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Female Idling and Social Critique in Mary Shelley's *Rambles in Germany and Italy 1840, 1842, and 1843* (1844)

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<1>In two passages in *Frankenstein, Or, The Modern Prometheus*, Shelley sends her protagonist on a boat on a lake¹ and lets him articulate two opposed functions that moments of idleness experienced in a specific foreign environment can have: while idleness can undoubtedly have an inspiring effect, perhaps especially for artists and writers, offering refuge and solace, cheering one up and restoring one's energy, it can also function as a space for endless grief and misery and offer the possibility to be annihilated by the "plunge" into it.

<2>In the Victorian age, "doing leisure" was a gendered enterprise and pleasurable idleness something especially women had to redefine for themselves.² In her travel writing from the early 1840s, Mary Shelley debated the many functions of idleness as well, which is why her observations shed light on the ambivalence of the term 'idleness' at the transition from the Romantic to the Victorian period.

<3>At its core, *Rambles in Germany and Italy, 1840, 1842, 1843* (1844),³ her last published work, is the account of an attempt to come to terms with the trauma of having lost her husband and two of her children in Italy; it reflects that what Mary Shelley made of idleness, or what she used it for, changed over the years. It produced different kinds of writing because her attitude toward it had changed. I will identify the key features of Shelley's idleness that embed her text and her traveller persona at the threshold between Romanticism and the Victorian age and anticipate High Victorian discourses on leisure. Focal points of my reading are her rejection and individual reappropriation of William Gilpin's picturesque, a concept typically associated with Romanticism, and with that the picture she presented of Italy;⁴ her scornful comments on stifling institutions of leisure belonging to the Victorian travel/tourism industry in contrast with the pleasures she gained from her wayfaring and rambles; and the ways in which she sought and expressed moments of solitude and the connection between idleness and grief. All these thematic foci result from one another and are interlinked; at the same time, they exemplify how female idling creates an intellectual space for social critique.

<4>*Changing Attitude Toward Idleness*

Mary Shelley's letters and journal entries from the time of her first visit to Italy speak of a pilgrimage conducted in a jocund atmosphere; in a letter to Maria Gisborne from 2 July 1818 from Bagni di Lucca, she writes about how amusing it is that it would be

easier to find someone to speak Italian to in England than where they are since there are so many English tourists. She also provides a glimpse into what their average days look like:

For us, we generally walk, except last Tuesday, when Shelley and I took a long ride to il prato fionto, a flowery meadow on the top of one of the neighbouring appenines. We rode among chestnut woods, leaving the noisy cicala; and there was *nothing disagreeable* in it except the steepness of the ascent. The woods about here are in every way *delightful*, especially when they are plain, with grassy walks through them. They are filled with *sweet singing* birds, and not long ago we heard a cuckoo. (Letter to Maria Gisborne, c. 77, fol. 59, emphases added)

<5>In April the couple had already visited Como because they wanted to find a house there for the summer (cf. Shelley 1987a, 204). These happy rambles she partook in can be read as a time when being idle for her functioned as a prelude both for amusement and creativity. Almost two decades later, in the early 1840s, Shelley wrote from a different personal and historical situation. Since she was writing at the threshold of two literary periods, her work can be characterized as late-Romantic: she took up topoi accentuated in Romanticism, such as the picturesque, yet modified them. She was also taking up a genre that had begun to flourish in the Romantic age, travel writing, but was aware of the genre's changed status from the 1810s and 1820s to the 1840s, and adapted to that change.

<6>The "pensive" (Moskal 2003, 242) *Rambles in Germany and Italy* is written in epistolary form, based on letters to her stepsister Claire Clairmont (whom she corresponded with since 1816) telling of her travels with her son, Percy Florence, and two of his friends from Cambridge, in 1840, 1842 and 1843. The text is "arranged chronologically to recreate her journey" (Kautz 2000, 167) and enable one to follow her route which is "shaped by personal relationships" (ibid.). Some cities are on the itinerary because she wanted her son to do something like the Grand Tour, other places were sites of memories, where persons of the past and her former self were buried. She thus travelled to 'retravel' a journey from the past and not only to revisit a familiar space but also a lost time, her youth.

<7>*The Composition of Rambles in Germany and Italy and Shelley's Idling*

Writing about Italy guaranteed a wide readership in the 1840s because for Victorians "Italy was 'a land to dream of,' a touchstone for everything magical and visionary" (Foster 1990, 29). Many travel writers thus used "analogies of dream or vision [...] to express their awareness of another level of apprehension from the normal, rational one – [...] the magical world of the spirit" (ibid., 33). Like many other women travellers in the Victorian age, Shelley felt attracted to the country's "impermanent and transitory nature" (Frawley 1994, 70). Edward Gibbon's historical writings (he had been on the Grand Tour), Sir Joshua Reynolds's art and the poetry of Lord Byron, John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley contributed to the creation of Italy as the haven of the aesthetic and the arts. The idea of Italy aligned well with the Victorian preoccupation with the past; Italy was "so self-evidently the repository of its rich and various history, and in particular the Renaissance, characterized above all by its own obsession with the past and by its attempts to recover the past" (Fraser 1992, 3) that it presented itself as a ground for orientation.

<8>While a preoccupation with classical antiquity (prime examples would be Tennyson's and Arnold's poetry) can serve the purpose to understand one's present via (hi)stories of others, it also implies the avoidance of a confrontation with one's present. When assessing the role of Italy in the context of Victorian England, Fraser's referring to Barthes's "The Discourse of History" is to the point, but Barthes's remarks let me arrive at a slightly differently focused conclusion. About history (writing), he says that "the utterer means to '*absent himself*' from his discourse," which, apparently, "seems to be telling itself all on its own." (Barthes 1981, 11, emphases added) The novelists he mentions are writing under the same illusion, that is those "novelists who imagined – in the epoch of Realism – that they were 'objective' because they suppressed the sign of the 'I' in their discourse" whereas in these cases "the utterer *nullifies his emotional persona*, but substitutes for it another persona, the 'objective' persona" (ibid., emphases added). One looks to (hi)stories of others to understand one's present via these, that is one creates fields of reference⁵ in order to avoid reading one's present as it is and—most importantly—via a confrontation with oneself the self is *absented* and *nullified*. The confidence that it is possible to tell a coherent history of the past implies that in the future the same kind of coherent history will be told about one's present. When one aligns tourism with this searching for references, idling presents itself as a bold counter narrative (see Liedke 2018). The Victorian idler let him- or herself be deterritorialized⁶, he or she was "thrown back onto oneself" and willingly accepted this solitude rather than shying away from. He or she even enhanced it by recurring to the spatial practice of idling and re-subjectification.

<9>In Shelley's writing, similarly, Italy was not meant to serve as an anchor for coherence. While her travel book was readable and of use for prospective industrious Victorian tourists who wanted to follow her route, it is primarily a private account. She transformed the ambiguity of the genre of travel writing for her purposes because she knew it enabled her to write a work "one part self-portrait, one part portrait of the other" (Schor 1993, 235).⁷ On documenting her travels, Shelley "worked in a tradition that expected figuration and selection in travel books and in which the boundary between travel and fiction was contested" (Moskal 2003, 243).

<10>In the beginning, she makes it clear that she can tell "nothing new, except as each individual's experience possesses novelty" (MSa vii); when going on a boat to the three islands on Lago Maggiore later on in the book she skips the description and makes the somewhat grumpy remark that "I do not minutely describe: these islands are well known. Islands in a lake have a peculiar charm; they are rare too" (MSa 129). And when in a museum in Berlin she ends her enumeration of artworks saying "I must not send you a mere catalogue" (MSa 221). She feels powerless when she, for instance, at the lake of Como in 1843, observes the gradual changes in the colour of the landscape before her brought about by the sun going down but, exasperatedly, finds that language is too poor "to paint [...] [this] difference in words" (MSb 20). She also may be weary of repeating common literary tropes relating to picturesque settings in nature in a typical fashion (an argument that I will take up in more detail below).

<11>There were several direct and indirect reasons which served as the motivations for Shelley's travels in these years: she had been troubled by a nervous illness and

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headaches for some time. Prior to setting out to Germany in 1840, she had edited her husband's complete work, which had worsened her depression.⁸ As she wrote in a letter to Augusta Trelawny on 24 February 1843 from Nice, "illness has been the dark shadow" (c. 76, fol. 2) and she "suffered so much anxiety & ill health all the winter, that [she] for ever deferred writing until a better day" (c. 76, fol. 1). She needed a remedy for her grief and health-related problems and hoped that "[t]ravelling will cure all: my busy, brooding thoughts will be scattered abroad" (MSa 2). On her second trip to Germany, she was looking for a cure for her headaches, which is why she went to spas, for instance in Kissingen.⁹ In addition to that, by 1840, Shelley felt she was losing the thread as a writer. Thus, she undertook the trip "as an antidote to her own depression and professional stagnation" (Frawley 1994, 48) and a new source for inspiration, perhaps similar to that she had experienced in the same places almost 25 years earlier. Yet while she was very much looking forward to her travels, the idea of leisure, freedom and classlessness "evoked an array of anxieties" (Schor 1993, 241).

<12>The general structure of the text is, however, from the beginning calm and regular; for instance, she begins many letters/chapters with "We left x for y", or similar descriptive formulations, usually even giving the exact time when they set off for the next destination. She visited some cities several times over the years, for instance "Frankfort", which she describes as "a clean, airy, but dull town" (MSa 30). On her first visit, she – "by stupidly not making proper inquiries" (ibid.) – did not get the chance to see Dannecker's Ariadne at Moritz von Bethmann's gallery (in contrast to George Eliot who, being better acquainted with Bethmann, had made the necessary arrangements on her first trip).¹⁰

<13>While she did have an itinerary in mind, she discovered the places she got to by way of a circular, repetitive kind of travelling. She designed her own meshwork of places. To speak with Tim Ingold, her rambling can be characterized as "wayfaring", that is, "the embodied experience of [...] perambulatory movement" (Ingold 2011, 148). When Shelley was rambling, she went her way along different paths, not lineally from A to B, and it is this 'alongness' (Ingold coins the adverb 'alongly', cf. 2011, 154, so I might as well take up his cue) that best describes her travelling style. It also explains her disdain on meeting other travellers who were not interested in experiencing alongness; unsurprisingly, she did not regard them as 'fellow travellers' but rather as a different group of people. Echoing Yorick's catalogue of travellers in Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* she distanced herself from them:

In a classification of travellers, what name is to be given to those who travel only for the sake of saying that they have travelled? He was *doing* his Saxon Switzerland; he had *done* his Italy, his Sicily; he had *done* his sunrise on Mount Etna; and when he should have *done* his Germany, he would return to England to show how destitute a traveller may be of all impression and knowledge, when they are unable to knit themselves in soul to nature, nor are capacitated by talents or acquirements to gain knowledge from what they see. We must become part of the scenes around us, and they must mingle and become a portion of us, or we see without seeing and study without learning. There is no good, no knowledge, unless we go out from, and take some of the external into, ourselves: this is the secret of mathematics as well as of poetry. We indulged, as well we might, in gazing delightedly from this battlement of nature on the magnificent

scene around; and then we turned to the prosaic part of travelling, the necessity of getting on. (MSa 265, emphases in original)

<14>Imitating the sound of a drumbeat, the word “do” is repeated in different inflections until it echoes the monotony of the young Englishman’s travels. Emphatically addressing an unspecified audience, Shelley introduces an emotional dimension into the discourse on tourism which has become obsessed with efficiency: “We must become part of the scenes around us” for a mere skimming of landscapes and collecting of landmarks has nothing to do with sensitive involvement. This passage, thus, identifies her as a distinctly idle traveller who re-subjectifies her surroundings through her readiness to engage with them. It presents a very direct critique of those profit-oriented travellers, those “doing” their travel destinations, who were becoming increasingly proliferous at the time. As Schor points out, “Shelley’s ethic of travel maintains that only when travel is an affair of the body and the mind does it become a matter for the heart; the failure to sympathise indicates a homebound mind” (Schor 1993, 239) and thus it is not enough to merely passively watch and tick off items on one’s itinerary.

<15>Mary Shelley and the Leisured Picturesque

In terms of fashioning herself as a late-Romantic idler, the discussion of Shelley’s use of the ‘picturesque’ is a pivotal aspect. Already in her first travelogue, *History of a Six Weeks’ Tour*, she presented herself as having a refined traveller persona, which also included a rejection a priori of what tourists would deem worth visiting and especially scenes and landscapes that were labeled ‘picturesque.’ To make her argument more convincing and increase its dramatic effect, she did not mind stretching reality a bit by depicting her stepsister as the touristic foil to her sensitive self. She thus represented her “as the quintessentially indiscriminate picturesque traveler.” While “she [did] not ventriloquize Claire with conspicuously picturesque language [...] she [did] have her roam the landscape in search of what is beautiful, never actually reflecting thoughtfully on what she sees” (Jones 1997, 511). In Mary Shelley’s journals from that time, however, there are no complaints about Claire being a passive tourist, so one can assume that these remarks do not reflect the actual Gilpinian picturesque which is “dulling tourists’ and readers’ abilities to make nuanced distinctions about their surroundings” (Jones 1997, 511), not only in *Six Weeks’* but also (or still) in *Rambles*.

<16>William Gilpin, an English artist, Anglican priest and traveller, was the first to coin the concept of the picturesque in 1792 as a set of criteria according to which landscapes could be described. Incidentally, he “never visited Italy, but his guidebooks cite landscapes by Claude, Poussin, and Rosa as models for the desired picturesque ‘irregularity’” (Stabler 2002, 13). His essay on “Picturesque Travel” proposes how to engage the “vacant minds” of those travelling “without any end at all” and goes on to outline the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of picturesque travel (Gilpin 1794, 41). The main characteristics of the picturesque he outlines are beauty in its varied, irregular forms as it can be found in a myriad of different shapes and combinations in nature (cf. 42) - “[w]e rather *feel*, than *survey* it” (50, emphases in original). The picturesque eye especially examines “the *form*, and the *composition* of the objects of landscape” and “connects them with the atmosphere, and seeks for all those various effects, which are produced from that vast, and wonderful storehouse of nature” (44, emphases in original).

The idea of novelty achieved by a combination of grandeur with accidental circumstance “which harmonises with it, and gives it double value” (44) is central, that is, “every form of life, and being may have it’s [sic] use as a picturesque object, till it become too small for attention” (45). Gilpin stresses that ‘too much beauty’ is unbecoming, as is a river whose banks are merely “smooth” and “parallel” (57). The overall purpose of picturesque travel, that which satisfies the traveller, however, is to ‘hunt’ for these scenes and objects: “After the pursuit we are gratified with the *attainment* of the object” (48, emphasis in original) – a motto that late eighteenth and early nineteenth century travellers brought to perfection.

<17>Mary Shelley was undoubtedly familiar with Gilpin’s text.¹¹ In her version of the picturesque eye, Shelley added the dimension of the intellect to that of the heart – again, travel for her must be an affair of the body *and* the mind to become a matter of the heart. For instance, when being taken aback by the ruggedness of landscapes, Shelley could be an active observer and thus be in control of her healing process. Only then, “observing new scenes [could] free the mind from preconceptions” (Kautz 2000, 176). Notably, the scenes she observed were not only new for her but also often accidental and, objectively speaking, insignificant. For instance, she and her companions spent the entire month of August in 1840 in an inn in Cadenabbia. Due to the heat, they rested during the day and left the inn in the evenings “to stroll beside or linger upon the divine lake, to see the sun’s declining rays gild the mountain peaks, to watch the stars gather bright over the craggy summits [...] and hear the soft tinkling bells, put by the fishermen to mark the spot where the nets are set, come with softened sound across the water” (MSa, 76). All they did, therefore, was indulge in *dolce far niente*, an old Italian expression for being deliciously idle, a state of mind rendered by Shelley in a way that at times borders on rather kitschy renderings. Yet even though she describes three completely different picturesque impressions – the divine lake, the sunrays and then the light of the stars on the mountain peaks, and the fishermen’s bells – it is the most humble and inconspicuous one she chooses to pursue. Shelley’s picturesque does not have to be grand in order to evoke a sentiment of blissful joy.¹² By re-appropriating the ‘conventional’ idea of the picturesque, Shelley thus engages in a process of re-subjectification in the sense that she relies on her personal interpretation of what she sees and deems interesting for its own sake. Crucially, for the picturesque to have a healing-enhancing function, it has to be experienced while Shelley is idling. It is the “interaction between specific landscapes and the viewer” (Kautz 2000, 174) which brings about the healing, if only momentarily.¹³

<18>Shelley did not mind that in Italian gardens English trimness was replaced by “the exuberant richness of Nature” (MSa 78). Her time in Italy made her realize what she was missing at home in England, where one did not feel the value of the pleasures of “lingering [...] surrounded by all the beauty of an Italian landscape, sheltered by the pure radiance of an Italian sky” which for her were “the divinest [delights] imparted by the visible creation” (MSa 84). Linger, loiter, delicious hours, strolling, dreaming, magic, rambles – all these are words used by Shelley to describe her emotional and psychological response to the Italian landscape and culture. She did not mingle with the inhabitants of the villages and cities she visited, neither in Germany nor in Italy, thus she was primarily interested in her own response to the places she visited.

<19>There are some “rambling” passages in *Rambles* which made Robert Browning accuse Shelley of not paying sufficient attention to detail when describing Italy. But, as Frawley counters, he simply seems “curiously unable to acknowledge the validity of

using the emotional to evoke the impressionistic range of the country” (Frawley 1994, 60 f.). Furthermore, the parallel between her actual rambling and the ‘rambling’ style of her writing can also be seen as an indicator of her individual reappropriation of the concept of the picturesque. She translated the concept, usually only used with reference to settings in nature into a ‘rugged’ text and to mount a critique of the current social politics of Italy. Schor, for instance, referring to a passage where Shelley describes the course of the sun from morning to evening (see MSa 67-68) claims that

[i]nstead of arranging her description spatially and pictorially, *Shelley renders the scene temporally, lyrically*. With the arc of the sun, the reader’s emotions rise and sink; the penultimate ‘gladdening’ of the mountaintops finishes ‘cold and gray.’ By the end of the passage, the obscured peaks have become mere indicators of the remote, yet surpassing, radiance of the stars. Thus, the most lyrical passages of Rambles display the self in the service of a particular political agenda: the reader’s sympathies, trained in the textual landscape by the example of Shelley’s sympathies, can be trained as well toward the social landscape of Italy. (Schor 1993, 240, emphases added)

Shelley does the same thing on several occasions in her text, for instance in the following passage describing the “finest scenery of the Moselle” (MSa 23):

...but words are vain; and in description here there must ever be *at once a vagueness and a sameness* that conveys no distinct ideas, unless it should awaken the imagination: unless you can be placed beside us in our rough-hewn boat, and glide down between the vine-covered hills, with bare craggy heights towering above; *now* catching with *glad curiosity* the first glimpse of a more beautiful bend of the river, a higher mountain, peak, a more romantic ruin; *now looking back to gaze* as long as possible on some picturesque point of view, of which, as the boat floated down but slightly assisted by the rowers, we lost sight for ever [...]; *then*, the quiet enjoyment of golden evening, succeeded by still and gray twilight; *and last*, the lassitude, the fatigue, which made us look eagerly out for the place where we were to stop and repose; – there is a *zest* in all this, especially in a *voyage unhacknied by others*, and therefore accompanied by *a dash of uncertainty* and a great sense of novelty, which is lost in mere words: – *you must do your part*, and feel and imagine, or all description proves tame and useless. (MSa 23-4, emphases added)

<20>This extremely long sentence is restless and fragmented, like an eruption. In the enumeration her gaze quivers from “now...”, to “now...”, to “then...” and “and last...”. Again, Shelley’s “meandering” (Schor 1993, 240) description traces the course of the day in a fast-forward motion and dwells especially on the changing shades of light. It also follows not so much the actual route of the journey but rather the direction of the traveller’s gaze, from the hills, to a bend of the river, to a ruin and then turning around and looking back. What is striking is that Shelley refrains from being even remotely geographically accurate; her picturesque can only attain a shape in the reader’s imagination, which is why her description must be characterized at once by “a vagueness and a sameness.” Her picturesque, therefore, attains a second, meta-level. It is not exclusively found in rugged nature; it is found in the nature one travels to in one’s imagination triggered by a ‘vague’ and ‘same’ description of the picturesque as experienced by someone else on seeing an actual landscape. Her descriptions

deliberately contain gaps, they are, indeed, positively idle, her text is not afraid of emptiness or unsaid things and rather thrives on “a dash of uncertainty.” Her picturesque is built on the appeal to her readers to “do your part” – an echo of her understanding of the obligation of the traveller to become part of the things around her. Analyzing this textual level of her writing, one gets the impression of “an ineffable sense of leisure” (Schor 1993, 240). What I see as crucial in the passage above is that it is a textual materialization of Mary Shelley’s wish uttered in the preface – namely, that on her travels her “brooding thoughts will be scattered abroad.” It is apt to say that while being based on an ‘average’ boat trip, the paragraph successfully takes apart the whole and reassembles it in a scattered ‘whole.’

<21>Shelley thus demonstrates how a text can be made rugged; as Frawley observes, “Shelley’s voice in her *Rambles* is never secure” by which she means that “her subjects, settings, and moods are in constant flux and the overall effect of the work is to suggest, rather than declare, the region’s potential influence” (Frawley 1994, 60). Instead of providing factual descriptions of the landscapes and “lions” she visits, a project that she describes as futile in her preface, her text’s “unevenness helps to further Shelley’s own sense of the country’s emotional and political terrain” (ibid.). I would argue, however, that the terrain itself is not emotional but it contains objects and scenes that trigger a particular emotion in the viewer; in Mary Shelley’s case they enhance the possibility to linger. Reminiscent of passages in Isabella Bird’s travelogue *A Lady’s Life in the Rocky Mountains*,¹⁴ Shelley anthropomorphises nature by making the cornfields, vineyards, woods and the river wear “their fairest summer dress” (MSa 12) when she is on her way to the city of Metz.

<22>At that time, women writers were criticized for being incapable of writing anything which did not consist of emotional or sensual outpourings. In the above passage Shelley precisely represents these critics’ object of scorn: she directly responds to the new environment she finds herself in with her body. Writing in a flux, she retells her day “of agreeable idleness” in Metz (MSa 14), then goes on to fantasize about the ancient inhabitants of German villages (see ibid., 31) and, bemoaning the fate of the women who were left behind at home to wait for their husbands while they were at war, exclaims that “[w]ayward human nature will rebel against mental sloth [...] We are not born to be cabbages” (32). The Black Forest in particular inspires her imagination making her think of the time when “Roman legions penetrated its depths” and the shadows haunting it from the middle ages. She wittily remarks that by calling a valley “Höllenthal,” the Germans demonstrate their skill of “spirit-stirring names” that are “very different from the Little Woman, or Muddy Creek, of America” (45); the falls of the Rhine also stir “like passion, the very depths of our being” (51). Her depiction of the falls is very intense, immediate and ‘fluid.’ It is difficult for her to find the appropriate words to render both her fear of and fascination with the natural spectacle. She breathlessly speaks of “the tumult, the uproar and matchless beauty of a cataract, with its eternal, ever-changing veil of misty spray” and “[t]he knowledge of its ceaseless flow; there, *before we were born*; there, to be after countless generations have passed away; the sense of its power, that would dash us to atoms without altering the tenor of its way . . .” (ibid., emphasis added). It is noteworthy that for Shelley, the tumult of the waterfall evokes a nostalgia for a primordial state, a state in which, as is mirrored in her writing style, everything was still in flux and undetermined.

<23>Shelley and 'Institutionalized Leisure'

The necessity of sensible travel as an "affair of the body and the mind" could, in Shelley's case, be best realized when she was the agent of her wayfaring. She felt comfortable in Baden-Baden because she felt she "could steal away from the throng, and find solitude at will on the mountain tops or amidst their woody ravines" (ibid. 37), postponing the confrontation with Italy.

<24>What is characteristic for idle travellers is the experience of a voyage that is *not* timed, that is, a voyage where a spatialisation of time occurs and where experiences of 'oneness' with the surrounding space are possible. Thus, the reason why Shelley gave up on her wish to stay in Baden-Baden was that her motivation to go travelling was not to "roost," like some tourists do, "as if they were fowls with a trellis before their feeding yard" (MSa 41). For Shelley, "to wander, and ramble, and discover new scenes [...] is the only real [amusement] to be found in such a place" (ibid.). She was interested in "a less purposeful, less predictable, more leisurely progression than the step-by-step spa regimen" (Kautz 2000, 171). It does not come as a surprise, then, that she does not enjoy her "cur," as she spells it, in Kissingen where she is stuck and surrounded by "a regiment of sick people" and forced "to seek amusement by being surrounded by the rheumatic, the gouty, the afflicted of all sorts" (184). While she initially finds routines like the morning walks pleasant and acknowledges the healing formula derived from the "holistic effect of the spa setting" (Kautz 2000, 171) by which she primarily means its geographical location which turns one's stay into an affair of the body and the mind, she fiercely rejects the spa as a typical space for positive idleness. She is primarily angered and frustrated by the ways in which the spa regimen is under the arbitrary control of doctors which she sees as analogous to political systems where a small group of rulers exerts power over others. After only a couple of weeks at Kissingen, she cannot bear the degree to which her daily life is regulated anymore (cf. Kautz 2000, 168). She can barely tolerate "the disgust of sitting down with two hundred people in one hall, served slowly with uneatable food" (MSa, 186); one's intellect also seems to be slowed down in the spa because the patients are not even allowed to take, for instance, lessons in German: "We *malades* are forbidden to exert our intellects; and, to make this prohibition more stringent, the gas one imbibes with the water produces a weakness in the eyes" which even makes it hard for her to write (187).

<25>One must note the irony here: Shelley rightly points out that, even though a spa is supposed to be a space for recreation, even small luxuries such as tea and strawberries at breakfast are forbidden (cf. 189). Even though the ballroom would accommodate several hundred people, barely anyone dances there because "the despotic decree of the triumvirate of doctors [...] maintain dancing to be absolutely incompatible with drinking the waters" (191) and children are not allowed to visit because this would be too exciting for the patients' nerves. Instead, everything is regulated in such a way that the patients are productive spa-goers. Also, the high degree of regulation and discipline does away with any private and free space for the individual body. In the spa as a "machinery of power" in the Foucauldian sense the body is made "docile" because it is "subjected, used, transformed and improved" (Foucault 1995, 138; 136); the individual is deprived of the possibility of constructing a meshwork of places 'alongly' because the notion of traversable space is done away with. Anticipating Foucault's argument of the surveillance apparatus and the idea that "modern institutional control is implicitly state control" Shelley points to "the apparent arbitrariness of the spa rules by establishing

their connection to political authority” (Kautz 2000, 169). Her biting criticism culminates in the following passage:

The King of Bavaria is so afraid that his medicinal waters may fall into disrepute if the drinkers should eat what disagrees with them, that we only eat what he, in conjunction with a triumvirate of doctors, is pleased to allow us. Every now and then a new article is struck out from our bill of fare, notice being sent from this council, which is struck up for our benefit at the door of the *salle-à-manger*, to the effect that, whoever in Kissingen should serve at any table pork, veal, salad, fruit, &c. &c. &c., should be fined so many florins. Our pleasures of the palate are thus *circumscribed*, not to say *annihilated*: for, strangely enough, though butter is prohibited, their dishes overflow with grease. (MSa 185-6)¹⁵

<26>Her tone is extremely cynical and Shelley makes it clear that the patients at the spa are turned into imbeciles; she unmasks the whole process as hypocritical because its only aim seems to be to calm down the patients and establish a ‘healthy’ atmosphere, while the food does not appear to be especially ‘wholesome.’ In addition, a patriarchal invasion of tasks typically belonging to the sphere of women, that is, taking care of children and the regulation of diet (cf. Kautz 2000, 170), occurs.

<27>Hence, as early as in the 1840s, a few decades before the widespread establishment of medical institutions of all kinds which the Victorian age is notorious for¹⁶, Shelley voiced her critique and worries that would be equally applicable in other contexts in the later part of the century. In the context of the late-Romantic appraisal of idleness, however, one can discern a decisive rejection of any political efforts to institutionalize idleness and turn it into productive leisure – a development which Shelley ultimately could not stop but which it was visionary of her to bemoan. Idleness cannot be regulated – it can only be found individually and in an unregulated fashion.

<28>Shelley therefore felt more at ease in Brukenau where the public gardens, which in her eyes resembled English pleasure-grounds, invited “the wanderer to stroll on, and enjoy in fine weather Nature’s dearest gifts, shady woods, open lawns, and views of beautiful country; loitering beside a murmuring stream, or toiling on awhile, and then resting as you gaze on a wider prospect” (MSa 200 f.). Her disdain for the enterprise of getting from A to B increased when she was forced to roast in a train coach longer than intended because there were stops of several minutes at every station since passengers were offered refreshments and snacks. Apart from criticizing modern institutions of the leisure industry such as spas, she was also not entirely convinced by the railway, the innovation of the nineteenth century. Travelling by train from Paris to Metz, she did seem impressed by the speed, yet (because of it) she experienced two nights of “excessive fatigue” (MSa 11) and the railroad to Frankfurt was “not a very good one” – at least “the carriages were comfortable” (MSa 29). Of another means of mechanised transport, namely the *veturino* in Italy, she said that its “leisure is a false lure” (MSb 212).

<29>The musing and idling traveller was, therefore, not content when she was supposed to employ ‘artificial’ means to move on and when she was told *when* to be idle and

breaks for 'enjoyment' were imposed on her. While these breaks were supposed to make the journey less exhausting for the travellers, they strained Shelley's nerves because for her idleness could only be recuperative when the notion of time was absent.

<30>*Back to the Beginning: Idling to Grieve*

As Moskal argues, Shelley felt "a need to expiate what appears to be 'survivor guilt,' a contemporary term that came into use in the 1950s and 1960s to characterize the continued suffering of Holocaust survivors. Now generalized [...] survivor guilt can entail idealization of the dead, remorse that 'the wrong person died'" (2003, 252). Yet her enterprise was not only a revisiting of these places but also of her youth when she noted that "at the name of Italy, I grow young again" (MSa 2). Upon arriving in Italy she felt that "the cup of life again sparkles to the brim" (MSa 94), the latter notion being a recurring motif found in travel writing by women in that period. As Frawley observes, for Victorian women, "a trip to Italy was [a trip] into the lightest light – a place physically and emotionally warm, colorful, and sensuous" (Frawley 1994, 53). Shelley's rejuvenation even seemed to turn the writer into a teenage girl again when she, on visiting the three islands on the Lago Maggiore fantasised about being the "Queen of Isola Bella" who invites her friends to her palace only to be reminded that she is in reality a "poor traveller, humbly pursuing her route in an unpretending *vettura*" (MSa 131).

<31>It is remarkable that the fact that a woman in her middle age was travelling with three young men is never mentioned. Indeed, one of the few times the gender aspect comes up at all is when she quotes a French lady who wrote about "the English mania for travelling" and was particularly baffled by those women who instead of enjoying "the comforts of an ordinary English house could leave the same, and by *diligence* and *voiturier*, harassed and fatigued, should find pleasure in exposing themselves to a thousand annoyances and privations, surprised her beyond measure" (ibid. 160). For Shelley, the fact that she was a woman seemed to be completely irrelevant with regard to her status as a traveller.¹⁷

<32>After a while, however, her letters from Italy are weighed down by her grief which sometimes breaks out at unexpected moments. When staying at the Lake of Como in 1841, she notes in her journal: "My mind slumbers & my heart is dull – Is life quite over?" (Shelley 1987b, 572)¹⁸. In the Italian village Chiavenna, on seeing window-curtains, that is seemingly trifling objects, she remarks that "[s]trange and indescribable emotions invaded me; recollections, long forgotten, arose fresh and strong by mere force of association, produced by those objects being presented to my eye, inspiring a mixture of pleasure and pain, almost amounting to agony" (MSa 61). As Schor suggests,

Shelley's inventory of familiar objects evokes an agonizing train of recollections. Crucially, she counts her youthful self among fate's casualties; while memory renders her a 'companion of the dead,' a former self also lies among them. Her own existence becomes solipsistic, inauthentic, 'an unreal phantasmagoria,' her own reality wholly absorbed in the objects she perceives. (Schor 1993, 242)

<33>Being constantly confronted with objects that trigger a memory from the past, her travel account "interweaves constant comparisons between past visits and the present one" (Broome Saunders 2012, 126). At the same time, however, Woolley rejects

Schor's analysis and states that Shelley's "recollections show a temporal consciousness that has assimilated the past into the present" (Woolley 2001, 220). Both arguments have to be combined in order to reflect Shelley's twofold approach to her personal Italy. On revisiting many well-known sights and feeling the intrusion of the past on the present, she experiences disorientation and inauthenticity; but at the same time, and this is reflected in Broome Saunders' use of the word "interweaves", noticing the passage of time, for instance when seeing the decayed buildings, enables her to let the past be as meaningful as the present – but not more. In Venice, however, where one enters "enchanted ground" (MSb 82) the moonlight makes everything appear less distinct and in this blurred image, the decay echoes and mirrors her own grief, rather than soothing it. Thinking back to the time when she was there with P.B. Shelley, Mary Shelley writes:

Often, when here before, I looked on this scene, at this hour, or later, for often I expected S.'s return from Palazzo Mocenigo, till two or three in the morning; I watched the glancing of the oars of the gondolas, and heard the far song, and saw the palaces sleeping in the light of the moon, which veils by its deep shadows all that grieved the eye and heart in the decaying palaces of Venice. Then I saw, as now I see, the bridge of the Rialto spanning the canal. All, all is the same; but as the Poet says – 'The difference to me!' (MSb 82).¹⁹

<34>In this scene, there is no sign of a temporal consciousness; the specific place has a more powerful effect than could be achieved no matter how much time passed. The imbalance – and thus disorientation – Shelley has to cope with is that encountering this illusion of sameness throws the difference of the actual situation into even greater relief.

<35>When arriving at the place she stayed at last with her husband and her children, when she first "stepped out from childhood into life" (MSa 139), she recognizes "a thousand slight peculiarities, familiar objects then – forgotten since – now replete with recollections and associations" (139-40). On revisiting this setting, she feels that "all [her] life since was but an unreal phantasmagoria" (140). Her distress even manifests itself in her writing immediately following this scene: thus, when the group of travellers goes to their next stop with their carriage up St. Gotthard and through Andermatt, Shelley writes in a disconnected, enumerative, or, to speak with Woolf, "jerky" style (Woolf 1928: vii).²⁰ There are very long sentences, divided by semicolons instead of full stops which she, being a self-conscious writer, feels the need to refer to, by addressing an implied reader, and apologizing for the "incoherent scrawl" and "extreme personality" of her narrative (MSa 152).

<36>Viewed in this light, her joy- and even youthful outbursts on seeing a piece of art that moves her or on enjoying an idle moment in which she can recuperate from her clouded state of mind serve as a starker contrast to her 'regular' self and become more significant. One can argue that the preceding disenchantment with the spas in Germany and her anger or unwillingness to be 'healed' by institutional medicine even heightens the healing effect of the landscape in Italy; both positions are cultivated by her "position as a late Romantic writer and female patient" (Kautz 2000, 166). The generally anxious woman feels comfortable in the foreign environment and enjoys walking from Cadenabbia towards the village of Menaggio by herself rather than being too afraid to do so. These solitary walks evoke in her the feeling that "this world, endowed as it is outwardly with endless shapes and influences of beauty and enjoyment, is peopled also

in its spiritual life by myriads of loving spirits; from whom, unawares, we catch impressions, which mould our thoughts to good” (MSa 94). This insight, albeit entirely irrational, makes her hopeful because even though she cannot be sure, there is the possibility that “the beloved dead make a portion of this holy company” (ibid.). One sees a deeply grieving woman who is momentarily helped to come to terms with her loss by moments of idleness found in a natural environment. Neither her travels nor her textual account of them provide closure; but ultimately, in Shelley’s case, idle rambling is a means of learning to embrace never-ending grief.

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1 Shelley 2008 [1818], 70, and Shelley 2008 [1818], 124.

2 See Liedke 2018, especially pp. 86-90 on "Idleness as a Gendered Concept."

3 In the following, I will use the abbreviation MSa and MSb when referring to passages from volume 1 and 2, respectively, from the 1844 edition of Mary Shelley's *Rambles in Germany and Italy 1840, 1842, and 1843*, London: E. Moxon.

4 The focus will be on her discussion of the picturesque, rather than her image of Italy because this would be too broad a topic for this chapter. Mary Shelley's support for Italian nationalism, her standpoint with regard to Anglo-Italian politics and relations and her digressions about Italian history are examined by Jeanne Moskal (1999) and Elisabetta Marino (2011).

5 See also a discussion of Stefano Evangelista's assessment of some Victorians' "use" of the Greeks in Liedke 2018, 268-269.

6 See Liedke 2016 for a discussion of Baudrillard in connection to W. H. Hudson's travelogue *Idle Days in Patagonia* (1893) and Bruce Chatwin's *In Patagonia* (1977).

7 Schor rightly points out that this generic ambiguity of travel writing does not only appeal to authors but also to their readers and suggests this as a reason why the genre has remained so popular for a long time. For when an author writes both a portrait of herself and of the other, the reader of a travelogue can be "two readers at once: active tourist and contemplative philosopher" (Schor 1993, 235).

8 See Shelley 1839.

9 See Köhler 2017.

10 As Eliot recorded in her unpublished travel journals, she "never saw any sculpture equal to this – the feeling it excites is the essence of true worship – a housing on the soul before power creating beauty" (Eliot 1854-1861, n.p.). If the other sentences in her journals were equally 'jerky' one might overlook this, yet here, Eliot's moment of idly standing in front of a work of art made her, even afterwards, when documenting her day's experiences, quite literally 'wax lyrical.' Today, the sculpture is in the Liebighaus in Frankfurt and is still a tourist magnet (cf. Wolters 2014).

11 She does not directly refer to him or his text, neither in *Rambles* nor in *Frankenstein*. Brennan points out, however, that she must have known him, at least indirectly, because her father William Godwin included many picturesque descriptions in his novels and in *Frankenstein* Shelley refers to Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" (which he wrote having read Gilpin's guide to the Wye) to introduce Henry Clerval (cf. Brennan 2004, 119).

12 Interestingly, Stabler draws a connection between the ways in which the picturesque was approached and the gender of the writers and points out that women writers were more inventive in this regard. She mentions other writers such as Hester Piozzi, Marianne Baillie, Charlotte Eaton and Lady Morgan who "valued picturesque variety or irregularity for its own sake, not as a part of some larger system of classical order." (Stabler 2002, 14)

13 Health through travel had already been established as a tradition at that time, as for instance shown in Marianna Starke's *Letters from Italy* from 1800.

14 In one scene, for instance, Bird writes that the eastward mountains “which had been grey, blushed pale pink, the pink deepened into rose, and the rose into crimson, and then all solidity etherealized away and became clear and pure as an amethyst” (Bird 1960 [1879], 21-22).

15 A little later (cf. MSa 192-3) she mentions that the King of Bavaria particularly patronized the baths of Brukenau and was anxious that they receive many paying visitors. For this reason, he gave Dr. A. B. Granville an award. Shelley only references Granville without any details, an indication that his 1837 travel guide, *The Spas of Germany*, was well-known at that time and the reason why many English people came to the spas. As Kautz points out, “[w]hile Granville surveys the German spas through a masculinized national and institutional lens, Mary Shelley views them through the lens of a Romantic ideology of organicism and individual authority.” (Kautz 2000: 167) Other references to guide- and handbooks in *Rambles* include Murray, whose mistakes Shelley occasionally corrects yet whom she generally finds an “admirable” guide (cf. MSa 164, and also 30, 49, 195, 199, 202, 231, 271, 278; MSb 17-18, 35, 39, 48, 61) and Brockedon’s prints (cf. MSa 134).

16 For an overview see Penner, Louise, and Tabitha Sparks, ed. *Victorian Medicine and Popular Culture*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016; Scull, Andrew. *Madhouses, Mad-Doctors, and Madmen: The Social History of Psychiatry in the Victorian Era*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981

17 She also, if only briefly, enjoyed playing with the idea of having a different social background when, on leaving Paris in June 1840 she stated: “I feel a good deal of the gipsy coming upon me” (MSa 9). See Liedke 2018, pp. 49-51, for a discussion of the changing semantics of the verb “to gipsy” in the course of the nineteenth century.

18 Journal entry from 26 February 1841. There are only about ten entries in her journal from the time that she was travelling in the early 1840s and the one from Como is the longest.

19 Lord Byron had taken a three-year lease of Palazzo Mocenigo in May 1818 (cf. Marchand 1976, xiii).

20 Virginia Woolf speaks of “jerky, disconnected sentences” (Woolf 1928: vii) when describing the style of Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey*. It is noteworthy that when rendering moments like the above Shelley is quite literally losing the thread of her writing and her text includes brief, incoherent bursts, similar to those in Sterne.