

## 17: Padova and Palladian villas

I wake this morning to the welcome sight of a clear blue sky – the stormy weather has obviously passed. I begin the day with a hot shower and a good breakfast, then set off on the bicycle on a journey that I have long been looking forward to: a trip along the Brenta Canal to see the famous villas built in the Palladian style, ending with Palladio's masterpiece, the Villa Malcontenta at the end (even though it will be closed today).

The main road to Venice is very busy and noisy. When I have escaped from the dreary suburbs of Padova, I see a signpost for Noventa. Glad of the opportunity to leave the main road, I head for this little town, stopping to admire the first signs of good Palladian architecture. I visit a fine church with statues in its niches; it is plain outside and restrained inside.

Down at the Piovego canal I stumble across the small but elegant Villa Giovanelli, built in the late seventeenth century. I gaze at this striking villa, with its wide sweeping steps, columns and elaborate pediment through locked gates, and then take the narrow canal road to Strà. As this road is not indicated on my inadequate map, I have to ask for directions. Very soon the road begins to deteriorate and I find myself bumping over loose stones. The scenery is not too bad here; although it is rural, I can glimpse industrial ugliness in the distance.



Villa Pisani, Strà

I am delighted when I eventually join a proper road and arrive at Strà, which turns out to be a horribly noisy and busy modern town. I pass through it quickly and begin to skirt the Brenta, where I notice a few fine but small villas. The huge and magnificent Villa Pisani then appears, with its striking and elegant façade facing the roadway and canal. Because of its size and magnificence, it is more like a palace; in the past, members of the Venetian Pisani family commissioned a number of other such villas across the locality. Just as I arrive, tourists disembark from the *Burchiello* riverboat and go in – I let them go ahead. As clouds are beginning to gather in the sky once again, I decide to take a look at the interior first and the exterior afterwards.

I leave my panniers at the ticket office, pay 1,000 lire and reluctantly wait for a group to form. Having to join a guided tour and not being able to see the place at my leisure annoys me, but there is no alternative here. At last a group forms, we are taken upstairs, and our visit begins. We are rushed through the few rooms that are open to the public, and a guide gabbles a commentary that I cannot understand. I deliberately trail behind the group and linger in the rooms after they leave, catching up with them at the last moment. Reading the brochure that I have, I learn that although this great villa was built in the Palladian style, it was not designed by Palladio. It was begun in the early eighteenth century for Alvise Pisani, who was appointed the 114th Doge of Venice in 1735. Two architects were involved: Girolamo Frigimelica at first and then Francesco Maria Preti. The 114 rooms in the house are in honour of its owner.



Villa Pisani, Strà

The décor of the first two rooms that we see is quite splendid and there are fine frescoes on the walls. Listed in my brochure are the artists' names: Tiepolo, Guarana, Carriera, Zuccarelli, Simonini and Ricci. In contrast, the next suite of rooms is spartan and decorated in a rather severe neo-classical style. Off one of these rooms is a tiny old-fashioned bathroom. Its walls are painted white and the decoration is executed in restrained colours.

Next we are conducted to a huge music room, passing a pair of pretty corridors adorned with frescoes. The music room is truly magnificent and has intricate stucco work and an impressive painted ceiling. Beyond we can see another pair of corridors, but they are closed to the public. It is very disappointing to see so little – even the extensive park outside, which looks so enchanting, is closed. I can catch glimpses of it from the windows.

As the visit is far too short for my liking, I stay put after the group leaves and make my way back to the first two rooms. The guide who leads the following group is very cross when he discovers that I am still here, I but don't care a damn. I mumble an

excuse in my worst Italian and he relents. However, the man who has led our group brings me downstairs and unlocks the door to let me out.

I collect my bag and bicycle, and go outside to take a proper look at the very imposing façade. I peep through gates in order to get a view of the grounds and the large, elaborate stables at the far end, which can be easily mistaken for another palace. Satisfied that I have seen as much as I can of the place, I retrace my steps to have a look at the other villas along the road. One of these is the Villa Foscari Rossi, begun in 1602.

By now it has turned dull and chilly, an unwelcome change of weather that has shattered my dream of a lazy trip along the banks of the Brenta in bright Italian sunshine. Another disappointment is the architectural muck in between the villas and the noise of traffic on the road. The next village, Fiesso, seems to contain little of interest, only pretentious modern houses that pretend to be Palladian villas, and which are decorated with reproduction statues. At least one can have a good laugh at these. Perhaps the genuine villas lie hidden elsewhere, for according to my brochure, there should be more in this area.

Feeling a little frustrated, I continue my journey, determined to see what I can. On my way from Dolo, through Mira and on to Oriago, I pass many villas, but most of them are only worth a glance. Many are in a bad state of repair or else they are modernized, especially the windows. As most of them are either private dwellings or institutions, they are therefore closed to the public. There is just one handsome place that I photograph through the tall trees just after Dolo; I like the gates and the statues adorning the façade. I guess that this region must have been idyllic back in the eighteenth century. The Widmann-Foscari villa just outside Mira is open, but as it looks so small and insignificant, I do not bother to go in as it means joining another unsatisfactory guided tour. Later I regret my decision, but wonder if I have missed much. The *Burchiello* group appears again here and a German guide waves as I leave and cycle on.

With lorries aplenty roaring past me, I follow the main road, which skirts and wanders away from the Brenta. I pedal through Oriago, which does not look too bad, and at last I branch off for the Villa Malcontenta. Here, off the main road, it is much quieter and prettier. At last the familiar villa looms through the willow trees by the water's edge, though not very much of it can be seen. As I have expected, it is closed. I hit on a plan of trying to visit it today with the *Burchiello* group, which, according to my brochure, would be arriving here at 3.20 p.m. this afternoon.

Changing my plans slightly, I decide to cycle to Fusina and take a look at the lagoon and Venice in the distance. I follow an uninteresting road by the canal with a most horrible view of an electricity plant on my left.

I reach this unremarkable seaside resort with a camping ground at about one o'clock and am rewarded with my first glimpse of the grey sea and the islands. Venice and its church spires can just about be discerned in the distance. Sheltering from the strong, cold sea breeze, I sit on a low wall and eat my simple lunch: it includes some of the ham that I have bought, which is quite horrible. In a burst of weak sunshine, the view of Venice improves and the water glistens. If nothing else, this serves as a pleasant introduction to Venice and a foretaste of what is to come.

Afterwards I return to La Malcontenta. The sun comes out and it is lovely around the villa but the surroundings are ugly: all around are modern, featureless buildings and in the distance I can see electric pylons. I wait with some German tourists until 3.20 p.m. and the boat appears. However, it does not dock at the gate, but at the bottom of the garden, farther down the river. It is very frustrating for us to watch the

people disembark and walk straight into the house, but there is nothing we can do. Although I do not particularly want to come all this way again, I will have to return tomorrow morning when the house will be open to the public. I content myself with looking at the fine villa from the roadway and leave.

I return to Padova by the same tedious route; fortunately the villas and the small towns look a little different from the opposite direction. I stop at a couple of fine churches and do a little shopping. As the weather is very changeable, I arrive back in Padova at 5.30 p.m. feeling very cold. The road leads me to the Piazza del Santo, where I relax for a while and meet a couple of English lads I had met in the hostel at Aix-en-Provence. We are amazed to see each other once again. We chat for about half an hour, recounting our various experiences. At six I return to the hostel and write my diary until the lady in charge leaves at eight o'clock. After she has left, I use the kitchen to make myself a meal, then read until bedtime.

Not a bad morning, but because of yesterday's experiences I decide to dress warmly despite the fact that the sun is shining. I am up early, I eat a good breakfast and I am off by 8.45 a.m. I cycle at a good speed towards the Villa Malcontenta, and at Strà I cross to the other side of the Brenta Canal. From here the view of Villa Pisani is excellent: the building is bathed in bright sunshine and is reflected in the water. I continue along this much quieter and prettier route. I do not see so many villas on this side of the canal, though I can discern some of them through the trees. Here I am far from the busy traffic and almost out in the countryside; I pass some humbler villas, ordinary houses, farms and vineyards. Sunlight comes streaming through the trees and it is pleasantly warm.



Villa Foscari ('La Malcontenta')

I have to cross back over to the main road at Mira and proceed along it towards La Malcontenta, which I finally reach by half past ten. Sure enough it is open – a very welcome sight! Although admission costs 4,000 lire, I do not mind as I feel that there

is something special about this place. Indeed, I notice that the visitors here are rather special: they are not the usual type of tourists and there are so few of them to be seen. As it is a little off the beaten track, my guess is that not so many people know about this villa.

I park my bicycle by the side of the house, spruce myself up, and taking out my little camera, I walk to the front of the building and photograph it. The villa looks a little grim and forbidding, but the setting is perfect. The elegant weeping willows offset the severity of the architecture and the river sparkles in the sunlight. I climb the steps to the entrance, pause briefly to admire the view and enter.

I am enchanted by the interior. Although it is smaller than I have imagined, it is very homely and cosy. The furniture is modern and comfortable. A bowl of dried rose petals adds a delicate fragrance to the air. Two large antique globes, one of the earth and the other of the heavenly bodies, stand on the floor of the large main central chamber. Sunshine streams through the open windows and outside can be seen the willow trees. On the walls are wonderful though slightly faded frescoes of mythological scenes from Ovid, and allegories of the Arts and Virtues, by Giovanni Battista Zelotti and Battista Franco. Architectural details, such as stucco work and door lintels, are painted directly on to the walls. There is a pleasant atmosphere here as the villa has a real lived-in feeling. I enter the first room on the left, sit down, relax and admire everything around me. It is beautiful here and the frescoes, which are the main attraction, are fascinating. Depicted on one of the walls is a servant coming through a doorway with a tray.

I recollect that in Bryan Guinness's book, *A Fugue of Cinderellas* (1956), the villa is described as being in poor condition and that it was built 'by some rustic pupil of Palladio'. In fact, Palladio himself was commissioned by the brothers Nicolò and Luigi Foscari to design the villa and it was built between 1558 and 1560. These two Foscari were related to Francesco Foscari, who had been Doge of Venice during the 1400s. In fact, the correct name for this residence is Villa Foscari; the nickname *La Malcontenta* was used when a spouse of one of the Foscari was locked in the house for allegedly not living up to her conjugal duty. The reason why Lord Moyne was familiar with this villa was because his son Desmond, who wrote *Palladio: A Western Progress*, regularly rented the property during the summer months and stayed there with his family. Desmond and Mariga Guinness probably stayed here in the summer of 1960, when my father, mother and I spent eight consecutive weekends in Leixlip Castle, as Desmond had asked my father to restore an antique grand piano. It is thanks to these people, the aforementioned books and the various journals of the Irish Georgian Society that my interest in this region of Italy and its architecture had first been aroused. Visiting these villas, I notice similarities with various important Irish country houses, many of which were inspired by the design and decoration of these Italian villas. It is the thrill of seeing these examples of the original inspiration for all Palladian architecture that makes these visits so enjoyable and exciting for me.

The peace of this exquisite villa is suddenly shattered by the arrival of a group of Italian tourists, but they soon leave and the place reverts to its original tranquillity. I wander slowly around the rooms and peep into a bedroom and study, which are roped off. As there is just one elderly lady in charge, it is easy to avoid her and take a few forbidden photos of the frescoes, which I hope will turn out well. Later I speak to the lady and compliment her on the villa. She is a pleasant old soul and is happy to chat with anybody.

I do not leave until shortly after midday, when the villa is closed. There is no effort to throw us out and nobody is in any hurry to leave. I linger in the portico, where soft

cushions and several small tables and chairs have been placed between the columns. Finally I leave, and after I have been let out of the gate, I eat my simple lunch sitting on the grass overlooking the river and the wonderful villa. I am still not sure whether I really like its rather forbidding exterior, but I have certainly been charmed by its magical interior.

At one o'clock I tear myself away and hit off for another Palladian villa, the Villa Cornaro at Piombino Dese, dating from 1554, a little earlier than La Malcontenta. This building is illustrated and described by Palladio in the second volume of his book, *I Quattro Libri dell'Architettura*, and by Desmond Guinness in his book. I cycle back to Oriago and then turn northwest towards Marano. From here I follow a dead straight canal northwards to Mirano. I then head north-westwards to Noale, an interesting town with fine architecture, but I do not stop to examine it. I push on to Piombino Dese, which I finally reach by 2.45 p.m. The large and rather austere villa with its double portico stands by the roadside in the middle of the village and looks as though it is locked up. Even though I have been informed that it will be open at three o'clock, I go into a restaurant on the other side of the road to check. A waiter says yes, it will be open at three. When, at half past three, there is no sign of the door being opened, the waiter comes out and suggests that I speak to the custodian, who lives in the third house on the left, around the corner.

I walk around, find the house, ring the doorbell and speak to the custodian's wife. I ask if it is possible to visit the house, but she apologizes and explains that it has been closed these last ten days. When I explain that I am from Ireland and that I have cycled all the way from Padova to see it, she goes off to speak with her husband and returns to say that he will be with me in ten minutes. Sure enough, he appears with a plastic bag full of keys and brings me across the road to the villa. He turns out to be a very pleasant man. I apologize for causing him so much trouble, but he seems not to mind. As he speaks Italian slowly and carefully, I am able to understand him perfectly.



Villa Cornano, Piombino Dese

At the villa, he opens the door, turns on the lights and brings me around the various rooms. My impression that the interior is more formal and severe than the Villa

Malcontenta may be due to the fact that the shutters of most of the windows are closed and there is no sunlight. However, it is obvious that the place is lived in as it contains comfortable modern furniture and, in one room, a television set. The frescoes, painted by Mattia Bortoloni in 1717, are colourful but look slightly amateurish. The fine classical stucco work is by Camillo Mariani (1565–1611). I ask my guide if the villa is cold during the winter. No, he replies; it is cool in the summer but because of the thickness of the walls it is warm in the winter. He shows me the fine staircase and explains that the rooms upstairs and in the basement are not so interesting. He then tells me that an American family lives here during the winter and that they will be arriving soon. When I mention that I am Irish, he says that he knows somebody with connections in Ireland. He is quite fascinated to hear about my cycling trip. When we have finished chatting, I pay him 1,500 lire (well worth it!), take directions from him and leave. I am delighted to have seen this fine villa and to have been afforded the luxury of a private guided tour.

As it is now only a little after four o'clock, I decide to go on to Fanzolo and visit the Villa Emo, also designed by Palladio. This means that I will leave the Villa di Maser, which is farther north, for tomorrow. Taking some quiet country roads and passing through pleasant scenery, I reach the village by five o'clock. The villa is nearby, in the countryside, surrounded by acres of unspoilt grounds. The setting is perfect and the yellow stonework of the façade and wings glows in the late afternoon sunshine. Here there are very few people about. The views from the front and back are very dramatic; at the back there is a tantalizing glimpse of mountains in the distance. Not a sound can be heard, save for the barking of a couple of guard dogs. Again the atmosphere is tranquil and homely; even the 1,000 lire ticket is elegant, for the lettering has been done by hand.



Villa Emo, Fanzolo

In the fine central chamber, with superb frescoes and decoration by Giovanni Battista Zelotti, I find two harpsichords: a small Italian instrument and a large red French one with painted chinoiserie. Excited by seeing them after such a long absence from any sort of good music, I ask a lady who the makers of the instruments are, but she does not know. I am determined to get to the bottom of this, but go off to examine the exquisite rooms and to secretly take some photos, which are not allowed here. Again I encounter comfortable modern furniture, vases of flowers and other personal touches – proof that the villa is lived in. I wander into a bathroom and make use of it.

The frescoes in the front rooms are particularly fine and in an excellent state of repair. From here I can look out at the long colonnaded wings on each side of the central building, where deck chairs have been placed. According to my notes, this wonderful structure was built in the late 1500s for the Magnificent Signor Leonardo Emo. How I envy Signor Emo!



Villa Emo, Fanzolo

Back in the central chamber, a German man opens up the little Italian harpsichord and tries a few chords. A lively discussion ensues as to the whereabouts of the stick to hold up the lid, with exchanges in both German and Italian. During the search, the red French instrument is opened; I am not surprised to discover that it has been made by William Dowd, for I have seen it before in Paris just the previous year! I speak to the German man briefly and later, when I have finished looking around, I begin to chat to a young German chap and a girl who is with him. It turns out that the lad, whose name is Kramer, has built the Italian instrument, and that the girl is a singer; her father (the older German) is the harpsichord player. It turns out that the girl knows Emer Buckley, an Irish harpsichordist whom I had visited last year in Paris. They are about to make a recording here. The girl then takes a cover off a lovely little chamber organ and plugs it in, only to discover that one of the notes is sticking. She tries to fix it, but without success.

When I make a move to leave at six o'clock, the young German lad brings me outdoors to his car and shows me photographs of some of the instruments that he has made. Although I am not particularly impressed by what I see, I compliment him on his work. This is a wonderful ending to a perfect day – one of the most enjoyable days so far in Italy.

Taking one last lingering look at this enchanting villa, I leave by cycling along country roads to Castelfranco. I have not intended to go through this town, but find that this is the easiest way to go. I stop to buy some provisions, eat a quick meal and set off again shortly after seven o'clock. Passing by a huge castle in the centre of the town and some interesting old churches, I find my way to the main road leading to

Padova, which is the shortest route. It soon turns dark and cars flash their lights at me. I make excellent speed and the journey is uneventful; I arrive back at the hostel by nine o'clock.

Upstairs in the corridor my thoughts are interrupted by somebody calling my name. There, standing before me is a familiar young lady – Marta! We are both astounded to meet each other here. Anxious to hear each other's latest news, we go down to the dining hall, sit at a table facing each other (why not together? I wonder) and spend the rest of the evening chatting excitedly. Poor Marta has been ill for some time; when she had arrived in Milan late one evening feeling extremely thirsty, she had gone to the river, filled her bottle with some of the filthy water, and had drunk it. Being more economic with her money than I have been, she had camped here and there in a tiny tent. She tells me that she regretted not allowing me to accompany her. She, as she had planned, had taken a more northerly route, by the mountains and lakes. It turns out that our views about Italy and conditions in general here are much the same. Marta tells me that she will make her first trip into Venice tomorrow (Sunday) – I plan to go there on the following day. We discuss accommodation in Venice; neither of us wants to stay in the crowded youth hostel on Giudecca Island. We wonder if we should stay put in Padova and commute to Venice every day.

Eventually we say goodnight at about 11 p.m. and I retire to bed in excellent spirits. It has been a most enjoyable day and it has ended with a wonderful surprise – a very welcome meeting with the lovely Marta once again.

After not sleeping particularly well because of mosquitoes in the dormitory, I get up at 7.30 a.m. There are very few people in the dormitory this morning. Marta and I meet outside the kitchen a little later, ready for breakfast, only to discover that the clocks have been put back an hour! We spend the hour writing our diaries and then breakfast together. I eat well in preparation for my cycle run to the Villa Barbaro (or Villa di Maser), the last Palladian villa I want to see before going to Venice.

I say goodbye to Marta and leave at nine, heading northwards. Once out of Padova, I take minor roads, passing through villages such as Vigodarzere, Saletto, Arsego and Villa del Conte. Eventually the roads become quieter and the scenery more pleasant. I take my time as the villa will not be open until three this afternoon. I now see flowers, country dwellings, chickens clucking in yards and farmers working in fields. By now I have left the noise and bustle of Padova far behind; here the atmosphere is positively sleepy.

Next come more villages: San Martino di Lupari, Galliera Veneta, Castello di Godego (all quite unremarkable) and across to Vallà along a horrible main road. I eventually turn off it and cycle across more unspoilt countryside towards Altivole and the mountains, which have now appeared in the distance. Here I pass masses of yellow wild flowers growing among the hedges, vines on wooden frames and small rustic houses with neat window boxes and gardens bright with flowers. By now the sun is shining and it is pleasantly hot. At last I stop by a stream, sit in the shade of a tree and eat my picnic lunch. I make sure to eat well: lots of brown rye bread, sardines, tomatoes, some cucumber, biscuits and an apple, all washed down with orange juice.

Afterwards I lie down for a short rest and then, feeling refreshed, I resume my journey. As I discover that Altivole lies in the opposite direction, I turn back. I soon reach it and, after I have asked several people for directions, I find the correct road to Madonna della Salute. From here I cycle up to Coste, where I turn right for Maser. By now I am at the foot of the mountains. In the village I ask some men at a café for

directions and soon find the elegant villa just down the main road, overlooking it. I think it is a shame the way this road cuts across and around the beautiful *tempietto* (little temple) nearby. I finally arrive at my destination by about quarter to three.



Villa Maser and the *tempietto*

Although I have seen photographs of this villa, I am struck by how beautiful the yellow stonework looks in the bright sunshine. The villa's setting at the foot of the mountains is quite dramatic. I take a long look at the building's façade and its wings with sundials at either end, photograph it and then examine the *tempietto*, which looks very firmly locked.

At three o'clock a coachload of tourists arrive and I follow them up the hill to the side entrance. Here there is a long queue, for more people are already here. Cars then arrive and the crowd increases in size. As there is no sign of the door being opened, the foreign tourists grumble and ring the bell, but the Italians laugh and joke. To kill some time, a group of elderly women begin to sing songs in harmony. The door is finally opened at 3.30 p.m.

Inside I buy a ticket for 1,500 lire and am given a wooden board with printed information attached to it. I then put on overshoes to protect the delicate floors. An English man, who has just put on his overshoes, begins to waltz around on the polished floor, singing; his wife, obviously unimpressed, barks '*shut up!*' at him. Just as I am settling down to view the first room, some of the Italians are already leaving! Everywhere there is bedlam: wives read passages from guide books to bored husbands, children slide on the polished floors and run around squealing, people ignore the warning notices and touch everything, and the Italians laugh and shout.

Although lived in, this villa is treated more like a museum. The living quarters are sealed off by glass doors. In the private rooms I can see comfortable couches and some pieces of tasteless furniture, such as a heavy office desk, a cabinet of silverware and a television set. The frescoes by Paolo Veronese are wonderful, but I find it very hard to concentrate on them and view them properly because of all the commotion. The first cross-shaped chamber is lovely: there is no decoration on the low ceiling, just colourful and exciting frescoes depicting women in niches playing musical instruments, two imitation doors with a boy coming out of one and a little girl peeping out from the other, and a series of idyllic country views as though seen from a balcony. I love the humorous touches. The frescoes all look as though they have been painted recently.



Frescoes

After this comes the small and intimate Bacchus room. He is depicted on the ceiling with other gods and mortals. On the walls are more country scenes, some of them really delightful. The chimney piece is made of carved stone and is very elaborate. This room contains a grand piano and plenty of comfortable seats. Despite the '*si prega di non toccare*' notices, the tourists all poke and touch everything. I decide to ignore the '*vietato fotografie*' signs and photograph some of the details when the officials are not watching.



*Nymphaeum*

The opposite room is very much the same as the previous, save for the ceiling, which has a depiction of 'the Tribunal of Love' painted on it. This is believed to be Veronese's last work. Next comes the large and impressive Hall of Olympus with its breathtaking frescoes, one of which shows the owner's wife leaning over an imaginary balcony, with her pet dog, a child and an old nurse. On the opposite wall, two boys look down, one of them holding a dog. In the centre of the magnificent ceiling are the gods of Olympus set against a blue sky. The open window looks out into the garden, where a decorative stone *nymphaeum* with statues is reflected in the clear water of an ornamental pool. I am surprised at how close it is to the villa – I have expected to see it at the end of a long formal garden. Although I have seen reproductions of this fantastic folly, it still catches my eye and I cannot resist the

temptation to photograph it. This time I am caught and ticked off by a member of the staff, but I don't care.

In two smaller side rooms mythological scenes are painted on the walls, and the Holy Family makes a rather incongruous appearance over the doorways. Beyond these rooms are the suites of private apartments and, at the end of each, an arresting fresco. At one end is a hunter coming indoors (thought to be Veronese himself) and, at the other, a lady (thought to be his wife). The private rooms have frescoes, but not as magnificent as the others, and there are decorated wooden beams under the ceilings.

Having seen around the place, I return the wooden board with the information and walk around the rooms one more time, unencumbered. Tourists are still arriving and leaving. Outside, on the road, coach horns are blown and guides bellow through loudhailers to hurry their groups along: '*Intertura... Intertura...*' My inclination is to escape, but I linger. Later some well-dressed and well-spoken men and women in immaculate clothing arrive. Before viewing a room, I wait until it is empty and then step inside.

Satisfied that I have finally seen this famous villa and enjoyed everything that it has to offer (with the exception of the crowds), I leave at 5.30 p.m. and, down at the gate, I eat a hasty meal while taking a last look at the magnificent façade, now bathed in the light of the setting sun. Of course, it will get dark an hour earlier this evening – not later as I had initially thought. I chat briefly to a man who is amazed that I have cycled from Ireland. After he wishes me good luck, I jump on my bike and set off for Padova at six o'clock.

First of all I head for Castelfranco. By seven o'clock it is pitch dark but a full moon helps me see where I am going. Like yesterday, the journey back is uneventful. As it turns quite cool, I stop briefly to put on my heavy jumper. I arrive in Padova by nine o'clock and, because I feel thirsty, I make my way to the Prato della Valle, where I buy a delicious and very refreshing ice cream. This is the first time I have tried ice cream here – it costs just 400 lire.

I am back in the hostel at 9.15 p.m. There is no sign of Marta, but I meet a rather posh and slightly scatterbrained young lady named Cathy. After sprucing myself up, I sit down to write my diary until bedtime. It has been quite an enjoyable day. Now that I have got the Palladian villas out of my system (though I have only seen very few of them), I feel that I am at last ready for what I hope will be the highlight of this journey: my first proper glimpse of Venice tomorrow. I go to bed feeling elated.