵⁴. The travellers' next stop was Bergamo, followed by Milan, the final destination of Mary Shelley's 1840 journey to Italy: «in vain I have debated and struggled, wishing to visit Florence or Venice. My son must return to England»⁵⁵. She had to wait 1843 to fulfil her wish to see «the queen of the ocean» again, as she defines Venice in the second volume of *Rambles*.

«*A glorious City in the sea*»

Venice is the first Italian city described in vol. 2 of *Rambles*: Shelley's one-month stay there with her son and two friends of his is followed by their visits to Florence, Rome, Naples, and Amalfi. When recounting her journey to Venice along the Brenta, undertaken in September 1843, Shelley recalls her first one, «clouded» by the death of «her child»:

This road was as distinct in my mind as if traversed yesterday. I will not dwell on the sad circumstances that clouded my first visit to Venice. Death hovered over the scene. [...] With my “mind's eye” I saw those before me long departed; and I was agitated by emotions [...] the deepest a woman's heart can harbour – a dread to see her child even at that instant expire⁵⁶.

⁵² ROGERS, *Italy*, p. 103.

⁵³ *Ivi*, p. 36.

⁵⁴ SHELLEY, *Rambles*, 1, p. 105, emphasis added.

⁵⁵ ROGERS, *Italy*, p. 109.

⁵⁶ SHELLEY, *Rambles*, 2, pp. 77-78.

In September 1818 the Shelleys were travelling to Venice to seek a doctor for their eighteen-month-old daughter Clara, on Lord Byron's suggestion, but the child died as soon as they reached the city⁵⁷. Besides Shelley's personal recollections⁵⁸, Venice holds a special place in English literature, from Shakespeare's *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice* to the first twenty-two lines of *Childe Harold's* Canto IV and the "Venice" section of *Italy*. Indeed, Byron's and Rogers's poems, both illustrated by Turner, shaped the British image of Venice from the first half of the nineteenth century throughout the Victorian age, and Mary Shelley was no exception: in 1818 she read Canto IV «before embarking on her own sightseeing»⁵⁹, while Rogers's lines and Turner's vignettes, as we shall see, are key references through which she conveyed her impression of the city in *Rambles*.

Venice also played a significant role in several mid-century travelogues, such as Frances Trollope's *A Visit to Italy* (1842) and the chapter "An Italian Dream" in Charles Dickens's *Pictures from Italy* (1846), not to mention the importance of the city for Turner and Ruskin, which culminated in *The Stones of Venice* (1851-1853) and in the painter's watercolours of the 1840s. These authors saw Venice under Austrian rule, following the fall of the Republic with Napoleon's conquest in 1797. In *Childe Harold*, the «dogeless city» – a «dying glory» – is «repeopled» by the protagonists of Shakespeare's plays and of Otway's *Venice Preserved*, symbolizing the eternity of art opposed to the decline from the former commercial and maritime power of the Serenissima Republic: «ours is a trophy which will not decay / With the Rialto; Shylock and the Moor, / And Pierre»⁶⁰. But while Canto IV begins in *medias res* («I stood on the Bridge of Sights, a prison and a palace at each hand»), both Letter VI of *Rambles* and the thirteenth section of Rogers's *Italy*, with Turner's

⁵⁷ Clara fell ill en route from Pisa to Este, where Mary was to join P.B. Shelley with the aim of persuading Byron to keep his and Clairmont's illegitimate daughter. Byron had moved to Venice in 1817.

⁵⁸ Campbell Orr argues that Shelley presents herself as a mother, not as a "celebrity author", and highlights her predilection for the pictures of the Virgin in Venice (CAMPBELL ORR, *Mary Shelley's Rambles in Germany and Italy, the Celebrity Author, and the Undiscovered Country of the Human Heart*, p. 52).

⁵⁹ SCOTT-KILVERT, *The Journals of Mary Shelley*, pp. 227-228.

⁶⁰ GEORGE GORDON BYRON, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. Canto the Fourth*. London, John Murray, p. 5.

vignette of Saint Mark's Place as headpiece, report the journey to Venice by boat. The present tense in the famous opening of the "Venice" section of *Italy* – «there is a glorious City in the sea» – emphasises the timeless myth of Venice, and some lines below its dreamlike quality is underlined:

and from the land we went,
 As to a floating City [...]
 And gliding up her streets as in a dream,
 So smoothly, silently – by many a dome
 Mosque-like, and many a stately portico,
 The statues ranged along an azure sky⁶¹.

Shelley's own impact with the scenery leading to Venice is revived by the sight of the «queen of the Ocean», whose «domes and towers arise from the waves with a majesty unrivalled upon the earth»⁶²; here she almost quotes Canto IV («she looks a sea Cybele [...] Rising with her tiara of proud towers / [...] with majestic motion»), and Rogers's above-quoted lines. However, as soon as Shelley and her travel companions landed, they were «hailed by a storm of *gondolieri*; their vociferation [...] so loud, so vehement» and, writes Shelley, «the dilapidated appearance of the palaces, [...] weather-worn and neglected struck me forcibly, and diminished the beauty of the city in my eyes»⁶³, while Rogers remarks upon the permanence of art over the decay of Venetian palaces – «tho' Time had shattered them, / still glowing with the richest hues of art, / As though the wealth within them had run o'er»⁶⁴. The glorious past of Venice is also stressed in Rogers's lines on the origins of the city, built by the people who escaped from Attila like the waterfowl building their nest, and

rose, like an exhalation from the deep,
 A vast Metropolis [...].
 A scene of light and glory, a dominion,
 That has endured longest among men⁶⁵.

⁶¹ ROGERS, *Italy*, pp. 47-48.

⁶² SHELLEY, *Rambles*, 2, p. 79.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ ROGERS, *Italy*, p. 48.

⁶⁵ Ivi, p. 50.

In the second volume of *A Visit to Italy* (1842), published two years before *Rambles* and comparable to it in the epistolary form and themes, Shelley's contemporary Frances Trollope recounts her visit to Venice in October 1841. In their portrayal of the city, both women travellers were influenced by Byron and Rogers but, at the same time, they held personal views on the contemporary reality of the place. Although in *Rambles* she mentions the late Byron only with respect to his former stay at Palazzo Mocenigo⁶⁶, and she never acknowledges his influence, Shelley echoes Canto IV when highlighting the enchantment of Venice: «there is something so different in Venice from any other place in the world, that you leave at once all accustomed habits and everyday sights to enter enchanted ground»⁶⁷. Similarly, Trollope defines Venice «ex-earthly», and claims that, on approaching it, one feels «[as] if some great enchanter took possession of us [...] to show us nothing that we had ever seen before»⁶⁸. Yet she reacts against Byron's emphasis on its present decay: «instead of sinking, she floats so [...] beautifully, that, to my eye, she still looks triumphant [...] even though [...] her doge, her Council of Ten, and her lion's mouth are no more»⁶⁹. Despite her reservations on the ruined palaces, on the other hand, Shelley quotes two lines from *Italy* on the still living history of Venice, embodied for example by the accent of the gondoliers, «a shred romance»⁷⁰, rendering Venice «uninjured» albeit its former glory appears to have sunk:

⁶⁶ SHELLEY, *Rambles*, 2, p. 119.

⁶⁷ Ivi, p. 92. Cfr. «Unto us she has a spell beyond her name in history»; «as from the stroke of an enchanter's wand» (BYRON, *Childe Harold*, p. 3). On Byron's legacy in the nineteenth century see, among others, BUZARD, *The Beaten Track*; DAVID LAVEN, *Lord Byron, Count Daru, and Anglophone Myths of Venice in the nineteenth century*, in «MDCCC1800», 1 (2012), pp. 5-32. As for P.B. Shelley, his wife mentions the Lido setting of *Julian and Maddalo* (ivi, p. 99), and his opinion on the character of the Venetians: «When I was last in Venice, many many years ago, I knew no Venetians, and it so happened that the English whom I saw chose to erect themselves into censors of this people [...]. Shelley, in his letters and poems, echoes these impressions. I cannot pretend to say with what justice such opinions were formed: I do not know whether the Venetians are improved» (ivi, p. 107).

⁶⁸ FRANCES TROLLOPE, *A Visit to Italy*, London, H. Colburn., 1842, pp. 66-69.

⁶⁹ Ivi, p. 71.

⁷⁰ SHELLEY, *Rambles*, 2, p. 83.

[Venice] has floated down, amid a thousand wrecks
Uninjured, from the Old World to the New⁷¹.

Few passages below, Shelley cites *Italy* again with reference to Turner's vignettes as the best possible representation of Venice when words and even Canaletto's paintings fail to convey the essence of St Mark's Place:

I spare description of a spot, of which there are so many thousand – besides numerous pictures by Canaletti [*sic*] and his imitators, which [...] show all that can be shown. Perhaps the vignettes to Mr. Roger's *Italy*, by Turner, better than any other description or representation, can impart this⁷².

Trollope expresses a similar opinion, but she does not offer her readers the alternative of Turner's vignettes: even if Canaletto accurately depicted various «points of view» of the city, «nothing that can either be said or painted can possibly convey any full, adequate idea of what one must feel on approaching Venice»⁷³. Turner's *Venice* (fig. 4) depicts Saint Mark's Place from the Grand Canal, filled with gondolas and the Bucentaur, and it is the visual counterpart to Rogers's lines on the legend of Venice: «the Doge's Barge dates the scene to before the French invasion of 1797 when Venice was still a proud and thriving republic»⁷⁴.

As for its contemporary political and economic situation, in line with her support of the *Risorgimento* cause for the liberation of Italy from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Shelley claims that the emperor sought to revive trade «to increase his store; for two thirds of the taxes of the Regno Lombardo-Veneto go to Vienna»⁷⁵. Trollope, on the contrary, regards such revival a boast for Venetian economy, and envisions Venice as «a flourishing commercial city» and a «museum of art»:

⁷¹ Quoted in SHELLEY, *Rambles*, 2, p. 83.

⁷² Ivi, p. 84.

⁷³ TROLLOPE, *A Visit to Italy*, p. 71.

⁷⁴ MEREDITH GARNER, *Venice, for Rogers's 'Italy' c. 1826–7 by Joseph Mallord William Turner*, in *J.M.W. Turner: Sketchbooks, Drawings and Watercolours*.

⁷⁵ SHELLEY, *Rambles*, 2, p. 104.

Venice is not likely to be ever again the heart and the head of a great maritime empire; but in all human probability she will again become a flourishing commercial city, and still remain a magnificent museum of art, and a favourite resort of the curious and intelligent of all countries.... and I think we may say to her, not as a threat, but as a very comfortable prediction⁷⁶.

Connected to this idea is the construction of the railway bridge linking Venice to the mainland, ordered by the Austrians to facilitate trade, as well as the circulation of tourists. The works began in 1843, when Shelley revisited the city and wrote *Rambles*. Her reaction was not favourable: «however convenient, it is impossible not to repine at this innovation; the power, the commerce, the arts of Venice are gone, the bridge will rob it of its romance»⁷⁷. If Trollope is optimistic on the future of Venice, Shelley's view of the present and future state of the city thus oscillates between Rogers's romantic vision of it as «uninjured», best conveyed in Turner's vignette to *Italy*, and the feeling that its «romance» is to be ruined by the Austrian innovations, as Shelley remarks very much as a threat rather than a comfortable prediction.

Conclusion

The representation of the Alps, Lake Como, and Venice in the travelogues under analysis illustrates the shifts and analogies in the early and mid-nineteenth-century British journey to Italy. In particular, Mary Shelley's *Rambles in Germany and Italy* presents numerous yet ambivalent points of contact with the influential poem of its dedicatee, Samuel Rogers's *Italy*, illustrated by Turner. Rogers's and Lady Montagu's accounts differ from Lady Morgan's and Shelley's ones with respect to the crossing of the Alps, altered by the transalpine roads built at the beginning of the century, but Shelley shares with Rogers and Lady Morgan the portrayal of the Alps in Burckian terms. Moreover, for both Rogers and Shelley Lake Como is imbued with literary – and personal for Shelley – associations to the past, and Turner's vignette could be the visual depiction of the lake that Shelley seeks due to the inadequacy of her words. With regard to Venice, she explicitly

⁷⁶ TROLLOPE, *A Visit to Italy*, p. 122.

⁷⁷ SHELLEY, *Rambles*, 2, p. 104.

cites Rogers's lines and Turner's vignettes as the best way to convey its «uninjured» myth, although for Shelley, unlike Frances Trollope, the future of the city is threatened by the Austrian rule. Thus, Mary Shelley's 'Paradise regained' in the 1840s reflects all the changes «from the Old World to the New», but with a constant: like Rogers's Italy, it is «painted».

ABSTRACT

L'ultima opera di Mary Shelley è un resoconto di viaggio sul suo ritorno in Italia vent'anni dopo la morte di Percy Bysshe Shelley nel Golfo della Spezia. Il presente contributo analizza i numerosi – ma poco studiati – nessi tra *Rambles in Germany and Italy in 1840, 1842, and 1843* (1844) e il poema illustrato *Italy* (1830) di Samuel Rogers, a cui è dedicato il *travelogue* della scrittrice e con cui condivide l'editore. La resa "visiva" di Shelley delle Alpi, del lago di Como e di Venezia è qui esaminata in relazione a *Italy* e alle vignette di Turner al poema, citate in *Rambles* riguardo a Venezia. L'analisi può far luce sui cambiamenti e sulle analogie nel viaggio inglese in Italia nella prima metà del XIX secolo, con ulteriore riferimento a Lady Montagu, Lady Morgan e Frances Trollope.

Mary Shelley's last work is a travel account on her return to Italy two decades after Percy Bysshe Shelley drowned in the Gulf of La Spezia. This essay explores the numerous yet little studied links between *Rambles in Germany and Italy in 1840, 1842, and 1843* (1844) and the illustrated *Italy, A Poem* (1830) by Samuel Rogers, to whom Shelley's travelogue is dedicated: the two works also share the same publisher. Shelley's aesthetic recounting of the Alps, Lake Como, and Venice is thus examined in relation to *Italy* and Turner's vignettes to the poem, explicitly cited in *Rambles* with regard to Venice. The analysis can shed light on the changes and similarities in British travel to Italy in the first half of the XIX century, with further reference to Lady Montagu, Lady Morgan, and Frances Trollope.



1. Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Hospice of the Great St Bernard II (The Dead-House)* for Rogers's *Italy*, 1830, Line engraving on paper, Tate
2. Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Marengo* for Rogers's *Italy*, 1830, Line engraving on paper, Tate
3. Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Lake of Como I* for Rogers's *Italy*, 1830, Line engraving on paper, Tate
4. Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Venice* for Rogers's *Italy*, 1830, Line engraving on paper, Tate

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