

SARAH PARKER REMOND (1834-1894) IN HER CONTEXT

AFRO-AMERICAN ABOLITIONIST AND OBSTETRICIAN

LECTURE GIVEN AT SANTA MARIA NUOVA HOSPITAL, FLORENCE, 13/6/2019



Introduction: Alcmeon, Aristotle's Physician, said that man dies because he cannot join the end to the beginning. We call our Human Rights project for the Roma in the 'English' Cemetery, 'From Graves to Cradles'. I end as I began with the nineteenth-century, Afro-American Abolitionist, friend of Frederick Douglass and Giuseppe Mazzini, the woman doctor and obstetrician, Sarah Parker Remond.

Dr. Sirpa Salenius will speak of her biographical research concerning Sarah Parker Remond, in particular here at Santa Maria Nuova Hospital in Florence, in 1866-1868. Instead I will explore the context of such revolutionary studies for a woman, particularly a woman of colour, in the Victorian era, in Italy.

First let me give the medieval, Renaissance and even modern background. Dante's Beatrice Portinari's Monna Tessa founded the Oblate nursing order together with the banker, Folco Portinari, Beatrice's father, founding this hospital, to take in the poor sick of the city and also poor strangers, such as pilgrims too ill to continue walking to Rome. Similar concepts from the Gospel led to the founding of the Misericordia, Orsanmichele, the Bigallo, the Hospital of the Innocents, the Buonuomini of Saint Martin, Montedomini, Prince Demidov's philanthropy, the Republic of San Procolo of Giorgio La Pira and Fioretta Mazzei with its Mass for the Poor, and Professor Mauro Barsi's Progetto Agata Smeralda. A Florence as a new Jerusalem, based on the love of God and neighbor. Which as a result, created the most beautiful and humane art and architecture in the world. In these institutions by and for the people are found the true roots of the Renaissance, rather than in the Medici family's palaces and villas built for themselves.



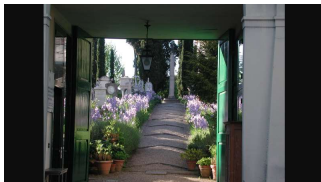
Folco's descendant, Thomas Portinari, at Bruges, commissioned the Nativity triptych for this Hospital in which we see our own vulnerability, a risky childbirth, a teenage mother, the baby placed on the earth in the filth of a stable. There being no room at the inn.



The English Cemetery in Florence, paradoxically owned by the Swiss, is as if a history book, an archive in marble and can teach us much about Sarah Parker Remond's context. Its oval, designed by Giuseppe Poggi when Florence briefly became capital of Italy,



for years was closed and abandoned,



but is now restored and researched with the help of Florence's poorest, the Roma from Romania, presenting a microcosm of the problems and also the solutions to global issues, not only in the Victorian period – the cemetery was in use from 1827-1877 – but which are also applicable today. We were awarded the Niccolò Stenone Prize for this work.



Slavery

I was introduced to the figure of Sarah Parker Remond by Professor Marilyn Richardson, when organizing a 2008 international conference on the Americans in Florence in the nineteenth century, the fifth in our series on The City and the Book. Dennis Looney, a Dante scholar like myself, had already told me how important the English Cemetery was for Black Studies. Buried here are:

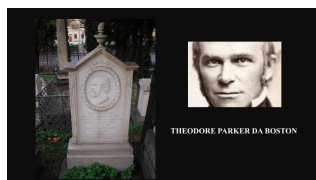
Elizabeth Barrett Browning, from a Jamaican slave-owning family, herself part Black, who hated slavery;



Frances Trollope, English, who journeyed up the Mississippi from New Orleans to Cincinnati, and who wrote against the enslaving and lynching of Afro-Americans in the New World;



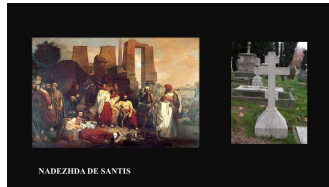
Theodore Parker of Boston who preached against slavery at the risk of assassination from slave-dealers:



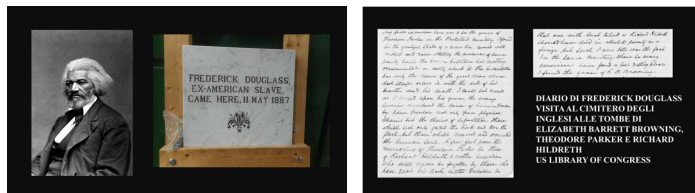
and Richard Hildreth who wrote a powerful book against slavery.



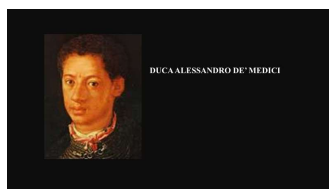
Fanny Trollope's and Richard Hildreth's two novels were then copied by Harriet Beecher Stowe in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.



In 1828 Champollion and Rosellini had been funded by the Grand Duke Leopold to go on expedition to Egypt and Nubia, returning with a fifteen-year-old Black slave girl, who, years later, with the name, Nadezhda De Santis, came to be buried in Florence's English Cemetery.



And Frederick Douglass, ex-slave, visited the tombs of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Theodore Parker and Richard Hildreth, 11 May 1887. He next commissioned a new tomb for Theodore Parker to be sculpted by William Wetmore Story, whose biography Henry James wrote. Above is his diary entry of the visit, from the Library of Congress's website. It had been forbidden for slaves to read or write under pain of death from lynching.



Duke Alexander of Tuscany, the last true member of the Medici, was the son of a Black slave.

But first let me tell you about my friend, Marilyn Richardson, who is Afro-American. One day her mother had a fall and the hospital telephoned Marilyn to say she was all right

physically but they were worried about her mental state because she was saying she had a daughter who was a professor at M.I.T. Marilyn answered, 'But I am!'.

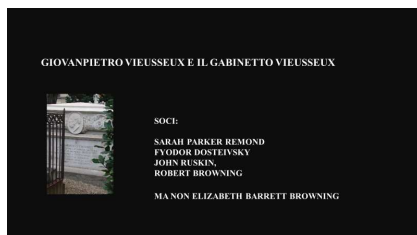
Marilyn asked me to help find where Sarah Parker Remond was buried. I was looking at the nineteenth-century register in Rome's Protestant Cemetery to see the entry for my ancestor, the Irish painter, Richard Rothwell, who portrayed Mary Shelley. And there on the same page I found her! But the tomb itself was lost. Marilyn has since worked to have the commemorative plaque placed in the Roman cemetery.

The Rights of Women and Children

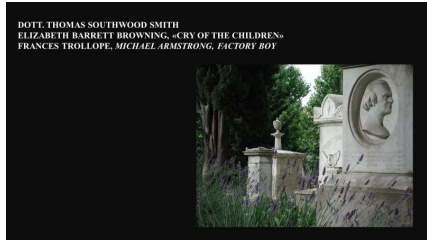
We have many famous nineteenth-century women associated with Italy, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Margaret Fuller, Jessie White Mario, Anita Garibaldi, Mary Somerville, Ada Lovelace, Fanny and Theodosia Trollope, Cristina, Princess Belgioioso, Christina Temple Bowdoin, and Sarah Guppy.



Who invented the computer? Two women! Mary Somerville, and Ada, Contessa di Lovelace, Lord Byron's daughter.



Among the members of the Gabinetto Vieusseux and its reading room were Sarah Parker Remond, Fyodor Dostoevsky, John Ruskin, and Robert Browning, who all signed its Register, but Robert lied to Elizabeth, telling her that women were prohibited entry, which crushed her. She believed him but spoke of the dragons guarding the golden apples of the Hesperides.



Thomas Southwood Smith, a medical doctor deeply concerned about children working in mines and factories, asked Elizabeth Barrett Browning to write 'Cry of the Children', and Fanny Trollope, *Michael Armstrong Factory Boy*. With the result that the law was changed in Parliament, forbidding children to work under the age of 12. An example of how men and women can collaborate for Justice.

Medicine and the English Cemetery

The Doctors

Many doctors are buried in Florence's so-called 'English', but in fact international and ecumenical, Swiss cemetery for all non-Catholics. Among them: Vicomte Henri de la Balinaye, in exile from France, practicing medicine in London; Augustus Kirch, from Germany; John Nesbit Maxwell, from Scotland; Edward Porteus, at the Battle of Trafalgar; Thomas Sevestre, an aged doctor who practiced in India and treated duelists in Bagni di Lucca; Alexandre Delisser, a Wimpole Street doctor; Joseph Anthony Pouget, a doctor from India; Ivan Ivanovich Ivanov, a Russian doctor; James Craigie, a Scottish surgeon, who, unfortunately, suicided; Thomas Southwood Smith, head of the London Fever Hospital; James Annesley, doctor in India, author of a huge study of tropical diseases; Thomas P. Jackson, an American doctor; John Williams, Charles Bankhead, William Somerville, naval doctor and husband to the mathematician, Mary Somerville; Peter Francis Luard, Sir Charles Lyon Herbert, Thomas Trotman, doctor in the Barbadoes. Not buried here though practicing medicine in the Anglo-Florentine community were doctors Wilson and Gressanowski. While Sampson Gamgee, William Lister and Lorenzo Capei are linked through Emma Gamgee Capei. Among them are those who treated the rich with a fine bedside manner, like Gressanowski, those concerned for the poor, like Southwood Smith, and those treating the war-wounds of soldiers and sailors. But none of them a woman.



Bartolomeo Odicini was the doctor to Anita Garibaldi and their children in Monte Video, Uruguay, and later was one of the doctors treating Garibaldi after the Battle of Aspramonte.



24. Sir David Dumbreck was the head of hospitals in the Crimea and associated with Florence Nightingale, succeeding Dr James Barry, of whom more later in this talk.



The Grand Duke's Museum, 'La Specola', and also the Galileo Museum show us Florence as at the cutting edge of medical research and practice, particularly in obstetrics. Though male doctors generally resisted using anti-septic practices the teaching of Ignaz Semmelweis, Domenico Chiara, Louis Pasteur, Sampson Gamgee and Joseph Lister were beginning to take effect at the time that Sarah Parker Remond was carrying out her medical studies, Domenico Chiara publishing *Vita e luce* in Florence in 1867 after finding the need for hygiene to avoid puerperal fever in Parma in 1866.



The Illnesses in the Cemetery

Puerperal Fever following Childbirth: Fanny Holman Hunt, 1866, Louise LeComte Counis, 1847, Sarah McCalmont, 1836, etc.

Deaths from Childbirth: Fanny Holman Hunt, Louise LeComte Counis, Sarah McCalmont, Emma Gamgee Capei, Selina Garinei, Maria Mercadanti, Horatia Augusta Robley, and many more.

Tuberculosis: Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Leontiev Levitsky, Jonas Kjellander, Countess Charlotte Bowes-Lyon, Ellis William Delisser, Georgiana Clementina Sloper, Theodosia Trollope, Bice Trollope, and many poor Swiss adolescents.

Diphtheria: Mary Spencer Stanhope, Alice and Charles Cottrell, John Logan Campbell, Dmitri and Elena Mignaty, Garibaldi Porcinai, etc.

Malaria: Arthur Hugh Clough

Cholera: Robina Wilson, Catherine Jane Penfold Baroncelli

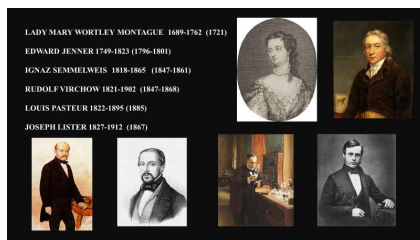
Cancer: Cornelia Loring

Tetanus: Louisa Catherine Adams Kuhn

Anthrax: Henry Arnold Savage Landor

Suicide: James Craigie, M.D., Adelaide Delisser

The History of Medicine



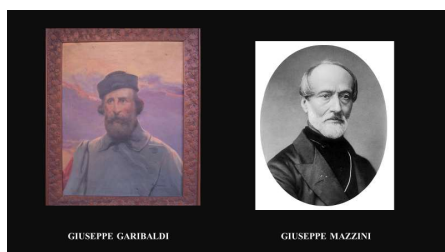
Lady Mary Wortley Montague learned of inoculation against smallpox, used, interestingly, by Roma, in Turkey. Then Doctor Jenner discovered how to vaccinate more safely against smallpox. The disease is now eradicated globally. But the 'Anti-Vac' movement is causing measles to return.

Ignaz Semmelweis advocated cleanliness in childbirth to prevent infection and his findings were published in the *Lancet* in 1848, yet were resisted. Semmelweis tragically, ironically, died in an insane asylum of septicaemia. Rudolf Virchow advocated democracy, not bureaucracy, and a National Health Service, in Prussia, in a typhus epidemic. But his work was discredited because of Louis Pasteur's findings. In Italy, Domenico Chiara, and in England, Joseph Lister and Sampson Gamgee, like Ignaz Semmelweis, taught the need for cleanliness in childbirth and in surgery, Domenico Chiara's findings in Parma being published in Florence in 1867. Nor should we forget the Swiss Henri Dunant's founding of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent to care

of the wounded and dying of both sides in wartime and the adoption of the Geneva Conventions from his witnessing the carnage at the Risorgimento's Battle of Solferino in 1859. He declared 'The influence of women is an essential factor in the welfare of humanity, and it will become more valuable as time proceeds' and admired Harriet Beecher Stowe, Florence Nightingale and Elizabeth Fry



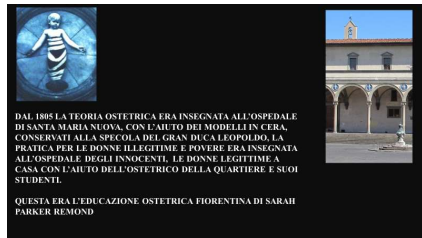
Tragically women in medicine were relegated to cleaning and nursing tasks, and forbidden to become doctors. Princess Belgioioso and Margaret Fuller worked for Garibaldi's hospital in the short-lived Roman Republic, Margaret even while pregnant out of wedlock and following childbirth, the Princess ill with siphylis contracted, like Isac Dinesen, from her husband. Jessie White Mario, whose many applications to medical school were all rejected, helped Garibaldi with hospitals in Sicily, Venice and elsewhere. Florence Nightingale took the model of Santa Maria Nuova of her natal Florence, in establishing hospitals in the Crimea and schools of nursing in England. Octavia Hill, Thomas Southwood Smith's granddaughter, continued his work for adequate housing for the poor with fresh air and sunlight to prevent diseases such as tuberculosis. And, finally, Doctor James Barry, a military doctor, in South Africa performed a Caesarian in which both mother and child lived, served in the West Indies, in Saint Helena, in Malta, always performing surgery with clean hands, becoming head of the military hospitals in England, to be succeeded by Sir David Dumbreck. When Dr Barry died in 1865, it was discovered, while washing the corpse, that she was a woman, and from the stretch marks, that she had born a child.



Jessie White Mario was friends with Garibaldi and Mazzini. Sarah Parker Remond, Abolitionist, gave many lectures against slavery, first in American, then in England, in 1859-61, and was also friend and colleague to Giuseppe Mazzini, who was living in exile

in London during this period. Sarah studied at Bedford College, begun for women, now part of the University of London; then she enrolled at All Saints University College Hospital to study surgery. Mazzini himself wrote the letter of recommendation for her to continue her medical studies in Florence at Santa Maria Nuova Hospital's leading school in obstetrics.

Santa Maria Nuova Hospital and the Hospital for the Innocents



Sirpa Salenius found Sarah's name entered in the archives of Santa Maria Nuova Hospital as 'Negra d'America', where she studied obstetrics from 1866 to 1868.

The Anatomical Studies at 'La Specola'



From 1806 Giuseppe Galletti had taught surgery and obstetrics making use of wax models, which the Grand Duke then placed in 'La Specola'. Galletti separated the practical and the theoretical parts of obstetrics, theory being taught at Santa Maria Nuova, the practicum with poor and illegitimate women, their children raised as orphans in the Hospital of the Innocents. The Grand Duke also arranged for an obstetrician with four students to be assigned to each quarter of the city to attend childbirths in the homes of the more affluent. I have asked the Hospital of the Innocents to see whether in their archives the poorer disgraced unwed mothers might have had a better survival rate from its greater cleanliness during this period than did the affluent respectable mothers buried in our cemetery from puerperal fever treated in childbirth by fashionable male obstetricians. An observation made by Dr Semmelweiss in 1847 concerning the two wards in Vienna, one with women midwives, the other with male doctors.

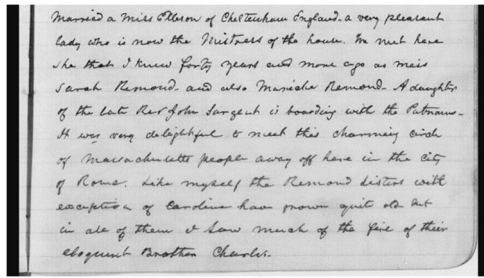


We recall that Emma Gamgee Capei, daughter of Dr Sampson Gamgee, the colleague of Dr Joseph Lister, and wife of Dr Lorenzo Capei, died in childbirth from twins, 15 July 1863.

DISTINTA CHE FU IN SUA MODESTA LUCE
PER VENUSTA DI FORME
E PIU'
PER INGENUITA D'ANIMO
TEMPERATO AD ELEVATI PRINCIPII
QUI RIPOSA NEI SONNO ESTREMO
EMMA DI GIUSEPPE E MARIANNA GAMGEE
CHE
AFFRANTA DA LABORIOSO GEMINO PARTO
NEL DI 15 LUGLIO 1863
IN ETA DI ANNI 29 MESI 3 GIORNI 13
LASCIO DI SE
NEI QUATTRO SUOI FIGLI
NEL CONSORTE DOTT. LORENZO CAPEI
E IN QUANTI LA CONOBBERO
MEMORIA NON PERITURA

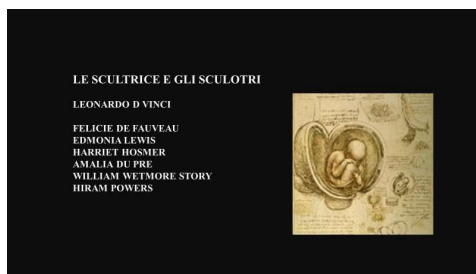


Sarah Parker Remond thus studied and practiced obstetrics and surgery here in Florence. Then married the Sardinian, Lazzaro Pintor, in 1877. Afterwards they moved to Rome.



Frederick Douglass wrote in his Diary, 26 January 1886, at page 24, now online with the Library of Congress, of his joy at seeing the Remond sisters, Caroline, Maritche and Sarah, now grown old, after having known them forty years before in Concord, Massachusetts. On the next page he writes of visiting the Afro-Native-American sculptor Edmonia Lewis, who had been living in Rome for twenty years. Then Sarah Parker Remond came to be buried in Rome's Protestant Cemetery in 1894.

The Sculptors, Artists and Poets



I should like to conclude with the arts of sculpture and poetry, because medical science is also an art, an empathy, a Human Right, a search for Justice, of the body, the mind and the soul. Michelangelo Buonarroti and Leonardo da Vinci had access here to cadavres to study anatomy. Then several women also studied anatomy but from live models, and became sculptors, among them: the French Royalist exile, Felicie de Fauveau; the Afro-Native-American Edmonia Lewis; the American Harriet Hosmer; the Italian Amalia DuPrè. And the American men, William Wetmore Story, and



Hiram Powers, the part Native-American, discovered by Fanny Trollope in Cincinnati and then who became professor of sculpture at the Accademia de Belle Arti in Florence. His 'Greek Slave', modelled on Margherita Mignaty (the very beautiful Anglo-Greek

friend of Sarah Parker Remond, and the mother of the dead children, Dmitri and Elena, buried in our cemetery probably of childhood diphtheria), was exhibited at the Crystal Palace in 1851. It had already been seen in his studio by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, whose sonnet addressed to it was published in Boston in the Abolitionist journal, *The Liberty Bell*.

Hiram Powers' Greek Slave

They say Ideal Beauty cannot enter
The house of anguish. On the threshold stands
An alien Image with the shackled hands,
Called the Greek Slave: as if the sculptor meant her,
(That passionless perfection which he lent her,
Shadowed, not darkened, where the sill expands)
To, so, confront men's crimes in different lands,
With man's ideal sense. Pierce to the centre,
Art's fiery finger! - and break up erelong
The serfdom of this world! Appeal, fair stone,
From God's pure heights of beauty, against man's wrong!
Catch up in thy divine face, not alone
East griefs but west, - and strike and shame the strong,

For slavery was not only American, it was in Europe, Turks enslaved Greeks, and Elizabeth's slave-owning father built their home in the Malvern countryside like a Turkish palace with minarets and crescent moons.

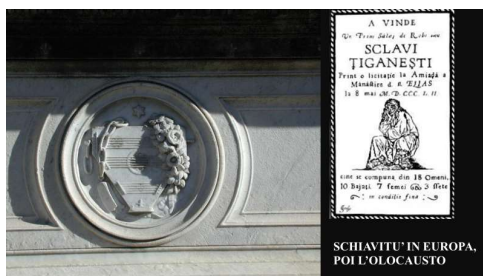


Joan Kantakuzin, the Romanian nobleman, descended from the Emperor of Constantinople, friend of the Russian Prince Demidov, had owned slaves. The Roma slaves lived there in the same extreme poverty that in our day they did in Osmannoro, Florence, until they were bulldozed in 2010 on the coldest day of winter from their

shacks, among them mothers with new-born babies and juveniles, all of them illiterate, though European citizens, and came to live under the Loggia of the Hospital of the Innocents for eight years. I am still caring for some of those Roma families, among them the grieving parents living with me, all four of their children snatched from them by Social Assistance to be put up for adoption in rich infertile Italian families. We are now at the Italian Supreme Court who heard this case 6 November 2019 and will let us know their decision.



Lorenzo Bartolini created the statue on Florence's Arno of the philanthropist Prince Demidov. Russian wealth was measured in how many 'souls', 'serfs', 'slaves', a man owned. The English Cemetery has slaves, serfs and servants buried side by side with titled nobles and wealthy property owners.




The Roma were slaves of the monasteries and the nobles in Romania until the translation and publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* there in 1853, a novel copied from those by Trollope and Hildreth. Then they were subjected to the genocide of the Holocaust in Transnistria.

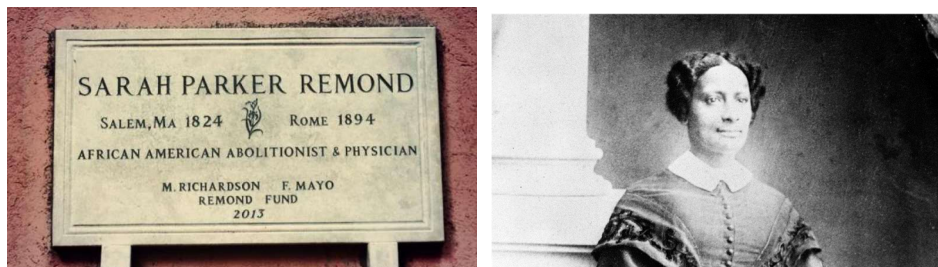


It is the Roma who created the plaque in Florence's English Cemetery to honor the visit of Sarah Parker Remond's friend, the Abolitionist Frederick Douglass, 11 May 1887.

They could also make this plaque:

SARAH PARKER REMOND,
ABOLIZIONISTA, AFRO-AMERICANA,
STUDIO' LA MEDICINA
ALL'OSPEDALE DI SANTA MARIA NUOVA,
1866  1868

Alcmeon, Aristotle's Physician, said that man dies because he cannot join the end to the beginning. We call our Human Rights project for the Roma in the 'English' Cemetery, 'From Graves to Cradles'. I end as I began with the nineteenth-century, Afro-American Abolitionist, friend of Frederick Douglass and Giuseppe Mazzini, the woman doctor and obstetrician, Sarah Parker Remond.



(PowerPoint slides at <http://www.florin.ms/SarahParkerRemond.pptx>)