

On the left:  
René Boylesve  
(1867–1926)  
On the right:  
Antonio  
Fogazzaro  
(1842–1911)



The young Ernest  
Hemingway  
(1899–1961) in  
the uniform of  
the American  
Red Cross  
during the First  
World War

## The Verbano in three novels

Three novels written or set during the Art Nouveau period offer us three images of Lake Verbano, each emblematic of a different emotional perspective.

The first, published in 1898, is *Le Parfum des Iles Borromées* by French novelist and academic René Boylesve, pseudonym of René Tardiveau (La Haye-Descartes, 1867 – Paris, 1926). Set between the Borromean Islands and the Grand Hôtel des Iles Borromées—where high society holidayed in September—the partly autobiographical novel tells the story of a passionate affair between an Italian married woman, Luisa Belvidera, and the Frenchman Gabriel Dompierre, as well as the romantic, friendly, and physical bonds that form among the other characters. The lake itself is a key accomplice and protagonist: with emotion, sensuality, and melancholy, the author captures its scents and sounds, colours and light, in the last flashes of summer and the warm tones of autumn.

Lake Maggiore appears only at the end, but in a crucial role, in *Piccolo mondo antico*, a novel published in 1895 by Antonio Fogazzaro (Vicenza, 1842 – 1911), a devoted admirer of the Verbano and advocate of Antonio Rosmini. The plot takes place in the decade preceding Italy's unification, between Lake Lugano, Turin, and Lake Maggiore. The protagonists are Luisa and Franco Maironi, lovers estranged by the death of their child. In February, before Franco departs to fight against Austria (1859), the couple meet for a few hours on Isola Bella and, in a misty atmosphere filled with sorrow and affection, slowly find each other again. After a night spent at the Albergo Delfino, Luisa senses that a new life is growing within her. With a disenchanting ending—where the heroine dies in childbirth—*A Farewell to Arms* (Addio alle Armi) by Ernest Hemingway (Oak Park, 1899 – Ketchum, 1961) concludes its narrative. Published in 1929 and set during World War I, between the front lines in Friuli and Veneto, Milan and Stresa, the novel—written in Hemingway's famously dry yet emotionally resonant prose—draws from personal experience to recount the love story between nurse Catherine Barkley and young American officer Frederic Henry, who deserts at the end of the war, defying danger. He reaches Catherine in Stresa, staying at the elegant Grand Hôtel des Iles Borromées. From there, the couple make a daring nighttime escape across the lake to Switzerland, where the story ends in tragedy. Hemingway loved Stresa: his first visit was in 1918 during convalescence after being wounded on the front, staying in suite 106 at the Borromées; he returned for the last time in 1948.



The cover of the novel *Le Parfum des Iles Borromées*, reissued several times, and some illustrations from the book that follow the development of the plot



The Italian Luisa Belvidera, wife and mother, lover of Gabriel Dompierre



The Frenchman Gabriel Dompierre, expert in political economy, and his English friend Dante-Leonard-William Lee, poet and painter, whom the flower girl Carlotta falls in love with



Carlotta, the flower girl of Isola Bella who sings while carrying her flowers across the lake; at the end of the novel, she is killed by her jealous fiancé



Above: Luisa and Gabriel in the gardens of Isola Bella. Beside: travelling aboard the steamer Regina Madre



The title page of the novel *Piccolo mondo antico*, in the 1896 edition



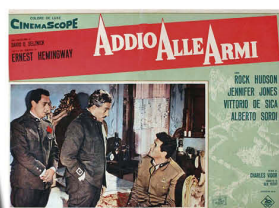
On the right: the poster of the first film version of *Piccolo mondo antico*, directed by Mario Soldati in 1941



The presentation at the Palazzo dei Congressi in Stresa of the TV miniseries *Piccolo mondo antico* (1957)



Ernest Hemingway convalescing in Stresa during the First World War



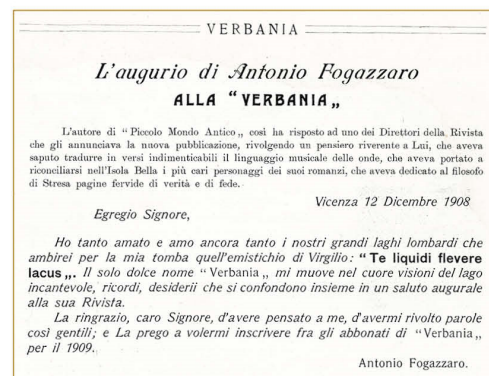
The posters of the second film version of *A Farewell to Arms*, from 1957, starring Rock Hudson and Jennifer Jones, with appearances by Vittorio De Sica and Alberto Sordi



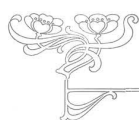
Hemingway back in Italy in 1948, photographed fishing in front of the Grand Hôtel des Iles Borromées and featured in a newspaper article



DUPLICE VERTICE SUBLIME DI UNICA FIAMMA: (A twin, exalted peak rising from one flame) inscription by Antonio Fogazzaro summarising the profound bond that united Rosmini and Manzoni, depicted by the sculptor Pietro Canonica (1869–1959) in a relief installed in the early 20th century on the façade of Villa Ducale.



The first issue of the magazine "Verbania" from January 1909



English