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Piero Sraffa and Raffaello Piccoli, two Italian Scholars in Cambridge in 1929-1932

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Abstract

Sraffa's diaries report that from June 1929 until late 1932 he often met with the literary scholar, poet and philosopher Raffaello Piccoli, Serena Professor of Italian at the University of Cambridge. After a sketchy biography of Piccoli, the essay reconstructs the story of their friendship, thus contributing to the reconstruction of Sraffa's biography in 1929-1932; it pauses along the way on their meetings with Carlo Rosselli in 1929-1931 and on their common friendship with Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Keywords: Piero Sraffa; Raffaello Piccoli; Carlo Rosselli; Ludwig Wittgenstein.

JEL codes: B31.

1. Introduction

The name of the literary scholar, poet and philosopher Raffaello Piccoli, Serena Professor of Italian at the University of Cambridge, comes out frequently in the Cambridge Pocket Diaries 1929-1932 of both Piero Sraffa and Ludwig Wittgenstein, and in fact, he played an important role in the first years of their relationship (Morra, forthcoming). At the same time, investigation of this role disclosed information about Sraffa's frequent meetings with Piccoli from June 1929 until late 1932 that may help the reconstruction of the economist's biography in those years.

After a sketchy biography of Piccoli, the essay tells the story of his friendship with Sraffa, pausing along the way on their meetings with Carlo Rosselli in 1929-1931 and on their common friendship with Ludwig Wittgenstein.

2. Raffaello Piccoli

Raffaello Piccoli was born in Naples in 1886, grandson of the statesman Pasquale Stanislao Mancini, 8th Marquis of Fusignano; his mother was a musician, his father an aristocratic engineer from Vicenza who applied his hectic genius to social and industrial issues, and served the socialist party also as a MPs.

Graduated in Literature and Philosophy in Padua, Raffaello perfected his studies in Literature in Florence; along those years, he wrote for the reviews *Leonardo* and *La Voce* and also collaborated with Benedetto Croce, of whose aesthetics he sketched out a variant based on musical experience (Piccoli 1910). Then, he taught Italian Literature at Industrial Schools for a couple of years, and in late 1912 went to Oxford to collect material for an anthology of Elizabethan dramas he was to edit and translate. There he came in contact with a group of philosophers interested in Croce's idealism, and also with literary scholars; recommended by both Cesare Foligno, lecturer in Italian Literature, and Robert Bridges, new Poet Laureate, he became Teacher of Italian in Cambridge in Fall 1913.

In Cambridge too he was praised by several scholars, like E.M. Forster, Hugh F. Stewart, Edward J. Dent; in addition, at the meetings of The Heretics Society, to which he addressed some lectures, he got acquainted with George Bernard Shaw, John Maynard Keynes, and Bertrand Russell. With Russell, in fact, he became close towards the end of July 1914, when the logician discussed the approaching war situation "with all and sundry" in Cambridge, and "collected the signatures of a large number of professors and Fellows to [an antiwar] statement that appeared in the Manchester Guardian" (Russell 2006: 238). A pacifist like his father, Raffaello was not amongst those who "changed their minds" when England declared war (as Russell bitterly remembered, "almost all" petitioners did, *ibid*: 3-4); beyond discussing the anti-war papers the logician was currently writing, in early October they spent together a short holiday in Somerset, and kept on meeting frequently also in the next months (Morra, forthcoming). Then Italy entered war; Piccoli addressed the University a vindication of the diplomatic decision holding that it added "new strength" to ideal of international right the Allies were "fighting for themselves as members of a larger community" (Piccoli 1915: 4-5), and went to London to work for the Pro Italia Committee, projecting for its benefit an anthology with contributions of both English and Italian writers, artists and musicians, *The Book of Italy* (Piccoli 1916). Required for an essay, Russell refused, and their correspondence suggests that their friendship had been supported, until May 1915, by their sharing the same political position; still, as Piccoli later wrote, it was under Russell's critical scrutiny that he had detected "the weakness of the foundations [of his] own idealism" (Piccoli 1922: v).

Since the call to arms had dramatically reduced the number of graduands, Piccoli had no students for his classes, so he spent in London the a.y. 1915-1916. Then he volunteered, joining in early 1917 the elite corps of the Granatieri di Sardegna. Wounded after Caporetto while defending a bridge on the Tagliamento River, he was detained in prison camps in

Hungary until October 1918. On his way back to Italy, he got sick with Spanish flu.

Still under arms when in March 1919 the Cambridge University elected the first Serena Professor of Italian, later in September, with the help of Croce (at that time Minister of Public Education), he sailed towards the United States, as Visiting Professor in several universities. Back in Italy by the end of 1921, he spent six months in Rome qualifying for university teaching English Literature and also following the inquiry about his father's death (the MP Piccoli had recently died on his way to Messina: fascists squads were suspected to be responsible, but investigations concluded for a tragic accident). His courses at the University of Pisa started in June 1922, and, shortly after, he married with the American pianist Blanche Goode. Then, from January 1923, he lectured at the University of Naples, a precarious post that remained as such until the end of 1926. To support his family (he was a father of three), he resumed teaching Italian literature in junior schools, and translated extensively, especially Shelley, Keats, and Shakespeare. His poor economic position (his father, by the way, had depleted the family estate in devoting himself to politics and patronage) was exacerbated by his basic retribution, as the years of teaching in England and in the USA were not accounted for, a 'miscalculation' that the new Minister of Public Education Giovanni Gentile, notwithstanding their acquaintance and Croce's direct concern, gave no directories to amend. From 1924, as he got a further qualification for teaching in English, he lectured also at the Istituto Superiore Navale, then was professor in 1925/1926 at the Regio Liceo Vittorio Emanuele in Palermo. The University of Naples finally formalized the chair of English and Literature; but two years later, when the Serena chair in Cambridge became vacant, Piccoli submitted his application, and in February 1929 the Electors gave him the chance to go back to the fertile soil where his talent had blossomed in the pre-war years.

3. Piccoli's 'second coming' in Cambridge, and his meetings with Sraffa

Admitted as a Fellow at Magdalene College on April 21, in the next days Piccoli started his two courses, 'Early Italian Poetry' (Italian speaking), 'The origins of the Italian Renaissance' (English speaking). On May 1 he met with Piero Sraffa, lecturer at King's since 1927.

Coherently with their different *Bildung* and life experiences, no data suggest a previous acquaintance. Different had been the intellectual interests and scholars they had respectively cultivated and met with in Italy;¹ in addition, not only Piccoli was twelve years senior to

¹ In Fall 1916, while projecting for the Pro Italia Committee an anthology of essays about Italy and the war, Piccoli wrote to Luigi Einaudi, with whom he was not personally acquainted (RP to LE, 8.10.1916, cf. RP to LE 10.11.1916; both letters are held at the Fondazione Einaudi, Archivio Luigi Einaudi, busta 2, Piccoli Raffaello). As two months later he volunteered, the book was never published.

Sraffa, but they hardly had the opportunity to meet, as before the war Piccoli was in England, whereas in 1919-1921 he lectured in the United States; he was back when Sraffa was research student at the LSE, and from June 1922, when Sraffa was in Italy again, they lived in different places, Piccoli in Pisa until January 1923, then in Naples (in Palermo in 1925/1926), whereas Sraffa in Milan and Perugia (he also spent the early 1923 in France, and the late 1924 in London).² In addition, they were both antifascists, but from different political perspectives.

In his youth an uncompromising socialist, after the war Piccoli had been a member of the Partito Socialista Unitario, founded, amongst others, by his close friend Francesco Flora. Coherently with his adherence to Croce's philosophy, Piccoli had however moved closer to liberalism, as witnessed by his attending the Libera Università dei Caffegrecisti in Rome and Croce's articulated 'family' in Naples (Giammattei 2009), by his interest in collaborating with Piero Gobetti in 1923 (Gobetti 2017: 423), and finally by his signing in 1925 Croce's manifesto, the statement that served as a base for a network to which antifascists who were neither communists nor Catholics could adhere in order to fight without political violence the regime. When a few months later the PSU had been declared illegal, he had stopped any (manifest) political activity,³ and his salon, part and parcel of the life of the Neapolitan area where many intellectuals and artists lived at that time (called "la repubblica vomerese", Doria 1961), was open also to people (critically) inclined towards the regime (Amendola 1976: 231-235).⁴ Nello Rosselli, by the way, attended Piccoli's salon in 1928,⁵ this suggesting a contact between the circles Piccoli and Sraffa were next to. War had in fact convinced Sraffa of his deep adherence to revolutionary ideals, so in Italy he had been (and still was) close to

2 Marjanovič (2005: 61) remembers that in May 1927 Sraffa spent a few days in Naples for an archival research; as Piccoli was in Naples at that time, she suggests they could have met, but no evidence is available.

3 For the benefit of the political police, Piccoli declared in 1927:

dopo lo scioglimento del [PSU] non ho svolto alcuna azione politica di alcun genere, ed è mia intenzione mantenermi in tale linea di condotta, dedicandomi esclusivamente ai doveri del mio ufficio, alla cura della mia famiglia, ed ai miei lavori letterari (Marjanovič, 2005: 75-76).

4 Giorgio Amendola, who in 1926-1928 attended both Piccoli's lectures on English Literature and his salon, wrote:

Il tollerante liberalismo di Raffaello Piccoli facilitava la conoscenza di giovani diversi per esperienze ed opinioni [...] [Li] conobbi per la prima volta un 'fascista dissidente', lo studente Ruggero Orlando [...]. Andrea Giovane di Girasole [la cui famiglia era fascista] mostrava di accogliere con intelligenza la lezione liberale di Piccoli" (Amendola 1976: 233-234, and cf. 168).

Another fascist attending Piccoli's salon was the diplomat Carlo De Ferraris. Amendola described the environment of the Repubblica vomerese as entrenched with a sort of "sweet" "wait and see policy" that he was to refuse entering in 1929 the communist party (Amendola 1976: 235, 239).

5 From March until September 1928 Nello Rosselli did archival research in Naples, lodging at the Pensione Vomero; at that time, he frequently met with Croce, and the way he mentioned Piccoli's salon to his mother (NR to AR 26.9.1928, in Rosselli 1997A: 391) suggests a customary attendance. His stay in Naples is remembered by Amendola (1976: 185-186).

the core of an environment far from the one to which Piccoli belonged, namely the communist area — when he met Piccoli in Cambridge, he was already the go-between for Antonio Gramsci and the party;⁶ however, he had had (and still had) several connections also amongst those who critically revised socialism through a liberal perspective (Gaetano Salvemini, Piero Gobetti, Carlo Rosselli and Nino Levi); and the salon of his best friend Raffaele Mattioli, in fact, was attended also by Piccoli's best friend Flora (Bacchelli 2017).

Piccoli and Sraffa, at any rate, met again on May 8. The next week, Sraffa gave a lecture at the Italian Society, of which Piccoli was soon to become President. Piccoli did not attend it, but the event is registered in the diary of a student of his, Alethea Graham, at her third year in Girton College to read Modern Languages with Economics as her second subject (a choice due to her mother's pressure; a brilliant writer, Alethea preferred by far Italian Literature to Economics, and deeply appreciated the lectures of the new Italian Professor, with whom a romantic, but platonic, attraction had in addition began). After Sraffa's lecture she wrote:

[On Tuesday] evening I went to the Italian Society. No — Piccoli wasn't there: only a handful of people heard Signor Sraffa (Maynard Keynes' pet economist) talk about Florentine bankers in the 14th century in a humorous kind of way (GCPP/Graham/A1/1/16: 16.5.1929)⁷.

Piccoli and Sraffa lunched again together a fortnight later; the next day, they met for tea with Ludwig Wittgenstein, with whom Sraffa had met a handful of times since his arrival in January, the last one a week before. Piccoli, who had frequently heard of the philosopher in 1913-16, might have asked to be introduced.⁸ Along the next terms the three of them were to meet frequently, although not all together. Each of them, in fact, became close friend with the other two (Piccoli and Wittgenstein, in particular, had several affinities),⁹ but no collective meeting was scheduled again (Morra forth).

6 Marjanovič (2005: 58-59) suggests that Piccoli might have met Gramsci in 1910/1911 when he was teaching at the Industrial School in Cagliari, as Gramsci was in his last year of high school and attended the meetings of the socialists at the camera del Lavoro; but until now, no data ground this hypothesis.

7 Alethea Graham's diaries are held in Girton College Archive. I thank the Mistress and Fellows, Girton College, Cambridge, who granted me permission to access them; although I made considerable efforts to trace copyright owners, and obtained permission to quote and publish from all the relatives at my knowledge, I apologise for any inadvertent infringements.

8 Sraffa wrote: "4½ Piccoli, Wittgenstein" (Sraffa/E3), this suggesting a meeting fixed at the purpose of introducing the two scholars.

9 Until his premature death, Piccoli had several meetings with Wittgenstein. Nearly of the same age, and with a similar social background, before World War I they had been in Cambridge and close to Russell; then, after fighting on the front lines, they were detained in prison camps. Similarly interested in the divide between ethics, religion and philosophy on the one hand and science on the other, they both adversed scientism; and they were both interested in authors that were to prove of importance in Wittgenstein's reflections in 1930-1931 — Freud, Spengler, Frazer, Augustine, and James. Finally, similar were also their political stances, as they equally adversed both Fascism and Bolshevism (Morra 2020). For a sketchy picture of the friendship and intellectual exchange between Wittgenstein and Sraffa, see Morra (2017).

A week after their tea with Wittgenstein both Italian scholars left Cambridge for a long holiday.

Shortly after his arrival in Cambridge for the beginning of Michaelmas Term 1929, Piccoli met with Miss Graham, in her fourth year at Girton to flank her sister in her first year in college. He invited her for lunch, extended the invitation to a friend she was with, and later chose Sraffa as a fourth mate, possibly because Alethea, again under her mother's pressure, was now reading Economics with Italian as second subject.¹⁰ She had not been informed about who else was to be with them, as she described with these words her arrival with her friend in Piccoli's rooms on the ground of Pepys Buildings:

For one moment I thought that we should be three [...] and something would spoil the charm of our meeting. But Sraffa, the Italian Economist, came after a few minutes & all went well. At lunch we were all a little shy to begin with until I suggested being parlour maid and then the ice was broken & we talked & Tetta argued stubbornly about "Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore", the play now on at the Festival, on which Piccoli had written a review for the Cambridge Review. Piccoli refuted her quietly with quotations [...] Then we went into the fellows' garden & he gave me mistletoe from the old apple tree, and heliotrope & a rose bud [...] and we walked under the trees among the fallen leaves & the frosty dahlias in sunlight and a little wind, and the hour was lovely [...] we talked about age & death, about people & travels, about nothings that are lovely, flowers & sunlight & wind — Tetta & Sraffa might as well not have been there for all we cared ..." (GCPP/Graham/A1/1/17: 16/10/1929; and cf. 14.10.1929).

Sraffa's little interest in small talks may explain why for some times he did not plan again with Piccoli for lunch. A fortnight later, at any rate, he attended his Inaugural Lecture, in which the Serena Professor proposed a new Humanism, mirror of the "true perspective of human values" at the basis of the Renaissance, as a tool to counteract the "mechanisation of the spirit and the tyranny of pseudo-scientific ideas" threatening Western civilisation (Piccoli 1929: 28). In all probability Wittgenstein attended the lecture too.

Sraffa dined with Piccoli the next week, then possibly went to his lecture to the Heretics,¹¹ in which Piccoli (new President of the Society) denounced the threatening idolatry of science menacing society, and promoted again humanism, this time expressly against Fascism and Bolshevism (cf. GCPP/Graham 10.11.1929). Piccoli met Sraffa again three days later (it was Piccoli's birthday; he was now 43), then on Sunday 17 they both attended Wittgenstein's lecture on Ethics at the Heretics Society. The next Saturday, Sraffa visited Piccoli in

¹⁰ Piccoli had proposed Alethea to do research under him instead, but her mother had been adamant, and in July Maurice Dobb had coached her for the Qualifying Exam. Her dislike for Economics, however, had driven her to such a state of emotional prostration that she had been exempted from the exam on medical reasons.

¹¹ Sraffa's CPD page for November 10 is blank, but diaries tell that sometimes he attended the Heretics meetings (e.g., on 3.2.1929, 17.11.1929, 8.11.1931, 22.11.1931).

Magdalene College:¹² two days later was due to arrive in London Carlo Rosselli, whose contacts with Sraffa had never stopped,¹³ and that Piccoli knew too — in 1924 Carlo had entered the PSU, while his brother Nello had attended Piccoli's salon in 1928.¹⁴ Rosselli had arranged to meet with Sraffa the day after his arrival, and in fact on November 26 they dined together at the 1917 Club where he was due to give a talk.¹⁵ Piccoli might have attended the conference too; as a socialist endorsing liberal ideals as regards individual liberties, he was plausibly interested in Rosselli's effort to conciliate liberalism and socialism (Croce was on the contrary to dismiss it as philosophically inconsistent).¹⁶ A week later Rosselli spent the day in Cambridge, attending a tea party where Piccoli might have been present,¹⁷ and dining at King's College as a guest of Prof. Dickinson — he joined the High Tables with Sraffa,¹⁸ who proved "affectionate and welcoming", although "as usual, sceptical" (CR to MCR

12 For November 23 Sraffa wrote in his diary a number of items (names, places, and things-to-do), then cancelled them all, as if accomplished. In particular, he wrote "~~Piccoli (M)~~" (Trinity/Sraffa/ E3).

13 In 1974 Sraffa wrote to Helmut Goetz (PS to HG 22.1.1974, Goetz Archive; draft in Sraffa papers C111, in Lattanzi, Naldi 2017: 96) that he had been a friend of Rosselli when he was in Milan, and (since then) they had met only once in Paris, in 1931. In fact they had spent some days together in Rapallo in 1925; in June 1927 Rosselli (in Savona's prison) had enclosed a note for Sraffa in a letter to his mother (CR to AR 12.7.1927, Rosselli 1997A: 342); and a letter Rosselli's wife sent to Sraffa in 1928 shows that they were still in touch (MC to PS 22.10.1928, Trinity/Sraffa/ C270_1).

14 In Spring 1926 Carlo Rosselli spent a holiday in Capri, a 'second home' for the Piccolis. Nello Rosselli's letter from 1928 (cf. n.5) suggests that Piccoli was familiar to him and his family. Since Piccoli had the chance to stop in Paris in his travels to and from Cambridge, he could have been amongst those contacted by Ernesto Rossi in September 1929, when he tried to "organize in Naples a group of Giustizia e Libertà" (Amendola 1976: 263).

15 The conclusion is suggested by a comparison between Sraffa's diary and Rosselli's letters. On November 26 Sraffa wrote "8. Carlo"; Rosselli was to talk that evening at the 1917 Club, a "labourist" club of which he (and Sraffa) had been made "visiting member" in 1924 (CR to AR 8.9.1924, Rosselli 1997: 215). As Rosselli dined there (CR to MCR 27.11.1929, Rosselli 1997B: 37), they probably met at 8 for dinner at the Club, and Sraffa attended the lecture. Still, as Enno Ghiandelli suggested me, it is possible that Sraffa was to *phone* Rosselli at that hour. They could have arranged either their meeting or their call already in Paris in early October.

16 Piccoli's interest in Rosselli's perspective is suggested also by a comparison between the call for a new humanism he advanced in his Inaugural lecture and the caption of the journal *Giustizia e libertà* (published from 1934): "unitarian movement for labourers' autonomy, a socialist republic, *a new humanism*" (emphasis and translation mine; cf. also GL 8.5.1934, in Rosselli 1992: 4-5).

17 "[A Cambridge] Meeting nel pomeriggio a casa di una signora, presenti professori e signore, tra le quali, molto confusa, perplessa e in fondo pro-fascista, Mrs. Trevelyan" (CR to MCR 4.12.1929, Rosselli 1997B: 48). Rosselli was in Cambridge on December 2, and Miss Graham's diary (GCPP/Graham/1/1/17: 2.12.1929) suggests that he attended a tea party organized by "Mrs [Frances] Hicks", a scholar in Italian history, for the last meeting of the Italian Society for that term. As the meeting alluded to by Rosselli, the tea party to which Alethea refers was attended by several professors, amongst which Piccoli; there was a talk about Giovanni Papini, a subject that could have induced Mrs Trevelyan (a passionate italofila, and then a likely attendant of the meetings of the Italian Society), to show the vein towards fascism that Rosselli detected.

18 Sraffa (who he had met Prof. Dickinson on November 22) wrote on December 2: "7^{1/4} Carlo" (Sraffa/E3).

4.12.1929, Rosselli 1929-1937: 48).¹⁹ Two days later Sraffa went to London, spent a couple of nights at Rosselli's hotel,²⁰ and probably attended his talk at the National Liberal Club, in company of Cecil Sprigge, former correspondent from Italy and now editor of the Manchester Guardian.²¹ Piccoli could have been present too, as Alethea's diary tells that he left Cambridge within the 5th, and he used to spend a couple of days in London before going to Paris and then Naples. Sraffa, back in Cambridge on the 6th, left to Paris the next day; as he stayed there until the 12, it cannot be excluded that he met again with Rosselli, who was back in Paris before his departure.²²

Piccoli was ill when he came back from holidays in mid-January. Still in poor health, he dined with Sraffa on the 23rd, after Herbert Read's first Clark Lecture, an event attended "by a multitude of dons" (GCPP/Graham/A1/1/18: 24.1.1930; cf. 17-19.1.1930). As Read was not only a celebrated poet and literary critic, but also a prominent anarchist, Sraffa might have planned to attend the lecture, and fixed to dine with Piccoli after it. Then, for nearly two months they scheduled no meetings, a circumstance possibly due not only to Piccoli's health, still precarious in early February and poor again a month later, but also to the engagements Sraffa had at that time, in the first place the lectures (as usual, deeply distressing for him; in addition, the course for this term was on theory of value, a subject he was by then intensively questioning) and the assignment from the Royal Economic Society of the edition of David Ricardo's works and letters. Also with Wittgenstein, in fact, Sraffa met only once, whereas Piccoli met the philosopher five times; at any rate, Sraffa planned his next meeting with Piccoli at the end of term, once he finished to collate the existent versions of Ricardo's *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*; it was March 17, and Piccoli was on the eve of his journey to Italy.

Piccoli began his Easter Term lectures on April 25; he met Sraffa on the 29th, and again for tea the next day. In this term Sraffa lectured only once a week, on 'Banking on the

19 "Alla sera, pranzo al King's College. C'era anche Piero Sraffa, che è stato molto affettuoso e accogliente [...] Sempre lo stesso scettico, ma mi ha dimostrato un affetto reale. Prendiamolo com'è, che oltretutto come ingegno, anche se dissolvente, ne ha da vendere" (CR to MCR 4.12.1929, in Rosselli 1997B: 48).

20 On December 4, Rosselli wrote to his wife that Sraffa was to arrive at his hotel in the evening ("[Sraffa] verrà oggi qui a Londra al mio albergo" (CR to MCR 4.12.1929, Rosselli 1997B: 48); Sraffa wrote both "8. teatro [theatre]" and "8.C" (Sraffa/E3), where "C" might refer to Carlo. The hotel in which Rosselli was staying was the Strand Palace Hotel, next to several theatres.

21 On December 5 Sraffa wrote "3. Sprigge" (Sraffa/E3), and on the 7 the Manchester Guardian published an article about Rosselli's conference (cf. CR to MCR 6.12.1929, Rosselli 1997B: 52). Around that time Sraffa was putting Angelo Tasca in contact with Sprigge, "thus helping him improve his economic situation at a time when he was facing particular difficulties, all sources of income associated with his work for the PCI having [...] dried up" (Naldi 2012: 1409).

22 Planned on December 9, Rosselli's departure for Paris was moved to the 10th (cf. CR to MCR 4.12.1929 with MCV to CR 6.12.1929, Rosselli 1997B: 50, 53) and probably further delayed to the 11th (CR to MCR [9.12.1929], *ibid*: 54).

Continent', and he scheduled with Piccoli five more meetings. On May 19 he wrote in his diary "Lucas-Piccoli?", an annotation suggesting that the two of them met with (or had in mind to meet with) Frank Laurence Lucas, a classical scholar and Fellow at King's College Piccoli knew since his first stay in Cambridge. Either because the meeting did not take place or because they decided to meet again, the three of them scheduled to lunch together on May 30, but finally Lucas cancelled and met Sraffa alone the next Tuesday. This suggests that their gathering was prompted at Sraffa's benefit; as in 1927 Lucas had edited the complete works of John Webster and his accuracy and astuteness in matters of dating and authorship were highly praised, Piccoli might have suggested Sraffa to ask him for advice about the collation of Ricardo's texts.²³

The day in which Lucas and Sraffa finally met (June 3), another Fellow of King's, the ornithologist and botanist Alexander Wollaston was shot dead in his rooms by a student; Piccoli, who was his friend, was much moved by the event (GCPP/Graham/A1/1/1/18: 4.6.1930), upon which he possibly commented with Sraffa when they met on June 7. The next week they lunched with a common friend, Geoffrey William Rossetti,²⁴ and on June 20, in London, they lunched with Alex Joel, director of the London branch of the Banca Commerciale Italiana.²⁵

Sraffa was to spend in London a few more days, whereas Piccoli was on the eve of his journey to the Continent. As Nello Rosselli was in London and he had possibly been in Cambridge shortly before,²⁶ Piccoli might have met with him too before leaving. On his way to Naples, at any rate, he spent in Paris a couple of days with Francesco Flora, who was there for a few months. Flora, since 1925 editorial director of *La Critica*, supported as Croce the monarchic movement Alleanza Nazionale per la Libertà, founded by another close friend of Piccoli, Lauro De Bosis (Amendola 1976: 232), who now lived in Paris, so Piccoli might have met with him too; the fact that De Bosis was not welcomed by the circle of GL (Bassanesi's demonstrative flight in July was severely criticized) does not exclude that Piccoli approached in those days also someone belonging to it, as Flora (like Croce) at that

23 Both the question mark after Piccoli's surname in Sraffa's annotations and Lucas' cancellation for May 30 might be explained considering that Lucas was notoriously critical towards T.S. Eliot (a bitter quarrel between them on literary journals had just ended), and Piccoli, who had definitely rejected Eliot's earlier poetry, was now enthusiastic of *Ash Wednesday* — the *Cambridge Review* was just going to publish his Italian translation. Lucas's anti-fascists campaign, mostly consisting in letters to the British Press attacking on the policy of appeasement, started only in 1931, following the inaction of the League over Manchuria.

24 Geoffrey William Rossetti, grandson of William Michael Rossetti and great nephew of Dante Gabriel, had graduated in Modern Languages in June 1929. Holder of a research studentship, he edited the *Cambridge Review*. Sraffa had met him a few times, and met him again on November 21. Rossetti left Cambridge shortly after.

25 Alessandro (Alex) Joel was son of the founder of the Banca Commerciale Italiana and since 1928 the director of its London branch, where Sraffa had a bank account already in 1924 (cf. CR to AR 19.11.1924, Rosselli 1997A: 228). Sraffa had met him also the day before, and met him frequently in 1930-1931.

26 Nora Balzani had provided Nello Rosselli with a presentation for George Trevelyan in Cambridge.

time actively supported also GL. For sure, beyond Flora, in Paris Piccoli met with Miss Graham, who, having endured a year of Economics “whose gloom was lightened only by her Italian studies, fainted from anxiety during one of her examinations, [and] achieved a creditable Lower Second in spite of this” (Mann 2013: 510), had left Cambridge to work for the English edition of *La Semaine*. While having a drink, Piccoli told her about his deep friendship with Wittgenstein (cf. GCPP/Graham 24.6.1930), with whom he had had frequent conversations in the last term.

In early September Piccoli was due in Oxford for the VII International Congress of Philosophy, of which on Croce’s behalf he had organized the Italian delegation, but health problems obliged him to renounce, and he left Naples only at the end of the month. Shortly before his departure he met with Flora, just back from Paris where a congress had set the reunion of the PSI and the PSULI; then he visited Croce in Meana, and arrived in Paris on October 2. In Paris he probably stayed until the 7th, as he must have met with Sraffa, who, fresh from a journey in Soviet Union, arrived there around that time — in fact, they scheduled to lunch together in Cambridge on October 10, then the meeting was cancelled as Sraffa arrived only that day (cf. JMK to LLK 10.10.1930, King’s/PP/JMK/45/190/4/244, with Sraffa/E3). Piccoli’s meeting with Sraffa in Paris could contribute in explaining why the British Embassy informed the Italian police about Sraffa’s presence in Paris on the 7th and 8th associating him *also* with GL (Lattanzi, Naldi 2017: 83); Sraffa denied having paid visit to Rosselli at that time,²⁷ whereas Piccoli, under surveillance since 1925 due to his militancy in the PSU, was probably reported as next to GL having spent his June stay in Paris with Flora;²⁸ and the possibility is even higher if in the previous days he had met with someone next to GL, possibly on behalf of Croce.²⁹

27 A document from March 1931 tells that on October 7 and 8 1930 and on January 13-14 1931 was in Paris “Sraffa Pietro”, described as “a militant communist and member of the group ‘giustizia e libertà’”, and also as “a friend of the entire band of Rosselli, Lussu & Co.” (quoted in Lattanzi, Naldi 2017: 83). Police investigations on Sraffa at that time emphasized his “role in liaising between the communist movement and *Giustizia e Libertà*” (ibid: 85), but several years later, asked by Helmut Goetz on the question, Sraffa remarked that the police missed the incompatibility between communists and GL, and affirmed that he had met Rosselli in Paris only once, in January 1931 (PS to HG 22.1.1974, quoted in n.13). Though, in a private conversation with an official of the Italian Embassy in Britain at the end of 1932, asked

whether he had perchance, above all his brief stays in France, had relations and contact with anti-fascists and refugees, Sraffa stated that such relations were limited solely to some very few chance encounters in the street with Rosselli and others, whom he has known for a long time, and that the short conversations had with them were no more than everyday small talk between acquaintances” (Lattanzi, Naldi 2017: 85).

Although wrong, the description of Sraffa given by the British Police in 1931 suggests that a meeting of his with someone signalled as next to GL had been noticed *also* on October 7 and 8 1930.

28 Flora was notoriously inclined towards both GL and De Bosis’ movement.

29 Croce visited Rosselli in Paris several times in the first week of September 1931, cf. CR to MCR [2-4.9.1931], Rosselli 1997B: 100-102.

The day after Sraffa's arrival in Cambridge Piccoli was engaged with Wittgenstein, and due to meet with him again four days later; also Sraffa had organized with the philosopher, so their scheduled lunch together was postponed to the 17th. Their next meeting was on October 30, then in November they apparently met no more; on December 3, Piccoli was admitted as an emergency case at the Evelyn Nursing Home.

He was diagnosed with pleurisy, then a consultation with a tuberculosis specialist was required, and in early January his health had worsened to the point that his wife was sent for from Italy. She arrived in Cambridge shortly before Sraffa, who as usual spent a couple of days in Paris, this time visiting also Rosselli,³⁰ who detected a change in attitude since their meeting in Cambridge the year before.³¹ Whereas in December 1929 Sraffa had been "sceptical as always" but "affectionate and friendly" (CR to MCR 4.12.1929, already quoted), now he proved "horribly sceptical and cold" (CR to NR, 17.1.1931, Rosselli 1914-1937: 513, translation mine).³² By then Rosselli and his movement were in fact stigmatized by the Italian communists, who, along the lines of the Third Period, labelled as social-fascists all moderate left-wing parties, and the recent publication of *Socialisme libéral* (welcomed in fact by none of the antifascist refugees in Paris) was to make the stigma even greater.³³ The hypothesis that Sraffa's coldness was consequent to this stigma is at odds with the independence of opinion he always maintained with respect to the PCI and the Soviet Union (Naldi 2012: 1409-1410),³⁴ nevertheless the stigma makes even more interesting enquiring why he visited Rosselli at that very time, at the risk of being included in the register of suspect travellers to be stopped on the border (as it happened, then the detention order was changed into report and surveillance, this meaning that since then he and his luggage were searched each time he entered Italy).³⁵ Had Rosselli promoted the meeting, as Ghiandelli (forthcoming) suggests? Did Nello Rosselli's presence in London at that time and/or Piccoli's

30 Along the police report quoted in n. 27, Sraffa was in Paris on January 13-14 1931; he arrived in Cambridge on the 15th (Sraffa/E4). Mrs. Piccoli was in Cambridge within January 14 (GCPP/Tillyard/1/1/39: 7-14.1.1931; Aelfrida Tillyard's diaries are held in Girton College Archive; I thank the Mistress and Fellows, Girton College, Cambridge, for permission to quote them).

31 Carlo Rosselli had been in England another time in 1930, but no data about his travel are available.

32 "Piero Sraffa was passing here. Horribly sceptical and cold, however interesting" (CR to NR, 17.1.1931, in Rosselli 1997A: 512, translation mine).

33 Treves' panning was out on January 15, followed shortly after by Saragat's panning, whereas the corrosive reviews from the communist area arrived later – Amendola's in June, Ercoli's in September, Grieco's in April 1932.

34 Significant at this regard were Sraffa's relations with Angelo Tasca after his expulsion from the PCI in September 1929, cf. also n.21.

35 Cf. Lattanzi, Naldi 2017: 83-86. There is no evidence that Sraffa met with Rosselli ever since; though, Rosselli gave a lecture to the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London on March 16 1933, the day in which Sraffa seemingly left Cambridge for Easter holidays going to London first (but no diary for that period is available).

impossibility to stop in Paris on his way back to England from holidays play any role in it?³⁶

Piccoli's recovery started in late January. Sraffa, who had to lecture again twice a week on advanced theory of value, apparently did not visit him, however on January 27 he wrote in his diary "cart. [medical record] Piccoli", and another day "scrivere sig.ra Piccoli [write to Mrs. Piccoli]", this suggesting that he got a copy of Piccoli's medical record and sent it to his wife, by then back in Naples. In addition, Wittgenstein regularly provided him with updates (since late October their conversations had taken a weekly pace), as he visited Piccoli very frequently. Piccoli was discharged on February 26; he left Cambridge the next day, and Sraffa might have gone with him in London, as they seemingly lunched there with Alex Joel.³⁷

Piccoli possibly spent some time in Arosa, in a Swiss sanatorium, then in June was in Italy. The hypothesis that he did not come to Cambridge for Easter Term seems confirmed by the fact that neither Sraffa nor Wittgenstein noted down meetings with him; and also by his not being mentioned in the recollection that his young friend Giorgio Amendola, in Naples an attendant of both his lectures and salon (see §3, n.4) wrote about his trip to Cambridge in early June, when upon Togliatti's order he met Sraffa and collected a parcel of copies of letters from Gramsci — on that occasion, Sraffa took him for a long walk through the colleges' gardens (Amendola 1980: 32-33); as Amendola's memoir tells some pages ahead, at that time he was convinced that his friend and former Professor Piccoli had been elected to the Serena Chair in Oxford (ibid: 61), so it is plausible that he did not enquire with Sraffa about him; but if Piccoli had been there, in passing by Magdalene College Sraffa would have surely mentioned him to Amendola, as they had both lived in Naples, and then Amendola's false belief would have been corrected.³⁸

36 Provided his interest in Rosselli's book, and given his impossibility to go in Paris, Piccoli might have asked Sraffa to get a copy of it for him.

37 On February 27 1931 Sraffa noted down: "1.15 Joel, Picc." (Sraffa E4). The appointment was probably arranged shortly before, when Piccoli was told he could finally be discharged from the hospital, as when Sraffa noted it down, he also cancelled the meeting already scheduled with Wittgenstein for the 27th. Though, on the 26th he was affected by tonsillitis (JMK to LLK 26/2/1931 King's/PP/JMK/PP/45/190/5/21), so it is uncertain whether he respected the appointments noted down in his agenda.

38 "Una domenica fui invitato da Togliatti a passare la giornata con lui. [...]. A un certo punto mi chiese se conoscevo Piero Sraffa. Gli risposi che non lo conoscevo personalmente, ma sapevo che, figlio del grande giurista, insegnava a Cambridge. Si parlava di Piero come di un economista di grande valore, dei suoi studi su Ricardo e, soprattutto, di un breve suo scritto recente, conciso ed oscuro, sulla distribuzione delle merci. Soddisfatto della mia risposta, Togliatti mi disse che dovevo recarmi a Cambridge, presentarmi col mio vero nome e ritirare un pacchetto che avrei dovuto, al ritorno, consegnare a lui personalmente. Era una missione di fiducia e non dovevo parlarne con nessuno. [...] Arrivato a Cambridge, mi recai subito all'indirizzo di Sraffa. Ricordo un grande studio disordinato, pieno di pacchi di libri, con poltrone fiorite. Fui accolto con sorpresa ed emozione. [...] Verso sera Sraffa mi guidò in una lunga passeggiata per i colleges più famosi, tra i prati verdissimi, lungo i canali sui quali scivolavano veloci le sottili imbarcazioni dei giovani canottieri. Il crepuscolo

In August, in some remarks about Italian scholars' lack of interest for scientific questions written to Gramsci (as usual, through Tania Schucht) to prompt him to work again on the history of the Italian intellectuals, Sraffa advanced a condemnation of the mystical turn taken by some British scientists that echoes a main topic of the conversations between Wittgenstein and Piccoli, who had often lamented also the tendency of those scientists to popularize science (PS to TS, 23.8.1931, in Sraffa 1991: 22; cf. Morra 2020: 13-16).

In early October Piccoli spent in Arosa a few weeks before arriving in Cambridge. When miss Graham's mother met him, she described him as "very depressed"; he told her that he was there only a fortnight and then was to go back to Switzerland, being "threatened with T.B." (GCPP/Tillyard/1/1/40: 26.10.1931).³⁹ Shortly after his arrival, Amendola, in Zurich to meet the editor of the Swiss weekly magazine *Falce e Martello*, noticed in a newspaper his name amongst those of the patients in Arosa, and visited him, founding him very sick.⁴⁰

Piccoli was still in Arosa when Sraffa arrived in Italy for Easter holidays; not only had he suffered from a constant low-grade fever, but flu had forced him in bed for a long time. On March 30 he finally arrived in Naples, where he stayed until April 16, three days before the beginning of Easter Term. Sraffa, who had left for Paris much earlier, noted down no meetings with him, but we know that within the end of the month they talked about Croce's new book *Storia d'Europa nel secolo decimonono*. In Rome, Sraffa and Tania had decided to pretend with Gramsci (or, rather, with Italian censorship) that she needed help for a comment on that book; back in Cambridge, Sraffa recommended Tania to insist with Gramsci on the review (PS to TS 21.4.1932, Sraffa 1991: 58), and then, in his next letter, he wrote:

A friend of Croce, who met him recently, tells me that this one told him to be by now convinced that "historical materialism has no value, not even as a practical canon of interpretation"; the friend, a follower of Croce now in his forties, cannot assimilate this last change, and would leave economics a place, however small (PS to TS 30.4.1932, Sraffa 1991: 62, translation mine).

si allungava, fresco e dolcissimo. Quindi mi portò a dormire in casa di un giovane economista, Maurice Dobb" [...]. (Amendola 1980: 32-33).

³⁹ Piccoli was distressed also by the recent death of his friend Lauro de Bosis after a demonstrative flight on Rome.

⁴⁰ "Non seppi resistere alla tentazione di abbracciare un amico e di avere notizie da Napoli [...] [Piccoli] mi disse che la mia fuga da Napoli non era stata una sorpresa per lui e per gli amici che più mi conoscevano. Avevo fatto sicuramente una scelta buona, perché a lungo meditata. Come liberale si rammaricava della mia scelta, come amico ne era lieto, perché era sicuro che avevo trovato la mia strada" (Amendola 1980: 61); "'una conclusione coerente" mi disse "con le polemiche da te condotte contro l'attesismo passivo degli antifascisti." Mi confessò che egli si attendeva da un giorno all'altro da me una decisione del tipo di quella che mi aveva portato ad espatriare clandestinamente per raggiungere, come delegato della Federazione di Napoli, il IV Congresso del Partito comunista italiano. Ma aggiunse seriamente non ci siete che voi comunisti a sapere battere" (Amendola 1976: 235).

Piccoli, by then 45, had recently met Croce, to whom he had written that he would have read his new book once in Naples (RP to BC 22.3.1932);⁴¹ and the uneasiness about a perspective deserving no place to economics is coherent with his political story, as Croce's explicit denial of any value to historical materialism ruled out any tentative of conciliating liberalism and socialism. As Sraffa wrote this remark in his second letter to Tania from Cambridge, he probably discussed Croce's book with Piccoli shortly before, even if no meeting was scheduled. During Easter Term, Piccoli lectured, sketched out the project of a study of D.H. Lawrence, wrote some poems, and met often with Mrs Graham and her daughters (Alethea, now an Anglo-Catholic, the next year became a nun, cf. Mann 2013: 510). On June 22 he lunched with Wittgenstein, due to leave for holidays two days later. By then Piccoli looked weary (cf. GCPP/Tillyard/1/1/41: 24.6.1932), but he remained in Cambridge until the end of July; in August and September he was in Naples, then spent a fortnight in Arosa, and in mid-October he was back in Cambridge to start his lectures. It was along that term that Sraffa, in order to give Wittgenstein a counterexample to the idea that a proposition must have a grammar, shew him a Neapolitan gesture, that he probably chose because frequently used by Piccoli, and then familiar to him. Piccoli, though, seemingly did not meet with Sraffa, and saw Wittgenstein only once, on November 12; shortly after, as his health continued to decline, he had to go back to Arosa.

He died in Davos on January 21, the day in which Sraffa was back in Cambridge. News of his death appeared on the *Times*; and on March 4 a memorial service was held in the Magdalene College Chapel, attended, amongst others, by both Sraffa and Wittgenstein. Shortly after, the election of the new Serena Professor of Italian was announced. Notice of the vacancy of the Professorship had been given a month before, and Salvemini and Giuseppe Antonio Borgese had both asked Sraffa to "to let the Board of Electors know that they were willing to be considered for the Cambridge Chair" (Limentani 1997: 888, n.41). He had approached in this sense G.M. Trevelyan, but the British establishment "still harboured illusions and misconceptions as to the nature of Fascism, and was hardly prepared to antagonise the Italian Government at the time of appeasement by backing declared anti-fascists who were viewed as potentially subversive elements"; so, the Electors preferred "a local candidate who was well known and personally respected in Cambridge" (ibid: 888), and on March 16 Edward Bullough, a Germanist who entitled his Inaugural Lecture *Fascism as Renaissance*, was elected.

4. Conclusions

41 A selection of Piccoli's correspondence and some of his unpublished papers are held at the Archive of the Fondazione Biblioteca Benedetto Croce, Naples: I thank the Board of Directors, who granted me access to material.

Differences in age, education, and theoretical interests suggest that the friendship between Sraffa and Piccoli was more due to their being both Italians in Cambridge than to their affinities — as it happened, on the contrary, between both Wittgenstein and Piccoli (Morra 2020) and Wittgenstein and Sraffa (Morra 2017). In addition, until he fell ill, Piccoli got more and more involved with the Bloomsbury environment that Sraffa carefully avoided (as Wittgenstein, by the way); Piccoli loved to attend parties, college feasts and “to be asked to meet the young”, flattered by his “being the fashion at Cambridge” (GCPP/Graham/A1/1/1/18: 4.5.1930, GCPP/Graham/A1/1/1/19: 24.6.1930). As was said, different were also their approaches to politics, as Piccoli rejected not only Fascism for its denial of liberty, but also Bolshevism for pretending to be a state in which Science was set up as an idol, a gap between them that, even if softened by the possibility of common contacts with Carlo Rosselli, probably became wider when any project of a conciliation between liberalism and socialism was labelled by the Italian Communist leaders as a form of cryptofascism. One of their deepest affinities proved in fact the intellectual friendship they both developed with Wittgenstein in those years, and the mark they both impressed to his ‘movement of thought’ (Morra forth).

Nevertheless, their friendship should not be overlooked, as they met frequently, and data about Piccoli’s presence in Cambridge in 1929-1932 may contribute in detailing the reconstruction of Sraffa’s biography in those years.

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