



## NEWSLETTER

### Gramsci's grave and Pasolini



*Commemoration ceremony, April 2008 (Susan Sanders)*

The grave of Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) is, together with those of the poets Keats and Shelley, the most frequently visited in the Cemetery. A founder of the Communist Party of Italy (PCI) and one of the most influential Marxist thinkers of the last century, he remains – through his writings – an important voice in many debates in political science and cultural studies.

Arrested and imprisoned by the Fascist regime in 1926, Gramsci was conditionally released in 1934 when already in very poor health, and died less than three years later. During his prison years, in which he wrote his *Prison Notebooks*, he was cared for devotedly by his sister-in-law, Tatiana Schucht. Her father Apollo Schucht had spent nine years in Rome with his family after arriving in 1908 as an exile from Tsarist Russia. Tatiana was the only one to remain behind in Rome for her studies when the rest of the family (including her younger sister Giulia who would eventually marry Gramsci) returned to Russia.

Some months after Gramsci's death and cremation in April 1937, Tatiana Schucht – as a Soviet citizen and non-Catholic – requested a plot for a family tomb in the Non-Catholic Cemetery. Her elderly mother (living in the Soviet Union) was seriously ill and both Tatiana and her sister Giulia (also still in the Soviet Union) wished eventually to be buried in Rome. The two sisters, as the concession-holders, also asked that they be allowed to transfer to their new family tomb the ashes of Giulia's husband (Gramsci) which had been deposited at the Campo Verano cemetery in Rome. (This request was made despite the earlier approval of Mussolini – who no doubt saw an opportunity for a propaganda coup – for the ashes to be transferred to the family in the Soviet Union.) In September 1938 the Cemetery granted them a plot of 3 sq.m., adequate for four cremation urns, as a pre-acquisition (i.e. made prior to death) and as a permanent concession. In the event, both sisters died in the Soviet Union (Tatiana in 1943 and Giulia not until 1980) and neither of them – nor their mother – was buried in the family tomb in Rome. Before returning to Russia after Gramsci's death, however, Tatiana had had the headstone inscribed in memory of her father Apollo Schucht (1860-1933) and of her elder sister, Nadine Schucht-Leontieva (1886-1919) who had died years earlier in Tbilisi in Georgia.

The spot carefully chosen by Tatiana for the Schucht family tomb was an exceptional one, located amidst much older tombs at the end of the top

row of the Zona Vecchia, in the shadow of the Aurelian Wall. In the photo, Tatiana stands at the grave with Story's *Angel of Grief* sculpture visible in the background and, between the two, the large Cronkhite monument that is also still there today. The Schucht tomb consisted of a small casket raised off the ground on four round supports; a massive travertine headstone, bearing on one face the surname and dates of Gramsci and on the other (visible in the photo) the memorial inscription to Apollo and Nadine Schucht; and, in front, a slab over a vault to contain the future family burials. The casket bore the inscription "Cinera Antonii Gramscii" (the correct Latin word would have been 'cineres'). Since the ashes were transferred to the Cemetery late in 1938 (and not after the war, as is widely reported) and Tatiana Schucht returned to the Soviet Union soon afterwards, the photograph is datable to 1938.

The first edition (1956) of the Guidebook to the Cemetery (see *Newsletter* No. 6, 2009) places Gramsci's grave in this location on its plan (no. 18) and illustrates it, draped in ivy, in a photo that is still reproduced in the current edition.

Not surprisingly, the grave of Gramsci received a large number of visitors, none more so than on April 27 of each year, the anniversary of his death. Large delegations from the PCI, the Istituto Gramsci and other bodies, together with many sympathisers would assemble to lay wreaths and to listen to a commemorative address. These events caused some anguish to the Director and to the successive Ambassadors who served as Administrators of the Cemetery. They had to manage the crowds in the confined spaces between the gravestones, and to ensure that no political banners were unfurled or other overtly political statements made within the Cemetery. It therefore came as a relief to them when, in 1957, the Schucht family in Russia made a request to improve and enlarge the family tomb; if necessary, it could be moved to another part of the Cemetery. The Director, M.P. Piermattei, adroitly suggested that the new location should be as close as possible to the gate that gives direct access from Via Zabaglia. Not only could a larger plot be conceded but the arrival and dispersal of the crowds on commemoration days would be much easier. This solution found favour with all parties including Edoardo D'Onofrio, Vice-President of the Chamber of Deputies acting on behalf of the PCI, and the grave was moved in 1958 to its present location in the Zona Terza. During the transfer, the tomb's design was modified: the supports under the casket containing the ashes were removed and the slab that previously covered the future family



*Tatiana Schucht at Gramsci's first grave (1938?)  
(International Gramsci Society, with permission)*

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## WHO THEY WERE...

### Vilhelm (William) Zoëga Bang (1917-1989)

Tourists from the northern realms of Denmark have not been immune to the Eternal City's many charms. Some Danes including Bertel Thorvaldsen, once considered the greatest sculptor in the world, lived and worked in Rome for long periods. Others such as Hans Christian Andersen, author of the *Fairy Tales*, merely passed through, visiting the Non-Catholic Cemetery as part of their itinerary. Over the years around



*William Bang at the Pantheon (Nordphoto)*

ninety Danes have found their final resting place in the Cemetery, sixty-four of whom rest in the communal Danish tomb, the grave marker of which was designed by Margrethe II, Queen of Denmark. The inscription reads simply 'We came from Denmark. Our resting place became Rome.' One of those who rest in this communal grave is Vilhelm Zoëga Bang, known as 'William'. His story, a painter turned tourist guide, might at first seem unremarkable, but it is men like William who brought Rome alive for Danish visitors and who helped make it a key node in any Danish tourist's visit to Italy.

In 1937, as a 19-year old, William arrived in Rome on the last grant ever to be given by the Scandinavian Art Fund (Den Skandinaviske Kunstfond). He stayed in Rome painting for three years until his grant ran out. His mother then sent him the funds to purchase a ticket back to Copenhagen. However, when waiting for his connecting train in Florence, he was overwhelmed by the despair of having to leave his beloved Rome. By chance he noticed four Danes approaching the ticket office, at which point he ran over to them, shouting 'A ticket to Copenhagen for half price!' Fortune had dealt its hand and William returned to Rome.

He vowed that he had come to stay, but the war made him a French soldier. In Lyon, William's regiment was captured by the Germans and he became a prisoner of war. However, the ever industrious William escaped with a fellow Danish volunteer, cycling to freedom

across the Alps. At the end of the war, he found himself working as a bar-tender in Paris, but he longed to return to Rome. In 1949, when the author Karen Jacobsen organised the first post-war Danish group trip to Rome, William was hired as their guide. This marked the beginning of his career as a travel guide.

He settled temporarily in the town of Olevano Romano where he was later to be made an honorary citizen and awarded a gold medal for his influence in making the town better known. He continued painting there, but sold works only to close friends as he could not bear to be separated from them. However, his employment in the burgeoning tourist industry meant that he stayed for long stretches of time in Rome's guest houses while he accompanied his tourist groups around the city's sites.

In 1960, a young woman from Odense came to be interviewed by William for a position at Jørgensens Travel Agency where he was at that time employed. The moment that she stepped through the door, William threw his glass against the wall and shouted 'And there she is!' From that day until his death in 1989, the two remained inseparable.

The author Dan Turèll has noted that "Innumerable Danes in Italy - and the Italians, including our correspondent Alfredo Tesio - can testify to his [William's] and Birgit's contribution. They *gathered* people. They had room - in the extended sense: heart room and home room. Certainly there is a so-called 'Cultural Institute' for Danish-Italian relations - and nothing bad can be said about that. [...] The *real* cultural politics took place at William and Birgit's [5<sup>th</sup> floor flat in Via del Cancellio, 12 in Campo Marzio]. It was there that one met, argued, laughed, sang and drank wine."

William helped foster a love for the city of Rome in the Danes who visited it. He opened the eyes of hundreds of tourists to its many splendours. For many Danes, he was the key to Rome. He did not part with the city that he loved so dearly, and that city remains his final resting place.

Contributed by Britt Baillie, a Ph.D student at the University of Cambridge.

The source material for this piece comes from *Vi kom fra Danmark: danske gravsteder på den ikke-Katolske Kirkegård I Rom* (Copenhagen: Conradianum, 1998) by Inge-Lise and Steen Neergaard, who also kindly provided the photo.



## Honouring Sarah Parker Remond: an appeal

We are launching an appeal to erect a memorial plaque to Sarah Parker Remond, the African-American abolitionist and physician. A figure of great importance in the slavery abolition movement and in African-American history, she had moved from the USA to Europe and was eventually buried in the Cemetery. But there is no visible memorial to her – the aim of this appeal is to put right this omission.

Sarah Remond (1826-1894) came from a family in Salem, Massachusetts, that was active in the abolitionist movement and as a young woman she learned of the horrors of slavery and, at first hand, of discrimination based on colour. Largely self-taught, she lectured widely and effectively on antislavery, so much so that in 1858 she was selected to travel to England for an intensive lecture tour. After a number of years in England speaking in public against slavery and continuing her own education, she moved in 1866 to Florence where she qualified and then worked as a doctor at the Santa Maria Novella hospital. After her death in Rome, she was buried in the Zona Prima in a tomb that no longer exists, her remains having been removed to an ossuary.

Cultural historian Marilyn Richardson in the US has generously offered to raise funds to install a plaque at the Cemetery that will honour Sarah Parker Remond. For further information or to make a donation, please contact the Director of the Cemetery.



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tomb was omitted. The costs of the new, slightly bigger tomb were met by the Schucht family heirs, with the PCI making a large contribution for improving access through the gate.

Many of those who have not visited Gramsci's grave will feel that they can imagine its ambience when reading Pier Paolo Pasolini's poem "Le ceneri di Gramsci". They may also know the photograph of Pasolini standing in front of the grave. But beware! It shows Pasolini at the present grave. *He composed the poem in 1954 when Gramsci's grave was still in the Zona Vecchia.* We



*Pier Paolo Pasolini at Gramsci's relocated grave (1961)*

must therefore imagine Pasolini standing, not as in the photo shown here but in a position similar to that of Tatiana Schucht in the earlier photo. At the end of the poem Pasolini wrote: "Gramsci è sepolto in una piccola tomba del Cimitero degli Inglesi, tra Porta San Paolo e Testaccio, non lontano dalla tomba di Shelley". The grave of Gramsci in 1954 was indeed at that time "not far from the tomb of Shelley", in fact only fifteen paces distant. No wonder the shade of that earlier poet was invoked in Pasolini's masterpiece (see 'Poets in the Cemetery' below). And no wonder that the graves of Shelley and Gramsci, still in proximity but less so now than when first witnessed by Pasolini, continue to be sought out by so many admirers of their works.

Nicholas Stanley-Price

*My thanks to Amanda Thursfield for access to Cemetery records; to Francesco Giasi and Maria Luisa Righi of the Fondazione Istituto Gramsci and to Marcus Green of the International Gramsci Society for their assistance; and to Alex Booth for his re-reading of Pasolini in this new perspective.*



## POETS IN THE CEMETERY

### In whose shadow? Pasolini, Gramsci and Shelley in the Non-Catholic Cemetery

In the fifth section of his poem *Le ceneri di Gramsci* (The ashes of Gramsci) composed in 1954, Pier Paolo Pasolini writes:

*...Ah come/capisco, muto nel fradicio brusio//del vento, qui dov'è muta Roma,/tra i cipressi stancamente sconvolti,/presso te, l'anima il cui graffito suona//Shelley...Come capisco il vortice/dei sentimenti, il capriccio (greco/nel cuore del patrizio, nordico//villeggiante) che lo inghiottì nel cieco/celeste del Tirreno; la carnale/gioia dell'avventura, estetica//e puerile*

*(...O how/I understand, mute in the rotten rustling//of the wind, here where Rome is mute,/among the sighs of disconsolate cy-*

*presses./near you, soul which spelled out sounds//Shelley...How I understand the flurry/of feelings, the whim (Greek/in the heart of the northern, aristocratic/vacationer) that swallowed him up in the blind/blue of the Tyrrhenian; the carnal/joy of adventure, aesthetic//and puerile)*

Here we are then, ghosting together with the thirty-two-year-old, conflicted poet, in internal exile from his home of Friuli, from Rome, from Italy itself. Here we are then, up by the ruins of the Aurelian wall (and not as 'alone' with his compatriot as the famous photograph suggests), among those disconsolate cypresses, the poet who is both a culmination and a continuation of two different spirits: in his heart the glow of the working-class, atheist, revolutionary, Sardinian intellectual destined to die both young and in exile, Antonio Gramsci; while in his darker, secret insides, in his gut, a different revolutionary's spirit smoulders, this one aristocratic, interestingly enough also from an island, also atheistic, and also destined to die young and in exile, that *cor cordium* swallowed up by the Mediterranean, that towering English Romantic poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley.

With this new understanding, Pasolini's metaphorical suspension takes on an even more immediate *physical* suspension: his connection to and identification with both Shelley and Gramsci is no longer so abstract, as he is literally standing somewhere between the two. The light that's "not of May" together with the "impure air" the "dark, foreign garden/makes even darker" combine to become a true in-between, a dimly lit and, to the young Italian, almost sinister other-world of sounds and spirits (and let us not forget that, in addition to all the spirits in the cemetery and the ground of Rome itself, yet another spirit is speaking, and from the tomb of Shelley: the island spirit of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Ariel).

Here we are then, in a borderland at the once-edge of the "Eternal City", brought together in the alembic of that place for exiles *par excellence*, the Non-Catholic Cemetery of Rome. What do we make of the voices? How do we respond?

Alexander Booth (translations by the author)



### Keeping it beautiful...despite snow and weevils

Thanks to close co-operation with our tree consultant and with Il Trattore, the firm we have contracted for gardening, the trees and plants in the Cemetery are now benefitting from specialist care and maintenance (see *Newsletter* no. 8, Autumn 2009). But it is a large task: strategic planning, such as the regular pruning of trees, had been interrupted in past years and many trees more than 100 years old are potentially vulnerable. The tree survey we commissioned in 2008 (see *Newsletter* no.4, 2008) allows us to monitor their condition. So there is good progress to report but also some setbacks. These should be eliminated as our investment in long-term planning for the Cemetery's vegetation pays off.

#### Improvements in the Parte Antica

In this, the oldest part of the Cemetery, the tombs are sparsely distributed, many of them as flat gravestones on the grass lawn. So as to minimise the risk of damage to them during mowing, we have cut a small channel to form a frame, as it were, around each stone. In the channels we will be planting *Convallaria* which is resistant, slow-growing and of low height. Unlike grass, it should not impinge on the gravestones. Last year we did routine pruning and removed a laurel and a cypress that were dangerous. But two hot, dry summers have shown that little grass now grows under the laurels in the shaded central area; so the trees have been heavily pruned and the bare patches of ground re-seeded.

We will also be stabilising the area around the much visited tombs of Keats and Severn. In the months of February to April we will limit the

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mowing of the grass there so as to encourage the growth of wild flowers. This will allow visitors to appreciate in particular the beautiful violets and daisies, descendants of those flowers that Keats described to the dying Keats after visiting the Cemetery where he would soon be buried.

### The red palm weevil strikes!

The view of the main facade of the chapel has long been graced by a pair of beautiful tall palm trees. Sadly, one of these is no more. Late last year, the one on the right was found to be infested with the dreaded red palm weevil which for over twenty years has been the scourge of date palms in the Middle East and now the Mediterranean countries. We had no choice, in line with local regulations, other than to have it felled and its timber and foliage burnt. Another palm tree nearby in the Zona Terza was similarly infected and has also been removed. This tragedy presented us with an unexpected bill of over €4000.



Photo: Alberando

*Removal of the infected palm from the top down*



Photo: Alberando

*Protecting the healthy palm from weevil attack*

It is the larvae of the weevil (*Rhynchophorus ferrugineus*) that infest the trunk and foliage of the palm, causing damage that only becomes visible when it is too late to save the tree. Nevertheless we are having the surviving palm outside the chapel protected and treated with disinfectant in the hope of saving it. It is a fair guess that the two palm trees were planted soon after the chapel was built in 1898.

### Trees old and new

The morning of February 12 brought a rare snowfall to central Rome, no more than a light covering but enough to bring down an old pine tree in the Zona Seconda. The tree, estimated to be 120 years old, fell across the wall and damaged a few cars parked in Via Caio Cestio. Thanks to prompt action by the Director and the volunteers on duty, the Cemetery was evacuated and closed. The fire brigade immediately cut up and removed that part of the trunk fallen onto public space outside the Cemetery. Within a few days, the tree specialists of Il Trattore had efficiently removed the rest of it, root and all.

Even before this worrying incident, we had moved ahead with planting new cypress trees to replace those removed for safety reasons.



Photo: N. Stanley-Price

*The fallen tree in Via Caio Cestio*



Photo: N. Stanley-Price

*The Fire Brigade is quickly on the scene*

The new trees (*Cupressus sempervirens*) are specimens 3.5-4.0 metres high, and their graceful fresh-green profiles are already an attractive feature of the Cemetery. If you would like to sponsor one of these young trees in memory of a relative or friend who had some connection with Rome, please contact the Director for further details. The gardeners will carry out all maintenance, and you can have a dedicatory inscription on a travertine plaque set at the base of the tree. A few sponsored trees are still available - why not take up this rare opportunity?

### HOW TO BECOME A FRIEND

This Newsletter is made possible by the contributions of the Friends of the Cemetery.

The Friends also help fund the care of the trees in the cemetery and the restoration of tombs. Please can you help us by becoming a Friend? You can find a membership form at:

[www.protestantcemetery.it](http://www.protestantcemetery.it)

### THE NON-CATHOLIC CEMETERY IN ROME

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00153, Roma

Director: Amanda Thursfield

#### OPENING HOURS

Monday to Saturday 9:00am - 5:00pm  
(last entrance 4.30pm)  
Sunday & Public Holidays: 9.00am -1.00pm  
(last entrance 12.30pm)

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### NEWSLETTER

of the Friends of the Non-Catholic  
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