

Peirce in Italia

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II.1 SCATTERED REMARKS ON PEIRCE AND ITALY

In addition to its numerous other glories and distinctions, Napoli can claim to have hosted more Peirces — six, to be exact (and now, also more Peirceans!) — than any other city in Italy. Our own Charles Sanders Peirce was here three times between 26 September 1870 and 1 January 1871; his first wife, Zina Fay, joined him on the last two occasions; his father Benjamin and his youngest brother Herbert stopped here twice, on their way to and from Sicily, in December 1879; his second wife, Juliette, arrived here on a steamer from New York on 22 December 1889, and she returned from here in April 1890; and his eldest brother, James Mills Peirce, passed some days here during the first week of June 1890.

Neither Milano, Roma, nor Firenze (nor even Padova) can boast six Peirces: and that is why it is indeed appropriate, that our congress, PEIRCE IN ITALIA, should be taking place right here in Napoli. It is also appropriate because the dean of Peirce scholars, Max H. Fisch (who sends his regrets, as well as his best regards), spent more time in Napoli than in any other city in Italy. He was here in 1939 (with Thomas Bergin) to consult and work with Benedetto Croce and Fausto Nicolini in preparation for what have been, for almost half a century, the standard English translations of Giambattista Vico's *New Science* and *Autobiography*; he was here again in 1950-51 when, among other things, he presented copies of his own *Classic American Philosophers* to Croce as well as George Santayana. Be that as it may, I wish to dedicate my

remarks to my beloved mentor and colleague, the senior editor of the Peirce Edition Project in Indianapolis, Max H. Fisch, who, in preparation for his retirement (it is real, this time), will celebrate his 90th birthday in two weeks, on the 21st.

1. A glance through the indexes of the *Collected Papers*, *The New Elements of Mathematics*, *Historical Perspectives on Peirce's Logic of Science*, and Robin's catalogue of the Harvard Peirce Papers — or even through computer-generated concordances of his "Nation" reviews and his letters to Lady Welby — would lead us to believe that Peirce knew little about Italy, her geography, history, literature, art and architecture. There are no references to cities or historical personages, to Ariosto, Boccaccio, or Tasso; there is a single reference each to Leonardo da Vinci, Machiavelli, Michelangelo, Raffaello, and to Calderoni, Papini, Prezzolini, and Vailati; and although there are several references to Dante and Petrarca, the reason is primarily that they appear in Comte's *Calendar of Great Men* and Cesare Lombroso's *The Man of Genius*, both of which Peirce reviewed.

According to these indexes, Peirce knew only of Galileo Galilei (who appears many times), Leonardo Fibonacci of Pisa (the medieval arithmetician), Annibale Ferrero (his friend and fellow-mathematician), and Giacomo Leopardi (whom Peirce calls «the author of modern pessimism»). Needless to say, this picture is flawed; for although it would be wrong to claim that his Italian connection was as pervasive as his French, German, and British connections, Peirce knew Italy and things Italian better than is generally known. Of course we have all heard of his connection with the Florentine Pragmatists (which will be discussed by others), but we know little of other connections. I will touch upon a few of those, say something about his travels in Italy, and show, I hope, that more can and must be done regarding Peirce in and *and* Italia, especially in searching for his correspondence with several well-known Italians. I hope, furthermore, that — as regards either me or Peirce — you will not conclude with the words of Sydney Smith (1771-1845), the English clergyman and wit who said (I don't remember of whom): «He has returned from Italy a greater bore than ever; he bores on architecture, painting, statuary, and music».

2. Early in his life — he was 31 and happened to be in Catania — Peirce had little praise for the Italians; for in a letter to his first wife Zina, written from Syracuse on 22 September 1870, he said: «Alas, the Italians are so weighed down by their history & their relics & have become — from the people most in grim earnest, so poetical & impractical that they never can come to anything. It's a pity for they might become a fine race if it weren't for that».

Peirce came to think better of Italy, as I will show; but if it gives you any comfort now, he was similarly opinionated as regards several other nationalities. The Spaniards, for example, «have been corrupted with the centuries of cruelty, injustice, and rapine they have indulged in, and have little real manhood left» (CSP-HCL 1898), and they speak «as if they had pebbles in their mouth which makes it very difficult to catch the distinction of their sounds» (CSP-SMP 11/16/70). The French, he said after the beginning of the Franco-Prussian War, «are so corrupted that there does not remain to them even the virtue requisite to waging war. If that is so we may say that they have been the *great nation* of many centuries but that they never will be any more, but must quickly sink into insignificance» (CSP-ZFP 9/5/70). And although he mentioned, regarding the same war, that he is «quite as ardent a German as ever» (CSP-ZFP 9/15/70), he frequently complained about the Germans as well. But as I said, he later thought better of Italy.

Peirce's comments about the Italians and Spaniards are due, in part at least, to the fact that, in 1870, he knew neither Spanish nor Italian (while his German was good, and his French improving) and, as he wrote his eldest brother, James Mills Peirce, he therefore often felt like «a dummy... a dumb beast» (CSP-JMP 8/5/70, Pest).

Peirce never did learn Spanish, but he did learn Italian. We read in MS 1611 (1903) that he «learned Italian of Ferrero and Frankfort», but that was in the late 1870s; I shall return to Ferrero, but Frankfort's identity remains a mystery. We know furthermore, from MS 1235, that he was studying Italian vigorously in 1905, for it consists of Italian word-lists, conjugations, and other grammatical matters. He was studying Italian in 1905, because that was the heyday of "Leonardo" and of his correspondence with the Florentine Pragmatists. Of these and of Peirce's knowledge of Italian, I shall say one more thing later on.

3. Before I bring Peirce to Italy, another quick tidbit or two. In all his writings, Peirce used only three pseudonyms. He signed a 1905 review of Herbert Nichols's *Treatise on Cosmology* «CUSP», which is his initials turned into a word, and he signed an article «Outsider» in the 1890 controversy revolving around Herbert Spencer's synthetic philosophy. The most interesting pseudonym appears in a manuscript (MS 210) written early in 1897. To help alleviate his growing financial difficulties, Peirce proposed, to one of the editors of the «New York Times», to write a weekly column of popular Mathematical Recreations, to be published in «A Corner for Pythagoreans» and signed by «Pico di Sablonieri». It is a mystery why how and where Peirce got the idea for the name.

One of the reasons Peirce had financial difficulties was that he bought too many books. Among his thousands of books (12.000 were given to Harvard after his death), we find Italian grammars and dictionaries, various other kinds of books written in Italian, and a number of valuable incunabula printed in Italy, among them Egidio Colonna's *Commentum in libros posteriores analyticos Aristotelis* (Padova 1478), Duns Scotus's *Scriptum in quattuor libros Sententiarum* (Venezia 1477), and Paulus Venetus's *Quadratura* (Pavia 1483). Peirce owned Bernardinus Petrella's *Disputationum libri septem* (Padova 1584), Peter Hispanus's *Summulae logicae* (Venezia 1597), Cosimo Pazzi's 1517 edition of Maximus Tyrius's *Sermones* (according to Peirce «the earliest printed edition in any language. The translator had died 2 years previously and the edition has a preface by his brother Pietro»), as well as «the celebrated cook-book bearing the name Caelius Apicius, *De re culinaria*» (1541) («a book», Peirce said, «that is very instructive in more than one way. I should not recommend anybody's trying the dishes, unless to get an impressive lesson of the strength of our forefathers' stomachs»).

Peirce also had copies of *Capricciosi e piacevoli ragionamenti* (1660) by Pietro Aretino (who, he said, «does not write for young ladies but his style is fascinating»); of several plays and of the *Vita* of Vittorio Alfieri (whom, in a loose manuscript page probably belonging to a letter, he identifies as the author of the following quotation: «La creazione è una febbre; durante l'accesso, non si sente altro che lei»); of operas by Felice Romani and Gaetano Rossi; and of several tales and a novel (*Lorenzo*

Benoni) by Giovanni Domenico Ruffini. He also owned such astronomical and spectroscopic studies as *Sulle protuberanze o vulcani del sole*, *Sugli spettri prismatici de' corpi celesti*, and *Sull'eclisse totale di sole del 22 dicembre 1870 visibile in Sicilia* by such authors as Angelo Agnello, Lorenzo Respighi, and Angelo Secchi. Finally, he bought in Torino the important *Traité des substitutions et des équations algébriques* (1870) by Camille Jordan, and in Napoli the *Logica* (1857) of Antonio Rosmini-Serbati. And he reviewed and owned Ferrero's *Esposizione del metodo dei minimi quadrati*.

And that gets me to my final tidbit: Peirce and Ferrero, the famous general, mathematician, and geodesist. Though they were lifelong friends since their first meeting in September 1875 in Paris — Ferrero admired Peirce's genius, Peirce Ferrero's mathematical abilities and worldliness — only a single letter survives. In any case, as Peirce was getting disenchanted with the Coast and Geodetic Survey, and thought of leaving the United States, he must have informed Ferrero of his intentions; for in the letter that survives, dated 11/25/89, Ferrero said, among other things: «Vous oubliez que votre nom est illustre par des travaux qui font honneur à votre pays. [...] Je ne veux cependant pas combattre votre idée de laisser votre patrie. [...] Il me semble que votre place serait admirablement choisie au Bureau Central de l'Association géodésique, bureau qui prendra bientôt un caractère international, non seulement par ses travaux mais aussi par son personnel. [...] En attendant, envoyez-moi un recueil ou du moins une liste de tous vos travaux scientifiques. Cela pourra me servir pour travailler en votre faveur [...]. Plus tard je vous écrirai de nouveau avec l'espoir que je pourrai vous être véritablement utile». But Ferrero did not succeed in getting him a position in Berlin. Peirce left the Survey in 1891, and he never had a full-time job again.

But that is not the only reason I mention Ferrero. In a long letter to his mother from Le Havre, dated 11/2/77, Peirce described some of the participants in the October geodetic meeting in Stuttgart. Of Ferrero, he gave this beautiful characterization: «Colonel Ferrero is an Italian deputy, and a very clever man. He is a mathematician and has just published an interesting work on Least Squares. He is young and handsome and wears a magnificent uniform. He rebelled against Baejer in

regard to a small point in the calculation of triangulation, and even went so far in his hardihood as to say that the different surveys were responsible to the opinion of the scientific world and need not submit to the will of any individual. Needless to say he was completely overwhelmed by the forces of Baeyer. He is deeply in love with a lady whose ancestry figures in the *Inferno* of Dante and received from her daily a letter and generally also a telegram. These he would generally come to read to me and to discuss. He is very amiable and also extremely clever. He is rather fond of talking and does not avoid a subject because it is personal to himself. He calls attention to the brilliancy of his demonstrations etc. [...] One night at a grand dinner we had, Ferrero who was sitting next me announced to me his intention as soon as some longwinded German had finished a speech he was making of toasting the ladies. "I have the sense of opportuneness, in a high degree", he said, "and I feel that now is the time". Alas, Peirce had little sense of this sort — and now is the time, at last, to get him to Italy.

4. Between 1870 and 1883, Peirce made five trips to Europe, all on assignment by the Coast & Geodetic Survey: in 1870-71 (about which more anon), from April 1875 to August 1876, from September to November 1877, from April to August 1880, and from May to September 1883.

The last of the five trips began two days after he had married his second wife, Juliette (who — here is another tidbit — was registered in the official passenger list of their ship *Labrador* as an American citizen whose birthplace, however, was «Italie»: which is no doubt untrue). In any case, the thirteen years spanning his five European sojourns represent, in many ways, Peirce's most productive, accomplished, and happy years: he was at the zenith of his career as a man of science and wrote his most important scientific papers and reports; he met many famous mathematicians and logicians and was a highly respected member (in Europe more so than America) of the international community of scientific investigators (especially in the small branch known as geodesy); and his many complaints notwithstanding, he enjoyed traveling.

But I must focus on his first trip, which brought him as an astronomer/spectrometrists rather than a geodesist and whose purpose it was to

locate possible observation sites for, and then to observe, the total eclipse of the sun on 22 December 1870; it was the only trip that brought him into Italy.

5. Peirce arrived in England at the end of June 1870 and spent most of July in London. For two weeks thereafter he was in Berlin (which «is a horrid place»), and then for several days each in Dresden, Prague, Vienna, Pesth, and Varna. Then a week in Constantinople, two weeks in Thessaly, and, on 15 September, he was on a steamer to Messina. Following ten days in Sicily, he arrived in Napoli on 26 September, continued to Rome on 14 October and, eleven days later, to Florence. From here he went on a two-week «hurry-scurry» to Spain (primarily Madrid and Jerez) to scout for further possible eclipse observation sites. By 17 November he was back in Torino, the next day in Milano, and the day after in Venezia. He made a quick trip to Graz and Vienna from the 20th to 25th, and was back in Venezia on the 26th. Though we now lose track of him for nearly a month, he was no doubt back in Firenze, Roma, and Napoli, which last was the gathering point for the several parties heading for Sicily and the solar eclipse. But before we join those parties, another tidbit about Peirce and Italy.

On his first arrival in Messina, Peirce had written to Zina (who joined him in Europe in early November): «Here I am in Messina. [...] handsome and clean streets. [...] Many balconies. Prices exorbitant. General aspect of the place joyous. [...] They have a wine here which strongly resembles Tokay [...] called Muscato di Siracusa or Malvasia. [...] There is nothing at all to see in Messina. When I get to Naples I suppose I shall be in comfort once more». And in another letter to his wife written ten days later: «Sicily is a dreadfully vexatious place — they impose upon one so frightfully and especially upon me because I do not know one single word of the lingo. [...] [T]he extraordinary & picturesque appearance of the country [is] too much for the worst of tempers. [...] All is joy in Sicily. [...] No doubt this is the garden of the world. [...] [Peirce went on to Giardini and then by carriage to Taormina], a mere dot of a place [where] I was shown to a decent but melancholy looking little chamber. Here in Italy one always begins by bargaining about the price of the room, so I commenced by saying that the

hotel had been recommended to me not by the guide but by Bäder's handbook. Ah! in that case, says the man, I will show you another chamber. He, therefore, took me into a perfect love of a room with two beds (which made me think how charming it would be to have you there...), a room with a charming exquisite view from its balcony. [...] Across the sea on one side the shores of Calabria were very prominent & in the opposite direction over the land rose Etna majestic & awful. It is to see such things as this that it is worth while to come abroad, things which no art can reproduce. [...] I saw the awful extent of its fields of lava and their depth and how this enormous Etna was all blotched with craters each itself a mountain I got a respect for it. You say I worship success, well this old fellow may have had bad aims but he has certainly carried out his views most thoroughly. [...] The only thing I cared for [in Catania] was a beautiful bust of Faustina which I couldn't tire of looking at. Marcus Aurelius & I are perhaps the only people who have ever appreciated this great creature. [...] [From Catania, Peirce took the train for Lentini (of which he said in 1907, in *Surmises about Guessing* [MS 689]: «I was once more or less [rather more than less, though I can remember something of my visions] out of my head off and on for some month owing to my having [...] contracted the fever of Lentini in Sicilia»)] [...] [At the Albergo del Sole in Syracuse, Peirce went on to say, in his letter] Nobody speaks French and I haven't even an Italian phrase book and I can't understand one word of Italian nor the people here one word of French. [...] Syracuse is a filthy place [with fleas, bed-bugs, and lice] [...] When I get to Naples I will take a week to recruit».

It was probably during his two weeks in Napoli that Peirce went on the excursion related in MS 814, entitled *Achilles and the Tortoise* and written in 1894: «I was once in a yacht skirting along the shores of the Principato Citeriore and admiring the two mountains, Monte Sacro and Monte Cervato are their names, if my memory does not fail me, which remind one of two sweet-corns upon the instep of Italy, when I fancied I caught sight of some ruins. We managed to make a landing and climb the cliff, and there I found myself, sure enough, among the few remains of that most metaphysical of towns, Velia, which gave its name to the school of Parmenides and Zeno. Desiring to drink to their august me-

mories, I sent a peasant to the neighboring village of Vallo, the same name modernized, for a bottle of wine. But it was so long coming that I fell asleep; and in my sleep I had the honor of a visit not from the noble Parmenides himself, but from the great logician, Zeno. [...] he was not a little proud of having rejected the testimony of sense in his loyalty to reason. He called them the "Four Seals upon the Secret of the Universe". I am sworn not to tell what they really are».

Peirce was fully recovered by the time he got to Rome. In a letter to his mother dated 14 October, he conveyed his thoughts on Pius IX and Victor Emmanuel II: «The King of Italy had the best possible opportunity of dealing with the pope. France could not interfere; Austria had just quarreled with the pope and was very anxious to be on good terms with Italy. The pope was driven to the absurdity of begging aid from Prussia! Under these circumstances had I been at the head of the Italian government, I would have dealt ruthlessly with the pope [or «this goose of a pope», as he said in a letter to his aunt Charlotte Elizabeth]. I would first have given him to understand that the Vatican was the state palace of Rome and must belong to the ruling power & that he had churches enough to bestow himself & his people in. *Secondly*, I would have notified him that the usual prerogative of Kings to nominate the bishops in their country would not be given up in the case of Rome. *Thirdly*, I would have told him that no person could be bishop of an Italian town & reside elsewhere. I consider that these propositions would have found supporters enough among the priests for practical purposes and would have amounted to a reformation of the church in Italy. But Victor Emmanuel dealt in a weak way with the pope. He permitted him the municipal government of the small portion of Rome on the same side of the Tiber as the Vatican and the consequence is that the Pope, each new act of whose is more absurd than the last, *has shut up all the Vatican collections!*»

But religious politics is not the only topic of the letter. «Rome», Peirce went on to say, «seems like a one-horse place [inferior, unimportant] in some aspects after Naples, but it is wonderful how much there is to see here. [...] [He went to the Palazzo Doria and Palazzo Barberini and] saw the celebrated picture of Beatrice Cenci by Guido Reni, and the celebrated Fornarina of Raphael, and a curious picture by Albrecht

Dürer of Christ among the Doctors. [...] [Then to the Forum, Colosseum, the church of Santa Maria Maggiore «one of the finest and largest in Rome» and] over the Ponte Sisto to St. Peter's: This impressed me & exhilarated me greatly. It is wonderful & great indeed. But not equal to Salisbury Cathedral. [...] It is the enormous size and perfect proportions of St. Peter's that impresses one. Beyond that there is nothing great about it».

Peirce gave a similar tour to his aunt Charlotte Elizabeth. He «found troops quartered in the» Collegio Romano («throughout Italy now one sees full five times as many soldiers in all the monasteries as monks»). The tomb of Cecilia Metella, «a singular illustration of Roman Magnificence built of great stones» leads him to opine that «stone is not a desirable material for building because all old buildings have become quarries for construction for all subsequent generations», and he remembers, in the vicinity of the Piazza del Campidoglio, «a fine bronze statue of Marcus Aurelius (which has escaped being banged to pieces by having been popularly supposed to represent Constantine)». He also saw «the celebrated Trajan's Column now absurdly crowned with a statue of St. Peter as the other finer column of Marcus Aurelius is with St. Paul — finer in my humble opinion, the *correct* opinion is quite entirely the reverse». Not far from here, he saw a monument by Michael Angelo. «But to appreciate Michael Angelo's statues requires more knowledge of the history of art than I have got. They seem to me horrid misshapen misproportioned things». Peirce thought more highly of Antonio Canova. In the church of the Apostles, he saw two monuments by him, «one of them very striking. I greatly admire Canova. My opinions on the subject of painting & sculpture I generally hold very timidly but not this one. I think Canova great — very very great. I was first struck — indeed quite overwhelmed — by his Theseus Killing the Minotaur in Vienna. Then I was greatly pleased with his Pauline Borghese & now this monument of Clement XIV I think has great power».

Peirce returned to Canova in a letter to his mother written from Narbonne on 16 November: «Canova's statues & some few pieces of modern art make one feel that all this age needs in order quite to eclipse all others in art is The Motive — but that you see is totally wanting. Art is a mere plaything or luxury now. What are our artists! Are they the

representative men of our age at all or do they even at all comprehend it? The difficulty is our age has no belief; it doesn't half believe in itself even. As long as that is so it yet asks for critics & scientific men & not artists». But enough of Peirce the art critic, and I spare you his remarks on Balzac, whom he was reading at the time; for it is time to return to Sicily.

6. Some fifty scientists and photographers (from Italy, England, and America) descended upon Catania, Syracuse, and Mt. Etna for the eclipse on 22 December: an interesting experience for some. Her Majesty's despatch boat *Psyche*, which took the English party to Sicily, was lost when she ran aground near Cape Molino; an English group on Mt. Etna was overtaken by a snowstorm and never saw the eclipse (to which Sir Henry Roscoe added, «Most provokingly, the last contact had scarcely occurred before the clouds blew over, and we were again in brilliant sunshine»); and Peirce had to borrow a spectroscope at the last minute, because his had been shipped to Jerez by mistake. In any case, according to Benjamin Peirce's report (he was Superintendent of the Survey at the time), one of the American stations «was about three miles north of Catania, at the villa of the Marquis di San Giuliano, whose obliging courtesy is a subject of grateful remembrance. [...] Mr. C.S. Peirce observed with a polariscope and obtained good results», among them the fact, shown the year before after a partial eclipse in Bardstown, Kentucky, that the solar corona not only radiates but reflect light to the earth. Following the eclipse — his first experience of large-scale international scientific cooperation — Peirce returned (with his wife, father, and youngest brother) to Naples, «sicker than ever we had the honor of being before» (CSP-HPE 1/22/71).

And now that we're back in Napoli, I should bring these scattered remarks to an end — even if, beginning with the day of his departure from here (1/1/1871), Peirce kept an interesting diary for nearly two months, in which we read: «Room at Hotel du Louvre in Naples extremely pleasant. Attendance remarkable». (His second wife, Juliette, who was here in April 1890, stayed at the Grand Hotel, «a delightful house» according to Peirce's eldest brother James). Peirce was in Roma until the 8th, in Firenze on the 9th, in Milano on the 10th, and in Torino and

Susa on the 11th and 12th. He went on to Genova and then Germany on the next day, and he returned to America in early March. But although he never set foot in Italy again, his Italian connections continued.

7. And now I return to the tidbit about the Florentine Pragmatists and Peirce's knowledge of Italian that I mentioned earlier. In a long letter to Signor Papini, written on 10 April 1907 from Cambridge — it was discovered in a few years ago by Prof. Mario Quaranta — Peirce sketches the proof of pragmatism he had developed in MS 318, the lengthy article intended for publication in the "Atlantic Monthly" (or the "Nation"). But the article was never published. Nor will I give you the proof: for this is about Peirce and Italy, not Peirce and Pragmatism.

In any case, following an opening expression of gratitude for Papini's article on pragmatism, an English translation of which was published in the "Monist", Peirce said the following: «My admiration for the Italian intellect of our day is most intense. General Ferrero was a personal friend of mine. Cremona's presentation of projective geometry and his celebrated transformation have helped me greatly. Fao de Bruno's early exposition of invariantive algebra was my *vade mecum* for a long time. Only two days ago I sent to the editor of a popular magazine, the "Atlantic Monthly", an attempt to explain pragmatism [...] in which I spoke of your article in the February "Leonardo" as a work of high intelligence, genius, and literary skill. [...] I cannot write Italian, I am sorry to say. For it is as beautiful a language for the expression of exact conceptions as for the purposes of poetry (including unrhymed fiction). Some decade ago, I surrounded myself, as well as I could, with Italian. My servants were Italians who could not speak English. I took only an Italian newspaper; and endeavoured in that way to enter into the speech. But speech is not the kind of representation of forms in which I naturally think, and therefore my efforts did not come to as much as I hoped they might. Besides, one cannot escape reading German, however much one may detest the language, the rhetoric, and the style of expression».

And now, I hope, we have a more balanced view of Peirce and Italy. If I may make one further reference to the Florentine Pragmatists, I should like to remind you of what Giuseppe Prezzolini said a few years

ago: «Come furono belli i giorni del "Leonardo"!» I should like to bring that statement up-to-date, and say, «Come sono belli i giorni del congresso PEIRCE IN ITALIA!» Grazie!

Abbreviations

- CSP-HCL = letter from Peirce to Henry Cabot Lodge
- CSP-SMP = letter from Peirce to Sarah Mills Peirce (CSP's mother)
- CSP-ZFP = letter from Peirce to Zina Fay Peirce
- CSP-JMP = letter from Peirce to James Mills Peirce
- CSP-HPE = letter from Peirce to Helen Peirce Ellis (CSP's sister).