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THE SHELLEYS IN MILAN, 1818-2018

Guest editors:

MARCO CANANI and VALENTINA VARINELLI

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY, WITHIN “THE VEINS” OF “FAIR MILAN”. A MAP OF THE POET’S CONTACTS AND PLACES IN APRIL 1818

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This article adopts a historical and biographical perspective in order to investigate Percy Bysshe Shelley’s experience of Milan in April 1818. To this end, I trace the Shelleys’ arrival in the city and focus on the places they visited, their contacts, and the encounters they made so as to reconstruct the poet’s “Milanese circle”. Subsequently, I focus on “Ode to Naples” and *Hellas* and argue that Shelley’s references to the medieval and early modern history of the city should be seen as transhistorical allusions to the political contingency of the Lombardo-Venetian capital after the Hapsburg restoration.

Questo articolo mette a fuoco il soggiorno di Percy Bysshe Shelley a Milano nell’aprile 1818 da una prospettiva storico-biografica. Dopo aver tracciato l’arrivo degli Shelley in città, particolare attenzione è data ai luoghi da essi visitati, nonché ai contatti e agli incontri che ebbero, delineando così l’esistenza di un “circolo Milanese” del poeta. Successivamente si analizzano le brevi allusioni alla città di Milano in “Ode to Naples” e *Hellas*, in cui i riferimenti alla storia medievale e moderna della città si configurano come allusioni transtoriche alla situazione politica del Lombardo-Veneto all’indomani della restaurazione asburgica.

Keywords: Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Shelley, Anglo-Italian Studies, British Romanticism, Risorgimento

After spending six days in the Kingdom of Sardinia, passing through Susa and Turin, Mary and Percy Bysshe Shelley arrived in Milan on 4 April 1818. They had left England three weeks earlier with their two children, Clara Everina and William, Claire Clairmont and her little daughter Allegra, and two nurses. According to the first letter that Percy sent from Milan, the couple presumably intended to stop in the city for a few days on their way to Como. On 6 April, the poet wrote to Thomas Love Peacock that they had almost reached the end of their “journey – that is within a few miles of it – because we design to spend the summer on the shore of the Lake of Como”¹. However, Percy and Mary stayed there only four days, from 9 to 12 April, and spent the rest of the month in Milan, leaving for Pisa on 1 May. While the Shelleys’ permanence in Pisa has been the object of much scholarship interested in Anglo-

¹ P.B. Shelley, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, F.L. Jones ed., 2 vols, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1964, Vol. 2, p. 3.

Italian relations², the three weeks that they spent in the capital of the Lombardo-Venetian Kingdom deserve further investigation. Research by Curran (1990), Crisafulli (2002; 2014), and Mulhallen (2010) has been invaluable in documenting the influence of Salvatore Viganò's "coreodramma" *Otello, o sia il Moro di Venezia* (1818) on *Prometheus Unbound*, which Shelley began to conceive while he was travelling to Italy³. Yet other issues need to be addressed with specific reference to the Shelleys' experience of the city.

Milan had been the capital of Napoleon's Kingdom of Italy until 1814, and even after the restoration of the Hapsburgs it remained an intellectually vibrant and cosmopolitan centre. As Casaliggi illustrates, in the years following the Congress of Vienna the city was a hub of "international Romantic sociability" that fostered intense intellectual exchange on aesthetic as well as political issues. In 1816, Milan was the centre of the heated debate on Classicism and Romanticism, while Romantic intellectuals and *émigrés* such as Vincenzo Monti and Silvio Pellico, Stendhal, Lord Byron, John Can Hobhouse, and John Polidori gathered around Ludovico di Breme and his salon⁴.

Even though recent scholarship suggests that Milan was a pivotal centre in the development of Romantic cosmopolitanism and sociability, Shelley's permanence in the city has largely been overlooked. One of the reasons for such scarce critical attention is probably the fact that his works and letters provide very few hints for investigation. Curiously, Shelley's poetry includes only two direct references to the city, one in "Ode to Naples" (1820) – to which the title of this article alludes – and one in *Hellas: A Lyrical Drama* (1822). Yet it is significant that both references occur in such politically charged works. At the same time, the poet's correspondence from Milan does not make explicit mention of intellectuals, writers or places that might help to reconstruct his Milanese circle. During the three weeks he spent in the city Shelley sent three letters to Lord Byron, all of which are mostly concerned with Claire and their daughter Allegra, three letters to Thomas Love Peacock and one to Thomas Jefferson Hogg. Rather than a clear indication of scarce or uninteresting contacts, this lack of information probably testifies to his early response to the Italians and their society despite the beauty of the country. Writing to Peacock on 20 April, Shelley remarks that

[t]he people here, though inoffensive enough, seem both in body & soul a miserable race. The men are hardly men, they look like a tribe of stupid & shrivelled slaves, &

² See, among others, H. Rossetti Angeli, *Shelley and His Friends in Italy*, Methuen, London 1911; C.L. Cline, *Byron, Shelley, and Their Pisan Circle*, Murray, London 1952; M. Schoina, *Romantic "Anglo-Italians": Configurations of Identity in Byron, the Shelleys, and the Pisan Circle*, Ashgate, Farnham 2009.

³ S. Curran, *The Political Prometheus*, in *Spirits of Fire: English Romantic Writers and Contemporary Historical Methods*, G.A. Rosso – D.P. Watkins ed., Associated University Presses, Cranbury, NJ 1990, pp. 260-285; L.M. Crisafulli, *Il viaggio olistico di Shelley in Italia: Milano, la Scala e l'incontro con l'arte di Salvatore Viganò*, in *Traduzioni, echi, consonanze. Dal Rinascimento al Romanticismo – Translations, Echoes and Consonances. From the Renaissance to the Romantic Era*, R. Mullini – R. Zacchi ed., Clueb, Bologna 2002, pp. 165-183; Ead., *"A Language in Itself Music": Salvatore Viganò's Ballet en Action in Shelley's Prometheus Unbound*, in *The Romantic Stage: A Many-Sided Mirror*, L.M. Crisafulli – F. Liberto ed., Rodopi, Amsterdam 2014, pp. 135-159; J. Mulhallen, *The Theatre of Shelley*, OpenBook Publishers, Cambridge 2010, pp. 147-150, 167-174.

⁴ C. Casaliggi, *From Coppet to Milan: Romantic Circles at La Scala*, "The Wordsworth Circle", 48, 2017, 1, pp. 59-66.

I do not think I have seen a gleam of intelligence in the countenance of man since I passed the Alps. The women in enslaved countries are always better than the men; but they have tight laced figures, & features & mien which express (O how un{like} the French!) a mixture of the coquette & the prude that reminds one of the worst characteristics of English women. Everything but humanity is in much greater perfection here than in France⁵.

As soon as he arrives in Italy, Shelley is struck by a stark contrast between the glorious history of the country and the modern Italians. To some extent, his early perception of the people is imbibed with national stereotypes recurring in much Romantic literature, from Madame de Staël's *Corinne ou l'Italie* (1807) to Goethe's *Italienische Reise* (1816-29), and severely criticised by Ugo Foscolo's *Lettere scritte dall'Inghilterra* (1817)⁶. At the end of his first year in Italy such divide seemed to Shelley to be almost unbridgeable. On 22 December he wrote to Leigh Hunt that the country consisted in fact of "two Italies", and that "the Italians of the present day, their works and ways" were "most degraded disgusting & odious"⁷. In the *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments* that she edited in 1840, Mary Shelley noted that Percy's early impressions of the Italians were the result of "ignorance" and "precipitation", and would change as he learned "the extraordinary intelligence and genius" of the people in spite of foreign rule and religious vice⁸. Unfortunately, her diaries and letters provide equally scanty, though useful insights into the four weeks that the Shelleys spent in Milan, and so do Claire Clairmont's.

By examining letters, diaries and other *realia*, this article adopts a historical and biographical perspective in order to investigate the Shelleys' experience of Milan, with a specific focus on the places they visited, their contacts, and the encounters they made in April 1818. As a final point, Percy's allusions to Milan in "Ode to Naples" and *Hellas* are examined in order to ascertain whether his references to the medieval and early modern history of the city might be related to the political contingency of the Lombardo-Venetian Kingdom after the restoration of the Hapsburgs.

1. *The Shelleys in the Lombardo-Venetian Kingdom*

Heading towards Italy in March 1818, the Shelleys travelled across France, crossing the border with Savoy through Mont Cenis. The route they followed was one of the two customary accesses to the Kingdom of Sardinia, the other being the Simplon Pass, and would

⁵ P.B. Shelley, *Letters*, Vol. 2, p. 9.

⁶ For a thorough examination of national stereotypes in Romantic literary representations of the modern Italians see the excellent study by J. Luzzi, *Romantic Europe and the Ghost of Italy*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT/London 2008, p. 53 ff.

⁷ P.B. Shelley, *Letters*, Vol. 2, p. 67.

⁸ P.B. Shelley, *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, Mrs. Shelley ed., 2 vols, Moxon, London 1840, Vol. 2, p. 120. Examining several letters Shelley wrote between 1818 and 1822, William Michael Rossetti was to note that the poet's correspondence hardly confirms Mary's testimony. See W.M. Rossetti, *A Memoir of Shelley: With a Fresh Preface*, Clay & Sons, London 1886, pp. 86-88.

still be indicated as one of the most popular in John Murray's *Handbook for Travellers in Northern Italy*, which ran through sixteen editions from 1842 to 1897.

The Shelleys' decision to take this route was most likely based on political reasons due to the climate of suspicion, censorship and control thriving after the Congress of Vienna. Mary's journal contains a note that Percy wrote on 26 March, and which gives a clear indication of the strict controls that were enforced upon crossing borders. Shelley's books were impounded and submitted to the approval of the local censor, while the lack of proper authorization on their passport risked postponing their admittance into Savoy. As British citizens, however, they seemed to receive a more favourable treatment from the Sardinian authorities in comparison with Lombardo-Venetian citizens travelling westwards. Around dinner time, Percy remarked,

we had stopped at Pont Beauvoisin where the legal limits of the French & Sardinian territories are placed. We here heard that a Milanese had been sent all the way back to Lyons because his passport was unauthorised by the Sardinian Consul a few days before & that we should be subjected to the same treatment. We – in respect to the character of our nation I suppose – were suffered to pass⁹.

As Claire Clairmont observed in her diary on 8 April, their admittance was favoured (and Shelley's books saved) by the intervention of a canon who was acquainted with Shelley's father through the Duke of Norfolk¹⁰, whose influential role as a member of an English Catholic family proved relevant. The group would probably have received a different treatment had the Shelleys planned to enter the Lombardo-Venetian Kingdom through Switzerland. Only nine years later, Thomas Jefferson Hogg recorded in his *Journal of a Traveller on the Continent* (1827) the difficulty encountered by travellers crossing the Austrian territories from the North:

The Teutonic tyrants who have at present military occupation of the north of Italy, are so conscious of their weakness, and acknowledge, with so much frankness – that it is the duty of all other nations to assist in turning them out – that they will not permit a stranger to enter the Lombardo-Venetian Kingdom, unless his passport has been signed by an Austrian Minister. I complied with this form at Bern, and sent my passport to the ambassador, that his master, the great Cæsar, might have due notice of my intention to enter the Milanese; lest I should rush upon his troops unexpectedly from the height of the Semplon, and clear Italy of its oppressors with my umbrella: so great is the cowardice of tyranny¹¹!

⁹ M. Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844*, P.R. Feldman – D. Scott-Kilvert ed., 2 vols, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1987, Vol. 1, p. 200; the note is also reported in P.B. Shelley, *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, Vol. 2, p. 111.

¹⁰ C. Clairmont, *The Journals of Claire Clairmont*, M. Kingston Stocking – D. Mackenzie Stocking ed., Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1968, p. 88.

¹¹ T.J. Hogg, *Two Hundred and Nine Days; Or, The Journal of a Traveller on the Continent*, 2 vols, Hunt and Clarke, London 1827, Vol. 1, pp. 179-180.

As a constituent land of the Austrian Empire, the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia shared its strict bureaucratic apparatus. With the restoration of the Hapsburgs the police had begun to keep detailed records of all foreigners walking in and out of their borders, giving public notice of daily arrivals and departures in the press¹². From 1816 to the annexation of Lombardy by the Kingdom of Sardinia in 1859, the official newspaper of the Hapsburgs in Milan was *La Gazzetta di Milano*. Published daily, it featured sections on foreign affairs and culture, including book reviews and advertisements of the operas and plays on at the city theatres – namely La Scala, Teatro Re and Il Teatro delle Marionette – all of which in compliance with government politics and censorship. Besides providing information about auctions, real estate sales and rents, the last page of the newspaper published a list of all incoming and outgoing foreigners, indicating their profession, origin and destination. *La Gazzetta di Milano* confirms the dates of the Shelleys' sojourn in Milan as recorded in Mary's and Claire's diaries. On 6 April, the newspaper gives the news that "Selley" had arrived from Turin two days earlier. Apart from the misprint, one reads with a certain degree of irony the poet's status as a "possidente" or "landowner" considering his financial situation when he left England. On 12 March Shelley had written to his bankers from Dover to pay off his debts – which amounted to £327 – to Thomas Love Peacock, William Godwin, Charles Ollier and the agent for Albion House. However, he still owed over £500 to Thomas Charters for the carriage he had bought while married to Harriet Westbrook in 1813, and which the Shelleys used for the first part of their journey towards the Continent in 1818¹³. Shelley's name is instead spelled correctly on 3 May, when *La Gazzetta di Milano* announces his departure for Pisa on 1 May. This time the newspaper simply describes him as a "gentiluomo inglese"¹⁴.

A crucial point in order to establish a possible map of the Shelleys' encounters in Milan is the location of their accommodation in the city. Based on evidence provided by the journal of Claire Clairmont, both the biographers of Shelley and the editors of Mary Shelley's diaries have been accurate in indicating the hotel where the group sojourned in April 1818¹⁵. Yet their lodgings have scarcely been a starting point in order to try and retrace the cultural environment that the party was most likely exposed to.

¹² The climate of suspicion and censorship, and the strict controls that the Austrian police enforced on British travellers would exacerbate after Giuseppe Mazzini fled to London in 1837 and the uprisings that broke out in Milan in 1848 and 1853. On this point see F. Orestano, *Back to Italy: Dickens' Stereoscopic Views*, in *Charles Dickens and Europe*, M. Leroy ed., Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne 2013, pp. 126-140.

¹³ P.B. Shelley, *Letters*, Vol. 1, p. 599; on Shelley's financial situation in 1818 see J. Bieri, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: A Biography*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 2008, p. 398; J. Worthen, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley: A Critical Biography*, Wiley, Hoboken, NJ/Chichester 2019, pp. 94, 189.

¹⁴ *La Gazzetta di Milano*, 6 aprile 1818; 3 maggio 1818.

¹⁵ See for instance M. Shelley, *Journals*, Vol. 1, p. 202n; R. Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit*, Harper, London 1994², p. 416; J. Bieri, *Percy Bysshe Shelley*, p. 400.

Figure 1 - Notice of Percy Bysshe Shelley's arrival in (top) and departure from (bottom) Milan in the Austrian newspaper La Gazzetta di Milano

Arrivi e partenze da Milano del giorno 4 aprile.	
Arrivati. I signori	Calabrizi Giovanni, barone, da Torino.
Caprini, negoziante, da Torino.	Di Monasterolo Girtodi, cavaliere, da Torino.
Bighi, possidente, da Verona.	Zadubaki, barone, da Domodossola.
Elmury, possidente e negoziante, da Verona.	Martin, negoziante, da Arona.
Selley, possidente, da Torino.	Tonolla, <i>idem</i> , da Genova.
Watson, capitano e ingegnere di marina, da Genova.	Partiti. I signori
Bardi, negoziante, da Genova.	De Giovanni, negoziante, per la Svizzera.
Rivara, <i>idem</i> , <i>idem</i> .	Bordier, negoziante, per Bologna.
Caraffe, <i>idem</i> , <i>idem</i> .	
Saner, ingegnere, da Novara.	
Calabrizi Clemente, cavaliere, da Torino.	

Arrivi e partenze del giorno 1. ^o maggio.	
Arrivati. I signori	Joannon, negoziante, da Odessa.
Weston, possidente inglese, da Firenze.	Tramoy, <i>idem</i> , <i>idem</i> .
Morises, ecclesiastico irlandese, da Torino.	Bevino, marchese, da Venezia.
Beraud, possidente, da Torino.	Lindon, gentiluomo inglese, da Genova.
Anhorn, negoziante, <i>idem</i> .	Berguer, gentiluomo inglese, da Genova.
Galletti, <i>idem</i> , dal Piemonte.	Partiti. I signori
Zeni, possidente, da Bologna.	Muggiotti, possid., per Macerata.
Mojana, negoziante, <i>idem</i> .	Agostini, negoziante, per Parma.
Perasini Barbara, possidente, da Ferrara.	Shelley, gentiluomo inglese, per Pisa.
Taraso, negoziante, da Novi.	Jaquet, negoziante, per Parigi.
Gutt, <i>idem</i> , da Zurigo.	Sorci, <i>idem</i> , <i>idem</i> .
Stafferi, <i>idem</i> , da Verona.	Zaegler, <i>idem</i> , per Genova.
Neville, gentiluomo inglese, da Venezia.	Conrad, <i>idem</i> , <i>idem</i> .
Valmarana, conte, da Venezia.	Salsbury, gentiluomo inglese, per Genova.
Devies, gentiluomo inglese, da Venezia.	Sindall Tommaso, gentiluomo inglese, per Firenze.
Buzard, gentiluomo inglese, da Venezia.	Sindall Onestito, gentiluomo inglese, per Firenze.

2. The Albergo Reale and its cultural significance

While in Milan the Shelleys rented rooms at what Claire records on 8 April as the “Locande Reale”¹⁶, a hotel located at a walking distance from the Duomo and whose name was in fact Albergo Reale. Built in the mid-eighteenth century, the Albergo Reale was owned by the Marquis Luigi Cagnola, one of the members of the “Commissione d’Ornato”, the urban development plan that had been established by a *decreto napoleonico* in 1807 in order to improve the aesthetics and the viability of the city. Among the various endeavours undertaken by the “Commissione d’Ornato” in Milan are the amphitheatre known as Arena Civica, the construction of Foro Buonaparte – the two semi-concentric rings that bridge the Castello Sforzesco to the surrounding area of the town – and the system of “rettifili” or “straight stretches” that still define the map of the city today¹⁷. A leading

¹⁶ C. Clairmont, *Journals*, p. 87.

¹⁷ The other members of the “Commissione d’Ornato” were the architects Giocondo Albertolli, Luigi Canonica – who designed the Arena Civica –, Paolo Landriani, and Giuseppe Zanoja. See A. Cassi Ramelli, *Il centro di Milano, dal Duomo alla cerchia dei Navigli. Documenti, note e divagazioni*, Ceschina, Milano 1971, p. 540; G. de Finetti, *Milano: costruzione di una città*, G. Cislighi – M. De Benedetti – P. Marabelli ed., Hoepli, Milano 2002, pp. 82-85, 207.

Neoclassical architect, Cagnola had won the sympathies of Napoleon soon after his conquest of Northern Italy. In order to celebrate the withdrawals of the Austrian troops and the Emperor's victory at the Battle of Marengo (1800), Cagnola was commissioned to design a triumphal arch, initially known as Porta Marengo, which set the example for the Neoclassical arches that were subsequently erected in Paris. Inaugurated after the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, the arch was renamed Porta Ticinese and decorated with the Latin inscription "paci populorum sospitae" ("to peace liberating people"). On the occasion of the French victory at the Battle of Jena (1806), Cagnola designed a second arch, inspired by the Arch of Septimius Severus in Roma, which was renamed Arco della Pace after the restoration of the Hapsburgs and was eventually completed in 1838¹⁸. Due to Cagnola's undertakings and institutional commitment, his status as owner of the Albergo Reale should be viewed as that of an entrepreneur rather than a host. At the same time, Cagnola's ownership of the hotel suggests that the Shelleys were possibly exposed to an extremely vibrant cultural atmosphere.

Inaugurated in the 1750s, the Albergo Reale stood in a small road, originally called Contrada dei Tre Re and later renamed Contrada dei Tre Alberghi because of its renowned hotels. The Reale had been conceived as a sumptuous accommodation, meant to "eclipse" the other two hotels in the street, the Albergo dei Tre Re and the Albergo Europa, "by luxury and fame"¹⁹. Standing at the heart of the neighbourhood that was known as Bottonuto, the Contrada dei Tre Alberghi was a cross street of Via del Pesce (today via Paolo da Cannobio), a busy street with restaurants, shops, and a bookkeeper often advertised in *La Gazzetta di Milano*²⁰. As a token of the popularity of the Albergo Reale among English travellers, as well as of its high standards, one should remark that in 1814 the hotel – temporarily renamed "Imperiale" under Napoleon's rule – had been the lodgings of the Princess of Wales, Caroline of Brunswick. Shelley's opinion of the Albergo Reale, however, seems quite different. After praising the picturesque beauty of Como and the sublimity of the Duomo, in a corner of which he used to sit down to read Dante, Shelley writes to Peacock on 20 April that

[t]he expense of our journey here has been very considerable, but we are now living at the Hotel here in a kind of pension, which is very reasonable in respect of price, & when we get into a menage of our own we have every reason to expect that we shall experience something of the boasted cheapness of Italy²¹.

¹⁸ A.L. Palmer, *Historical Dictionary of Neoclassical Art and Architecture*, Scarecrow Press, Lanham, MD 2011, p. 49.

¹⁹ L. Candrini, *Alberghi e albergatori d'altri tempi in via Tre Alberghi*, "Milano. Rivista mensile del Comune", 4, 1931, pp. 193-196 (p. 195): "Attorno al 1750 venne ad aggiungersi nella via dei Tre re, un terzo albergo, il Reale, che doveva in breve eclissare, per lusso e fama, gli altri due".

²⁰ M.G. Tolfo, *Atlante milanese, il sestiere di Porta Romana*, Comune di Milano, Milano 1991, p. 310, explains that the Contrada dei Tre Re was "il proseguimento in linea retta della via Speronari e terminava alla posterla del Bottonuto, all'altezza dell'attuale via Paolo da Cannobio"; see also A. Cassi Ramelli, *Il centro di Milano*, pp. 423-424.

²¹ P.B. Shelley, *Letters*, Vol. 2, p. 8.

In 1836, Marcello Mazzoni's *Traveller's Guide to Milan* would still list the Reale as one of the best "hotels of first order" in town thanks to its spacious rooms and baths, and one of the two favourite hotels among English travellers²². However, the impression that one gathers from Shelley's letter to Peacock is that of a modest accommodation in a quite affordable area of Milan. With a subtle critique of the local shopkeepers that confirms his early biased opinion of the Italians, Shelley adds in the same letter that

[t]he finest bread, made of sifted flour the whitest & the best I ever tasted is only *one English penny* a pound. All the necessities of life bear a proportional relation to this. But then the luxuries, tea, &c. are very dear – and the English, as usual, are cheated in a way that is quite ridiculous, if they have not their wits about them²³.

Only a year later, Joseph Mallord William Turner would lodge in the same Contrada, most likely renting a room in the same hotel as the Shelleys. As Crimi has demonstrated, Turner captured the view offered by his hotel room in the watercolour that the scholar has named *Milan: The Skyline at Dawn, with the Campanile of San Giovanni in Conca, the Church of Sant'Alessandro in Zebedia and the Basilica of San Lorenzo, from the Albergo dei Tre Re* (1819). Although the dome and belfry of the Baroque Church of Sant'Alessandro have enabled Crimi to identify with precision of details the subject of Turner's view, the scholar suggests that there is no supporting evidence as to whether Turner stayed at the Tre Re or the Reale²⁴. Yet the Albergo Reale remained a symbol of Milan in the English imagination throughout the century, a further proof being Willkie Collins's gothic novella *The Haunted Hotel. A Mystery of Modern Venice* (1878). When Lord Montbarry's brother, Henry Westwick, decides to leave Venice and travel through Italy, his first stop is Milan. From there, Westwick sends a telegram to Montbarry, informing him about his address while in town:

[a] week passed, and no letter came from Henry. Some days later, a telegram was received from him. It was despatched from Milan, instead of from Venice; and it brought this strange message: – "I have left the hotel. Will return on the arrival of Arthur and his wife. Address, meanwhile, Albergo Reale, Milan"²⁵.

²² M. Mazzoni, *The Traveller's Guide to Milan, with a Sketch of the Environs and a Description of the Lakes*, Sonzogno, Milano 1836, pp. 196-197.

²³ P.B. Shelley, *Letters*, Vol. 2, p. 8, emphasis in the text.

²⁴ M. Imms, "Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Milan: The Skyline at Dawn, with the Campanile of San Giovanni in Conca, the Church of Sant'Alessandro in Zebedia and the Basilica of San Lorenzo, from the Albergo dei Tre Re* (1819)", <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/jmw-turner/joseph-mallord-william-turner-milan-the-skyline-at-dawn-with-the-campanile-of-san-giovanni-r1186393> (last accessed July 16, 2019).

²⁵ W. Collins, *The Haunted Hotel: A Mystery of Modern Venice*, Dover, New York 1982, p. 68.

Despite Shelley's opinion, the Albergo Reale provided above the standard accommodation. Besides having been the lodgings of Caroline of Brunswick, in 1871 it was listed as the official residence of the English vice-consul in Milan, William Thomas Kelly²⁶, and part of its vogue was due to the neighbourhood where it stood. A posh area at Shelley's time, Bottonuto was to lose its appeal when Milan began to expand eastwards, in the direction of Porta Orientale (now Porta Venezia), and thus ideologically towards the centre of the Austrian Empire. In the "urban sketches" he collected in *Milano sconosciuta* in 1879, Paolo Valera would depict Bottonuto as an area of decay and degradation, a notorious meeting point for soldiers in search of prostitutes and fences trading stolen goods:

[b]isogna turarsi il naso. È un ambiente di case malfamate. Vi si vende di tutto. È una fogna, una pozzanghera. In certi momenti il vicolo delle Quaglie è un pisciatoio fino in fondo. Vi si guazza come intorno a un orinatoio. Se ne odora la peste. Sovente c'è una ressa di soldati che lascia supporre che ci siano nascoste moltitudini di vergini. [...] Se si esce dalle Quaglie e si passa nel vicolo del Bottonuto c'è roba scadente. È roba invecchiata. Sono donne tenute su con tutti gli uncini, con tutti gli spilli, con qualche vezzo di false perle. [...] Dall'altra parte, al margine di via Larga, il cancro torreggia. Lo si vede dappertutto²⁷.

However, when the Shelleys sojourned in Milan in 1818 Bottonuto was a popular neighbourhood among foreign tourists, who either lodged in the area or met in its cafés and shops. Being at a walking distance from the Duomo and La Scala, it was an ideal place to stroll around the city centre. In her journal entries for 9, 10, 19, and 21 April 1818, Claire records enjoying her walks down "the Corso", often in the evening, in some cases with Percy and Mary²⁸. This was a customary pastime among foreign visitors in Italy, as Stendhal also recollects in his travelogue *Rome, Naples et Florence* (1817). In October 1816, he noted that "tous les jour, à deux heures, il y a *Corso*, où tout le monde paraît à cheval ou en voiture. Le *Corso* a lieu à Milan, sur le bastion, entre la *Porta Rense* et la *Porta Nova*"²⁹.

As Stendhal remarked, the *promenade à la mode* extended towards the eastern end of the town, in the direction of the Oriental Gates and thus towards the core of the Austrian Empire, which is why Corso Porta Orientale was renamed Corso Venezia during the nineteenth century. Claire's meticulous annotations confirm the same pastime, and on 20 April

²⁶ G. Brignola, *Milano percorsa in Omnibus. Guida per chi vuol visitare con poco dispendio di tempo e denaro, tutto quanto di più rimarchevole offre questa città*, Brignola, Milano 1871, p. 144.

²⁷ P. Valera, *Milano sconosciuta*, Martelli, Milano 1967, pp. 119-122: "You need to hold your nose. It is a place of infamous houses, people will sell you anything. It is a cesspool, a dirty puddle. There are times when vicolo delle Quaglie turns into a complete pisshole – you wallow around it as if it were a urinal. You can smell the plague. From the frequent hosts of soldiers, you can tell that [the place] hides multitudes of maidens. [...] If you walk out of via delle Quaglie and get into vicolo del Bottonuto, the stuff is shoddy. Older. Women that seem to stand on some hooks or pins, their quirk are false pearls. [...] On the other side, at the end of via Larga, cancer dominates. You can see it everywhere" (my translation).

²⁸ C. Clairmont, *Journals*, pp. 90-92.

²⁹ Stendhal, *Rome, Naples et Florence*, D. Muller ed., 2 vols, Champion, Paris 1919, Vol. 1, pp. 44-45.

she records her “Walk in the Public Gardens with the Darling”³⁰. Indeed, the Corso extended along the south side of the Giardini Pubblici, the city park that the viceroy of Milan had commissioned in 1780 to Giuseppe Piermarini, the architect who designed La Scala in 1776-1778. Besides enjoying the park, biographical evidence suggests that the Shelleys had other relevant contacts in the area extending between the *Corso* and the opera house.

Figure 5 – *Corso Venezia in the nineteenth century*, <https://www.milanocittastato.it/evergreen/le-10-vie-di-milano-piu-da-milano-storia-e-curiosita-foto-comerano-come-sono-oggi/attachment/1-corso-venezia-nell-ottocento/> (last accessed July 16, 2019)



3. *The Teatro Carcano: Giuseppe Marietti and Domenico Mombelli*

Writing to Leigh and Marianne Hunt on 6 April, Mary closes her letter with the recommendation:

Direct to us
Mess. Marietti-Banquiers
Milano
Italie³¹.

Mary's directions suggest that the Shelleys were in contact with the Marietti brothers, a family of silk traders and bankers whose firm was located in the Contrada de' Bossi, an area whose borders roughly coincide with Piazza della Scala and Piazza San Fedele, north-east of the Duomo³². Unfortunately, Shelley's biographers provide no further details on the party's relationship with the family. Yet in his dual role as a banker and impresario Giuseppe Marietti played an active part in the Milanese cultural scene of the early nineteenth century, and he also had politically relevant contacts with England. Parliamentary records reveal that

³⁰ C. Clairmont, *Journals*, p. 92.

³¹ M. Shelley, *Selected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, B.T. Bennett ed., Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore/London 1995, p. 32.

³² *Il Corriere di Milano*, 22 giugno 1809, p. 604; *Utile giornale, ossia Guida di Milano per l'anno bisestile 1836*, Vol. 13, Bernardoni, Milano 1836, p. 315.

Marietti was involved in the trial of Caroline of Brunswick, who was charged with adultery after returning to London on the occasion of George IV's coronation in 1820. On 5 and 6 September, hearings were held at the House of Lords and Caroline's servant in Italy, Giuseppe Sacchi, was called as a witness because of his contacts with Marietti in Milan and their recent encounter in London. Parliament suspected that Sacchi had been bribed by the banker on behalf of the Queen's chief attorney, Lord Brougham, in order to influence his deposition in her favour³³.

It is intriguing that the Shelleys lodged in the same Albergo as Queen Caroline, and were in touch with the banker whom the Lords suspected to be involved in the corruption of the Queen's servant. A further proof of the contacts that the Shelleys maintained with Marietti is their acquaintance with Domenico Mombelli, the leading tenor of the Teatro Carcano, which the banker had founded with the Duke Pompeo Litta and Pietro Soresi in Corso di Porta Romana, where it still stands today. Designed by the architect Luigi Canonica in 1801 and modelled on La Scala, the Carcano inaugurated its activity in 1803 with a performance of Voltaire's tragedy *Zaire* (1732). The Austrian newspaper *Neues Archiv für Geschichte, Staatenkunde, Literatur und Kunst* states that Marietti had conceived the Carcano as an alternative to La Scala during the summer, when the opera house was closed³⁴. This might explain why there is no evidence of the Shelleys' going to the Teatro Carcano, whereas their five evenings at La Scala – on 5, 7, 20, 21 and 29 April – are well documented³⁵.

Mary's diary indicates that the Shelleys were personally acquainted with Mombelli. On 24 April she recorded that after their usual walk they met the "Italian Master in the evening"³⁶, whom Claire later identified as "Signor Mombelli"³⁷. A tenor and a composer, Mombelli had gained a reputation by performing in Giuseppe Sarti's *Medonte* and Domenico Cimarosa's *Oreste* at the Teatro San Carlo in Naples, where he worked from 1783 to 1786, before singing at the Burgtheater in Vienna. Back in Italy, Gioacchino Rossini composed for Mombelli the leading part of *Demetrio and Polibio*, which the tenor performed at the Carcano in 1813³⁸. More interestingly, the libretto for *Demetrio and Polibio* was written by Mombelli's wife Vincenzina Viganò. A renowned librettist at the time, Vincenzina Viganò was the niece of the composer Luigi Boccherini and the sister of Salvatore Viganò, who choreographed the *Otello* that the Shelleys saw at La Scala. Albeit scarcely documented, these contacts may have favoured Shelley's interest in coreodramma. Even though their acquaintance was possibly limited to the four weeks that they spent in Milan,

³³ *The Trial of the Queen of England, in the House of Lords*, 2 vols, Kelly, London 1821, Vol. 1, pp. 613-624.

³⁴ *Neues Archiv für Geschichte, Staatenkunde, Literatur und Kunst, Erster Jahrgang (XX. als Fortsetzung)*, 12. Oktober 1829, p. 641: "Noch ehe die Scala, wie gewöhnlich, für die heißesten Wochen des Sommers geschlossen war, hatte eine Gesellschaft, an deren Spitze der Banquier Marietti stand, das Theater Carcano eröffnet".

³⁵ P.B. Shelley, *Letters*, Vol. 2, pp. 4, 14; M. Shelley, *Journals*, Vol. 1, p. 205; C. Clairmont, *Journals*, pp. 89, 92.

³⁶ M. Shelley, *Journals*, Vol. 1, p. 207.

³⁷ *Shelley and His Circle, 1773-1822*, 10 vols to date, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1961-2002, Vol. 5, D.H. Reiman ed., p. 452.

³⁸ *The Grove Book of Opera Singers*, L. Macy ed., Oxford University Press, Oxford 2008, pp. 328-329.

the Shelleys most likely saw Mombelli more than once since the tenor, as Dowden records, taught them some Italian while they were in town³⁹.

Unfortunately, the Shelleys' correspondence and journals provide no further insights into their last days in Milan before they left for Tuscany. Some additional remarks, however, should be made on whether, and to what extent, the city and its history percolated through Percy's works.

4. *A transhistorical signifier for liberty*

Notwithstanding the cosmopolitan and intellectually lively atmosphere that Shelley experienced in Milan, his poetry includes only two explicit mentions to the city, one in "Ode to Naples" and one in the lyrical drama *Hellas*. In both cases, Shelley does not allude to the political contingency of the city after the restoration of the Hapsburgs but to its past, to the history of Milan during the Age of the Communes and the rule of the Sforzas. Yet both works have highly political tones that should be borne in mind in order to discuss the libertarian implications of these references to the city. In the aftermath of the Congress of Vienna, as Casaliggi remarks, Milan embodied for Romantic intellectuals and artists "a hub of radical sentiments and nationalistic sympathies", but also the tyranny and oppressiveness enforced after 1815⁴⁰. Such symbolical value seems arguably embedded in Shelley's two brief allusions to the history of the city.

"Ode to Naples" was inspired by the proclamation of a constitutional government following a revolution guided by the Carbonari in July 1820. The insurrectionists demanded the King of Two Sicilies a constitutional government in the wake of the Spanish revolution that had taken place earlier the same year. The Shelleys' enthusiastic response to the *moti napoletani* depended not only on their – albeit temporary – achievement, but also on the precedent that they had set. Writing to Maria Gisborne from Leghorn on 19 July 1820, Mary Shelley expressed her hope that Lombardy and Tuscany would follow the example of the Carbonari in the South:

This is the era for constitutions. [...] What a glorious thing it will be if Lombardy regains its freedom – and Tuscany – all is so mild there that it will be the last, and yet in the end I hope the people here will raise their fallen souls and bodies and become something better than they are⁴¹.

Following the Pindaric structure of epodes, strophes, and antistrophes, "Ode to Naples" expresses such enthusiastic and hopeful response to the historical events of 1820. Shelley praises the Spanish revolution that had broken out in Cadiz and the Neapolitan uprisings before expressing his hopes that the same spirit might enliven Venice, Genoa, Milan, and Florence. Particularly in Antistrophe Iß he imagines that

³⁹ E. Dowden, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2 vols, Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., London 1886, Vol. 2, p. 198.

⁴⁰ C. Casaliggi, *From Coppet to Milan*, pp. 60, 62.

⁴¹ P.B. Shelley, *Letters*, Vol. 2, p. 217.

[...] the Sea
 Which paves the desert streets of Venice laughs
 In light and music; widowed Genoa wan
 By moonlight spells ancestral epitaphs
 Murmuring, "where is Doria?" Fair Milan
 Within whose veins long ran
 The Viper's palsying venom, lifts her heel
 To bruise his head. The Signal and the Seal,
 If Hope and Truth and Justice can avail
 Art thou of all these hopes. O hail! (ll. 106-115)⁴²

In a note to the text of "Ode to Naples" Shelley explains that the viper he refers to is "The device of the Visconti – whose tyranny has been inherited by the German Emperors"⁴³. The coat of arms of the Visconti family, later inherited by the Sforzas, represented a "biscione", a coiled serpent depicted in the act of devouring the body of a Saracen to commemorate Ottone Visconti's military valour during the Second Crusade⁴⁴. As Weinberg argues, Shelley's Milanese experience, with his interest in the myth of Prometheus on the one hand and the life and madness of Torquato Tasso on the other, suggested to him poetic associations between the political oppression of the nineteenth century and the despotism of the Cinquecento⁴⁵. This possibility seems all the more plausible if one considers that the following year he would outline similar considerations on the corruption of the Papal State and the tyranny of *signori* during the sixteenth century in *The Cenci*. In this sense, Shelley's reference to the Sforza's coat of arm in "Ode to Naples" should be understood in a transhistorical sense, a metonymical allusion to tyranny – and its hemiplegic effects – across time. If one deconstructs the metonymical significance of this reference by replacing one phase of the history of tyranny in Milan with another, the viper reveals its allusion to the Austrian rule, which Shelley hoped the peoples of Lombardy and Veneto would defeat just as the Neapolitans were attempting to do with the Bourbons.

Similar considerations might arguably be extended to *Hellas*. At the beginning of the lyrical drama that Shelley dedicated to Alexander Mavrokordatos, the chorus addresses "[...] the great Morning of the world" (l. 46) where freedom shall triumph. The poet recalls the glorious battles of Thermopylae, Marathon, and Philippi, whose "winged Glory" (l. 56) would nurture the libertarian resistance of Milan in the Age of the Communes:

⁴² P.B. Shelley, *The Poems of Shelley*, Vol. 3, J. Donovan – C. Duffy – K. Everest – M. Rossington ed., Pearson Education, Harlow 2011 (Longman Annotated English Poets), pp. 641-642.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ A. Buzzi, *Per la storia dello stemma del Ducato di Milano*, "Arte Lombarda", 65, 1983, 2, pp. 83-88.

⁴⁵ A.M. Weinberg, *Shelley's Italian Experience*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 1991, p. 103.

[...] The winged Glory
 On Philippi half-alighted,
 Like an eagle on a promontory.
 Its unwearied wings could fan
 The quenchless ashes of Milan. (ll. 56-60)⁴⁶

As in "Ode to Naples", the implications of this brief reference to the history of Milan are political as well as transhistorical. Again, it is Shelley himself who clarified the meaning of these lines. In a note to the text of *Hellas* he explains that "Milan was the centre of the resistance of the Lombard league against the Austrian tyrant. Frederic Barbarossa burnt the city to the ground, but Liberty lived in its ashes, and it rose like an exhalation from its ruin"⁴⁷. On a literary level, Shelley's interest in the siege of Milan by the Holy Roman Emperor reveals his reading of Dante's *Purgatorio*⁴⁸ while in Italy. In Canto 18, Dante encounters the abbot of the Basilica of San Zeno in Verona, who tells him about "[...] lo 'mperio del buon barbarossa / di cui dolente ancor Milan ragiona" (ll. 119-120).⁴⁹ Yet the significance of this episode in the context of early nineteenth-century Italian politics depends on Shelley's reading of Sismondi's *Histoire des républiques italiennes du moyen âge* (1808)⁵⁰. The Swiss historian had envisaged in the martyrdom of the Lombard League in the twelfth century an example of heroic resistance to be followed by the libertarian movements of the nineteenth century. For this reason, in the same note to *Hellas* Shelley refers his readers to Sismondi's study as "a book which has done much towards awakening the Italians to an imitation of their great ancestors"⁵¹. That Milan, like the rest of Italy, should take action and revive its lost valour was a hope that Shelley would harbour throughout his four years in the "Paradise of Exiles", waiting for the Italian peoples – as "Ode to Liberty" (1820) suggests – to stand up for self-determination and independence.

⁴⁶ P.B. Shelley, *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, D.H. Reiman – N. Fraistat ed., Norton, New York 2002, pp. 434-435.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 462.

⁴⁸ M. Shelley, *Journals*, Vol. 1, p. 205.

⁴⁹ D. Alighieri, *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, 4 vols, G. Petrocchi ed., Le Lettere, Firenze 1994, Vol. 3, p. 309.

⁵⁰ J.C.L. Simonde de Sismondi, *Histoire des républiques italiennes du moyen âge*, 4 vols, Henri Gessner, Zürich 1807, Vol. 2, p. 180 ff.

⁵¹ P.B. Shelley, *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p. 462.

