

L'ANALISI LINGUISTICA E LETTERARIA

FACOLTÀ DI SCIENZE LINGUISTICHE E LETTERATURE STRANIERE
UNIVERSITÀ CATTOLICA DEL SACRO CUORE

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RETURN TO PARADISE: LAKE COMO IN THE WORKS OF MARY SHELLEY

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NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

This article deals with Mary Shelley's imaginary and actual revisiting of Lake Como in her writings following her return to England from Italy in 1823. First the Shelleys' weekend escape to Como in April 1818 is retraced through their contemporary accounts in their journals and letters. I then look at the ways in which recollections of this visit are incorporated into Mary Shelley's fictional and non-fictional works, and I compare them to the narratives of her subsequent two visits to Lake Como.

Oggetto di questo articolo è la rappresentazione del Lago di Como nelle opere di Mary Shelley successive al ritorno in Inghilterra dall'Italia nel 1823. Dopo aver ripercorso, attraverso le testimonianze contenute in lettere e pagine di diario, gli spostamenti degli Shelley nel fine settimana che trascorsero sul Lario nell'aprile 1818, analizzerò le memorie di questa visita incorporate nelle opere di Mary Shelley, confrontandole con le narrazioni delle sue due successive visite al Lago di Como.

Keywords: Mary Shelley, Lake Como, *Frankenstein*, *Rambles in Germany and Italy*, Italian language

Five days after arriving in Milan, on Thursday, 9 April 1818, Mary Shelley and Percy Bysshe Shelley set out for Como, where they remained until the following Sunday, looking unsuccessfully for a place to rent for the summer¹. Lake Como, and not Milan, was, in fact, the intended final destination of the Shelleys' journey to Italy, as Shelley informed Thomas Love Peacock in his first letter from that city². The Shelleys left their two children, William and Clara, and, most importantly, Claire Clairmont, Mary's stepsister, in Milan. In their absence, Claire passed the time reading, riding on the Corso with her daughter, Allegra, and climbing to the top of the Duomo³. Meanwhile Percy and Mary crossed Lake Como by boat four times, and saw at least three houses to rent. The first house they saw, on Friday morning, was Villa Tanzi, in Torno, near Como. Feldman and Scott-Kilvert's

¹ M. Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley 1814-1844*, P.R. Feldman – D. Scott-Kilvert ed., 2 vols, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1987, Vol. 1, pp. 204-205.

² P.B. Shelley, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, F.L. Jones ed., 2 vols, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1964, Vol. 2, p. 3.

³ C. Clairmont, *The Journals of Claire Clairmont*, M. Kingston Stocking ed., Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 1968, pp. 89-91.

edition of Mary Shelley's journals reads "Sanzi", but no Villa Sanzi has ever stood on the shores of Lake Como. A fresh consultation of the manuscript has revealed that the character the two editors took to be an "S" is a rather carelessly formed, but still recognisable "T"⁴. In an 1819 travel article the Italian journalist and writer Davide Bertolotti observed that Villa Tanzi was a popular tourist destination⁵. One of its many visitors was Lady Morgan, who lamented the excessive landscape gardening at odds with the "naturally picturesque and wildly rural" surroundings of the Villa – "red brick arcades, forts, and citadels, with cannons, cells for hermits, grottos for monsters, monuments to mistresses who perhaps never lived, and cenotaphs to friends who are in no haste to fill them"⁶. Mary Shelley also found something to complain about, but her considerations are of a more practical order. She described Villa Tanzi as "a very nice house but out of repair with an excellent garden but full of serpents". Thence the Shelleys sailed further north to the Tremezzina, a locality on the opposite shore of the lake, where the next day they looked "at a house beautifully situated but too small and afterwards crossing the lake at another magnificent one which we shall be very happy if we obtain"⁷. The following Monday, Shelley invited Lord Byron to join them in "the situation which I imagine we have chosen (the Villa Pliniana)"⁸. Villa Pliniana is also in the village of Torno, and, like Villa Tanzi, was a sight no traveller would miss. Although Byron did not accept Shelley's invitation (indeed, he never visited Lake Como), his name seems to have replaced the Shelleys' names in the list of notable guests to the Villa on the Lombardy Region's cultural heritage website⁹. During their trip the Shelleys also visited the celebrated Villa Clerici (now Villa Carlotta) in Tremezzo and met his owner, Gian Battista Sommariva¹⁰, a former statesman and personal friend of Napoleon turned art collector. Twenty-two years later Mary Shelley revisited his house and described its garden and rich collection of masterpieces – which includes a monumental marble frieze by Thorwaldsen and works by Canova – in her travelogue, *Rambles in Germany and Italy in 1840, 1842, and 1843* (1844)¹¹.

The "Shore of the Lake of Como" provides the setting for *Rosalind and Helen* (1819). Shelley completed his "Modern Eclogue" in the summer of 1818, but manuscript evidence indicates that it was begun two years earlier, in Geneva, and many of its landscape allusions originally referred to a different lake, Lac Léman¹². The change of setting reflects the

⁴ Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodleian MS. Abinger d. 28, fol. 78^r.

⁵ D. Bertolotti, *Viaggio al Lago di Como*, Ostinelli, Como 1821, p. 42. Bertolotti's travelogue first appeared in 1819 in serial form in the magazine he edited, *Il raccogliatore*.

⁶ Lady Morgan, *Italy*, 2 vols, Colburn, London 1821, Vol. 1, p. 182.

⁷ M. Shelley, *Journals*, Vol. 1, p. 204.

⁸ P.B. Shelley, *Letters*, Vol. 2, p. 5.

⁹ <http://www.lombardiabeniculturali.it/architetture/schede/CO180-00182/> (last accessed August 24, 2018).

¹⁰ M. Shelley, *Journals*, Vol. 1, p. 204.

¹¹ M. Shelley, *The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley*, 8 vols, Pickering & Chatto, London 1996, Vol. 8, J. Moskal ed., p. 122.

¹² P.B. Shelley, *The Poems of Shelley*, Vol. 2, G. Matthews – K. Everest ed., Pearson Education, Harlow 2000 (Longman Annotated English Poets), pp. 266-267.

delight that both Percy and Mary, with whom the poem was a special favourite¹³, took in visiting Lake Como, qualified as “beautiful”, “divine”, and “lovely” in Mary Shelley’s journal account¹⁴. Doubtless, part of the Shelleys’ delight arose from their being alone that weekend, which happened quite rarely, especially after their relocation to Italy. Shelley’s enthusiasm fully emerges in the description of the lakeside that takes up most of the four pages, all cross-written, of his letter to Peacock dated 20 April 1818. This is the first of a series of long descriptive letters that Shelley addressed to Peacock from Italy, but in fact wrote for all his friends in England, which he would probably have published had he returned. That such was Shelley’s intention is suggested by Mary Shelley’s postscript to Shelley’s letter from Bologna of 10 November 1818, requesting Peacock to “[t]ake care of these letters because I have no copies & I wish to transcribe them when I return to England”¹⁵. As often, Shelley’s enthusiasm was short-lived, and no further mention of Lake Como is to be found in his works.

The visit made a longer-lasting impression on Mary Shelley. Indeed, it represents an influential, but previously unexplored, moment of her multifaceted experience of Italy¹⁶. In her 1826 review of *The English in Italy*, Mary Shelley defined Italy as “an exhaustless theme”¹⁷. She herself wrote extensively about it since her return to England in the summer of 1823. Being unable to go back physically to her “adopted land”¹⁸, she kept revisiting it in her writings. Her memories and experiences of Italy and the Italians thus lend life and authenticity to what was perhaps not an exhaustless but certainly a fashionable “theme” in contemporary English literature. Interestingly, some of the places in Italy that are most frequently evoked in Mary Shelley’s works are places where the Shelleys spent relatively little time, such as Este, in the Euganean Hills¹⁹, or Lake Como.

¹³ M. Shelley, *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, B.T. Bennett ed., 3 vols, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1980-88, Vol. 1, p. 43, and P.B. Shelley, *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, Mrs. Shelley ed., 4 vols, Moxon, London 1839, Vol. 3, p. 159.

¹⁴ M. Shelley, *Journals*, Vol. 1, p. 204.

¹⁵ M. Shelley, *Letters*, Vol. 1, p. 82. See also P.B. Shelley, *Letters*, Vol. 2, p. 152.

¹⁶ In recent years a number of articles and books investigating different aspects of Mary Shelley’s Italian experience have been published. See, for instance, E.H. Schor, *Mary Shelley in Transit*, in *The Other Mary Shelley: Beyond Frankenstein*, A.A. Fisch – A.K. Mellor – E.H. Schor ed., Oxford University Press, New York 1993, pp. 235-257; J. Moskal, *Mary Shelley’s Rambles in Germany and Italy and the Discourses of Race and National Manners*, “La questione romantica”, 3-4, 1997, pp. 205-212; S. Curran, *Reproductions of Italy in Post-Waterloo Britain*, in *Immaginando l’Italia: itinerari letterari del Romanticismo inglese*, L.M. Crisafulli ed., CLUEB, Bologna 2002, pp. 135-151; G.G. Dekker, *The Fictions of Romantic Tourism: Radcliffe, Scott, and Mary Shelley*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2005; M. Schoina, *Romantic “Anglo-Italians”: Configurations of Identity in Byron, the Shelleys, and the Pisan Circle*, Ashgate, Farnham 2009; E. Marino, *Mary Shelley e l’Italia: il viaggio, il Risorgimento, la questione femminile*, Le Lettere, Firenze 2011. A still indispensable contribution to the understanding of Mary Shelley’s Italianism is J. de Palacio, *Mary Shelley dans son œuvre: contribution aux études shelleyennes*, Klincksieck, Paris 1969, pp. 21-90.

¹⁷ M. Shelley, *Novels*, Vol. 2, P. Clemit ed., p. 159.

¹⁸ M. Shelley, “The Choice” [Journal Version], l. 60, in *Mary Shelley’s Literary Lives and Other Writings*, 4 vols, Pickering & Chatto, London 2002, Vol. 4, P. Clemit – A.A. Markley ed., p. 124.

¹⁹ See V. Varinelli, *Echi e memorie. Este nell’opera di Mary Shelley*, in *Isole in fiore. Mary e Percy B. Shelley tra Este, Venezia e i Colli Euganei*, F. Selmin ed., Cierre edizioni, Sommacampagna 2017, pp. 49-66.

Perhaps the most valuable insights into Mary Shelley's Italian experience are offered by the biographical essays she wrote between 1833 and 1835 for the three-volume *Lives of the Most Eminent Literary and Scientific Men of Italy, Spain and Portugal* (1835-37), part of Dionysius Lardner's *Cabinet Cyclopædia*. Biography and autobiography often merge in Mary Shelley's so-called "Italian Lives", as she digresses with her own recollections whenever she mentions a place that she visited. The "Life" of Ugo Foscolo gave Mary Shelley the opportunity to recall the scenery of Villa Pliniana, where Foscolo "took up his residence" after he "retreated from the university", thus "giving proof of his pure and ardent love of nature, so rare among Italians, by his retirement from cities to the sublime and luxuriant scenery of [Lake Como]"²⁰. But Foscolo did not live in the Pliniana. Mary Shelley's source, Giuseppe Pecchio's biography of Foscolo, mentions his frequent visits to the Villa, but clearly states that Foscolo lodged in nearby Borgo Vico²¹. Mary Shelley followed her source closely throughout her essay, accurately paraphrasing entire passages and quoting from it in translation, so her mistake is hardly accidental. By stating that Foscolo resided at Villa Pliniana, rather than merely visited it, she implicitly justified her lengthy description of the place that follows:

He took up his residence at a villa named the Pliniana, built on the site of the fountains whose periodical ebb and flow the younger Pliny records in his letters. The lake, paled in by mountains, bathes the walls of the villa; and the neighbouring banks, clothed with myrtle and arbutus, overhang the waters, and cast their deep shade on the clear depths: the precipitous mountain rises behind, diversified by chestnut woods; and here and there are seen huge cypresses, whose spires seem to pierce the skies, when regarded from the terraced garden of the villa. The flowing fountains keep up a perpetual murmur; and, perhaps, in all the varied earth there is no spot which affords such a combination of the picturesque, the beautiful, the rich, the balmy, and the sublime²².

Such a vivid picture must have appealed to an audience already interested in things Italian. Engaging her readers' attention was not Mary Shelley's only concern though. Her description of Villa Pliniana contains distinct echoes of that provided by Shelley in his letter to Peacock of 20 April 1818 discussed above:

the finest scenery is that of the Villa Pliniana, so called from a fountain which ebbs & flows every three hours described by the younger Pliny which is in the courtyard. [...] It is built upon terraces *raised from* the bottom of the lake, together with its garden at the foot of a semicircular precipice overshadowed by profound forests of chestnut. The scene from the colonnade is the most extraordinary at once & the most lovely that eye ever beheld. On one side is the mountain & immediately over

²⁰ M. Shelley, *Literary Lives*, Vol. 1, T.J. Mazzeo ed., p. 348.

²¹ G. Pecchio, *Vita di Ugo Foscolo*, Ruggia, Lugano 1830, pp. 165-166. In 1808-1809 Foscolo was a regular guest of Count Giovan Battista Giovinetti in Como. He spent the summer of 1809 in Borgo Vico, then a village nearby (U. Foscolo, *Opere: Tomo I*, F. Gavazzoni ed., Ricciardi, Milano-Napoli 1974, pp. xxvii-xxviii).

²² M. Shelley, *Literary Lives*, Vol. 1, p. 348.

you are clusters of cypress trees of an astonishing height which seem to pierce the sky. Above you from among the clouds as it were descends a waterfall of immense size, broken by the woody rocks into a thousand channels to the lake. On the other side is seen the blue extent of the lake, & the mountains sprinkled with sails & spires²³.

Mary Shelley copied this and other letters by Shelley in November 1833 in preparation for an edition of them, which she eventually published in 1839, thus fulfilling her late husband's ambition. It is perhaps more than a coincidence that in the same journal entry as mentions her "copying Shelley's letters" Mary Shelley recorded the beginning of her work on "the lives of the Italians"²⁴. Incorporating Shelley's voice into her works in the form of explicit quotations, or echoes (as here), is a mourning strategy Mary Shelley adopted virtually everywhere in her production after July 1822, but most frequently within an Italian context.

To turn to Mary Shelley's fictional works, Villa Pliniana and its surroundings had already provided the setting for part of her third novel, *The Last Man* (1826). Towards the end of the novel the protagonist, Lionel Verney, moves to Villa Pliniana with his son, his niece, and his closest friend, who like him have survived the plague that killed the rest of mankind. Lake Como appears as a "paradisaical retreat"²⁵ to them, but when Lionel's child dies – in a manner reminiscent of William Shelley's death, in Rome in June 1819 – this paradise proves an illusion, and the three survivors feel compelled to leave. This episode, in which Lake Como stands synecdochically for Italy, voices Mary Shelley's disillusionment with a country that may well have seemed like paradise to the English exile until she lost her children and, later, her husband there.

Lake Como has an even stronger symbolic value in the 1831 version of *Frankenstein*. In the text of the 1818 edition references to Italy are sparse and not particularly noteworthy. As we learn in the first chapter, Elizabeth Lavenza is the daughter of Alphonse Frankenstein's sister and an Italian gentleman, but she does not seem to have retained any link with her motherland. In the revised version, Victor himself was born in Italy, in Naples, during his parents' tour of the Continent. In the course of the same tour, the Frankensteins adopt Elizabeth, who is now the orphan child of a Milanese nobleman and patriot,

one of those Italians nursed in the memory of the antique glory of Italy, — one among the *schiavi ognor frementi*, who exerted himself to obtain the liberty of his country. He became the victim of its weakness. Whether he had died, or still lingered in the dungeons of Austria, was not known²⁶.

²³ P.B. Shelley, *Letters*, Vol. 2, p. 7, corrected against holograph manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodleian MS. Shelley c. 1, fol. 225^v).

²⁴ M. Shelley, *Journals*, Vol. 2, pp. 532-533. Shelley's letters appeared in *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, 2 vols, Mrs. Shelley ed., Moxon, London 1840 [for 1839].

²⁵ M. Shelley, *Novels*, Vol. 4, J. Blumberg – N. Crook ed., p. 335.

²⁶ M. Shelley, *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus*, Colburn and Bentley, London 1831, p. 22. The phrase in Italian, which can be translated as "always restless slaves", is derived from Alfieri's work, *Il Misogallo* (Sonnet 18).

As noted by de Palacio, the character of Elizabeth Lavenza's natural father is modelled on Silvio Pellico, who had recently been released from Spielberg²⁷. This variation can thus be interpreted as Mary Shelley's tribute to the Risorgimento. Later in the novel, we are informed that Elizabeth had inherited a "small possession on the shores of Como" from her father, which had been first confiscated and then restored to her by the Austrian government thanks to Alphonse Frankenstein's intercession. Victor then recalls: "It was agreed that, immediately after our union, we should proceed to Villa Lavenza, and spend our first days of happiness beside the beautiful lake near which it stood"²⁸. The newly-wed couple, however, never reaches Lake Como. Having begun their journey to Italy by water, Victor and Elizabeth stop in Evian for the first night of their honeymoon, and there, like in the first edition, Elizabeth is murdered by the Creature. As Victor's country of birth, and the place where he spent his early childhood, Italy represents a state of innocence and bliss that he can no longer attain. It is a paradise that is lost to him. This romanticised depiction of Italy reflects Mary Shelley's idealisation of the country, a process that can be traced back through her letters and journal entries to the very moment in which she made the painful decision to return to England after Shelley's death, as if in reaction to the disillusionment she later expressed in *The Last Man*. Additionally, the representation of Lake Como, and, by extension, Italy, as an unattainable idyll in *Frankenstein* manifests the author's own fear never to see Italy again, such as emerges from a letter she wrote to Edward John Trelawny on 22 March 1831, only a few months before the new edition of *Frankenstein* was published: "You talk of my visiting Italy — It is impossible for me to tell you how much I repine at my imprisonment here but I dare not anticipate a change to take me there for a long time"²⁹.

Mary Shelley had to wait almost ten more years before she could revisit Italy. Finally, in the summer of 1840 she accompanied her son Percy Florence and two Cambridge friends on a Continental tour. As in 1818, the final destination of her party was Lake Como, where the students could prepare for their degrees and enjoy water sports. This second visit is narrated in epistolary fashion in Part I of *Rambles in Germany and Italy*. Mary Shelley's travelogue is characterised by a temporal oscillation between past and present that sets it apart from the more factual contemporary tourist accounts. This movement results from her alternating detailed descriptions of the places she is visiting with her own earlier memories of those places. Unsurprisingly, retrospective passages predominate in the letters about Italy. During her stay on Lake Como it is a ferry trip that evokes her strongest recollections:

I now made a voyage I had made years before, when putting off from Como in a skiff we had visited Tremezzo. How vividly I remembered and recognised each spot. I longed inexpressibly to land at the Pliniana, which remained in my recollection as a place adorned by magical beauty. The abrupt precipices, the gay-looking villas, the

²⁷ J. de Palacio, *Mary Shelley*, p. 77.

²⁸ M. Shelley, *Frankenstein*, pp. 171-172.

²⁹ M. Shelley, *Letters*, Vol. 2, p. 132.

richly-wooded banks, the spire-like cypresses — a thousand times scarcely less vividly had they recurred to my memory, than now they appeared again before my eyes³⁰.

In passages such as this one, Mary Shelley's travels assume the aspect of a journey back in time, as she seems almost to forget about her young fellow travellers to dwell in the country of her mind. The loss of touch with reality, however, is only temporary. The series of compound adjectives in this passage is a sign of how the fracture between external reality and inner life is continually recomposed. To judge from contemporary reviews, readers were not displeased with this juxtaposition of past memories and present impressions in *Rambles in Germany and Italy*. At least five reviewers quoted ample excerpts from the letters about Lake Como, and the critic of *The Athenæum* sympathetically observed:

Every lemon tree, and palace, and pine tree, of the villa scenery of Como's bewitching lake, recalls to [Mrs. Shelley] some pleasant emotion, for [...] remembered pain may become a pleasure, when recalled after a lapse of years, and the pilgrim is surrounded by objects so bland and winning³¹.

Revisiting Italy is without question a pleasure for Mary Shelley. If it is thus, though, it is not, or at least not only, thanks to the healing effect of time, or the enchantment of the place. As she wrote in a long journal entry later reworked for *Rambles in Germany and Italy*, the landscape of Lake Como inspired her with "glad elevation", "pious resignation", and "holy aspirations"³². The religious connotation of these terms is reinforced by the thoughts and feelings Mary Shelley voiced in the corresponding passage of her travelogue, as she contemplated "the magnificent mountain scene" from her favourite haunt by the lakeside:

With what serious yet quick joy do such sights fill me; and dearer still is the aspiring thought that seeks the Creator in his works, as the soul yearns to throw off the chains of flesh that hold it in, and to dissolve and become a part of that which surrounds it.

This evening [...] [m]y heart was elevated, purified, subdued. I prayed for peace to all; and still the supreme Beauty brooded over me, and promised peace; at least there where change is not, and love and enjoyment unite and are one. From such rapt moods the soul returns to earth, bearing with it the calm of Paradise³³.

Never before had Mary Shelley so openly avowed her belief in a creator god and the afterlife – a belief that seems to find at once expression and confirmation in the poetry of Dante's *Paradiso*, from which she went on to cite a few lines of Canto 33. In the passage from Mary Shelley's travelogue quoted above the trope of paradise is again applied to Italy,

³⁰ M. Shelley, *Novels*, Vol. 8, p. 120.

³¹ "Athenæum", 10 August 1844, pp. 725-727 (p. 725). The other reviews appeared in the following newspapers: "Bell's Weekly Messenger", 17 August 1844, p. 262; "The Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction", 17 August 1844, pp. 121-122; "The Morning Herald", 21 August 1844, p. 6; "Tait's Edinburgh Magazine", November 1844, pp. 729-740.

³² M. Shelley, *Journals*, Vol. 2, p. 568.

³³ M. Shelley, *Novels*, Vol. 8, p. 123.

and Lake Como in particular, but this time it reflects the author's new-found religiosity, which invests the country with a divine quality. As Mary Shelley revisited Lake Como, she saw its landscape as a manifestation of the divine.

In the following Letter of *Rambles in Germany and Italy*, Mary Shelley took one step further towards asserting a faith that may be termed Christian in its essence, as she identified with the hero of the *Gerusalemme Liberata* on account of his religion. Among the passages from Tasso that "make themselves peculiarly felt" on the lakeside, the one is singled out "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"³⁴.

Possibly inspired by the Italian poetry that she read on Lake Como, in the private space of her journal Mary Shelley gave expression to her religiosity in Italian. Since her return to England in 1823 she had written sporadically in Italian, mainly letters to Teresa Guiccioli, and it can be safely assumed that she had spoken it even less frequently. As she reached the Italian border in July 1840, however, she surprised her travelling companions by fluently speaking a "peculiarly useful Italian". She then explained to them (and to her readers): "from having lived long in the country, all its household terms were familiar to me; and I remembered the time when it was more natural to me to speak to common people in that language than in my own"³⁵. The memory of the language that she had used daily during her five-year residence in Italy is arguably the most potent of the recollections which Mary Shelley has upon her return to Italy, and specifically Lake Como, after more than two decades. Italian represents Mary Shelley's language of the heart. No sooner had she reappropriated it, than she started using it to write down her prayers. Reading these journal entries, one almost gets the impression that, just as she first avowed her faith in Italy, Mary Shelley could only pray in Italian, as if to circumvent the censorship of her English conscience. It was a liberating experience, which reminds one of Hans Castorp, the protagonist of Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, who declares his love for the novel's heroine in a foreign tongue (French, in this case). As Mann himself explained, the foreign language "eases his embarrassment and helps him to say things he could never have dared say in his own language. [...] it helps him over his inhibitions"³⁶. Mary Shelley's first uninhibited journal entry in Italian was written in Cadenabbia on 30 August 1840. She began in English, but soon switched to the foreign tongue to pray for her son's health and wellbeing and for her own happiness:

My birthday — I have felt particularly happy & in good spirits today.
Tanto è la paura che ispira l'incertezza della vita che si scrive tale parola temendo
che il sentimento della felicità si cambiasse pur troppo presto in lutto —

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 124. The allusion is to *Gerusalemme Liberata*, Canto 18, stanza 14, in which Rinaldo is moved to invoke the grace of God as he contemplates the sky at dawn.

³⁵ M. Shelley, *Novels*, Vol. 8, p. 104.

³⁶ T. Mann, "The Making of *The Magic Mountain*", in *Id.*, *The Magic Mountain*, H.T. Lowe-Porter trans., Secker & Warburg, London 1961, p. 719.

Chiedo — prego adunque che questo non fosse — che siano salvi la vita — la salute — il benessere del mio amato figlio — che siano serbate p[er] me la fedeltà e l'affezione di — ah! se fosse adempita questa preghiera sarei felice pur troppo³⁷.

The very next entry, dated 11 January 1841, is entirely written in Italian. Back in London, Mary Shelley complains that the sky is cloudy and she is surrounded by despicable people. She then begs God to preserve her son's good health and render him worthy of his father, but happier than he was. As for herself, she prays that she could go back to Italy and leave the "Stepmother England" forever:

Eccomi — il cielo è annuvolato tramontato il sole — mai fa chiara di luna — ogni stella sparita — Come è cambiata la scena — come è cambiato il mio core — Cosa mai sarà! —

Perso ogni Amico — Contornata da gente disgraziata — dubitando cosa sarà p[er] il mio figlio — sperando nulla — infelice — tradita, solitaria!

Dio mio — prego — Conserva il mio figlio — fa che egli riesca degno del padre suo — e più felice

Fa che io tornerò in Italia — e mai più riveda questo paese di ingrati — traditori, disgraziati

o fami morire — O mio dio soffro pur troppo — son pur troppo vilipesa, smarrita — disperata.

E pure dovrei ringraziare dio che vive sempre mio figlio e lo ringrazio — ma il cor umano è cosa debole — ed il colpo ricevuto è così fatale — e la mia situazione qui è così intollerabile, che non posso far di meno che lamentare, e pregare dio che mi sia permesso di tornare in Italia e lasciare la Matrigna Inghilterra per sempre, o morire

Questo novo anno cominciato in lagrime — dolori, tradimento, e povertà — come mai si finirà!

The following day her warm prayers seem to have been heard and answered: "Grazie a dio! Pare che le mie calde preghiere sono udite esaudite — Pare — dio volesse che sarà — ed io — se veramente tutto va bene — felice me! partiro di questo paese fra poco"³⁸.

I will conclude this overview with one of Mary Shelley's last letters, which brings us back – literally – to Lake Como. It is the letter that she sent to her childhood friend Isabella Baxter Booth on 26 May 1850, about eight months before her death, which is written from "Cadinabbia on the Lake of Como". This letter reveals that Mary Shelley visited Lake Como a third time after spending the winter of 1850 in Nice with her son and daughter-in-law. Her comments on the changes she has observed in the inhabitants betray her deep

³⁷ M. Shelley, *Journals*, Vol. 2, pp. 569-570, corrected against holograph manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodleian MS. Abinger d. 31, fol. 56^v). Mistranscriptions in *Journals* make it difficult to appreciate Mary Shelley's remarkably correct Italian.

³⁸ M. Shelley, *Journals*, Vol. 2, pp. 570-571, corrected against holograph manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodleian MS. Abinger d. 31, fol. 57^{rv}). Mary Shelley's second Continental tour, also narrated in *Rambles in Germany and Italy*, took her to Venice, Florence, Rome, and Sorrento.

tiredness, but may also contain a veiled allusion (in the reference to the many youths who have recently died) to the 1848 uprisings in the Lombardo-Venetian Kingdom:

Percy & I were ten years ago — ten years which have made me old — & the changes found here have forced Percy to feel that boyhood is indeed passed — Yet we have found the old alive & very little altered — but the stalwarth & youthful — many of them dead & the children sprung up to men & women.

Even so, the letter ends on a cheerful note and the assurance that Mary Shelley enjoyed her last trip to Lake Como no less than her previous ones: “with the sun shining the blue lake at my feet & the Mountains in all their Majesty & beauty around & my beloved children happy & well, I must mark this as a peaceful & happy hour”³⁹.

³⁹ M. Shelley, *Letters*, Vol. 3, pp. 377-378.

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