

' Roma o morte ': Garibaldi, Nationalism and the Problem of Psycho-biography



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Courtesy of Bruno Leoni.

Fig. 1. The late nineteenth-century Tiber (1882). Image from Isola Tiberina website (http://www.isolatiberina.it/muraglioni_e.html).



Courtesy of Bruno Leoni.

Fig. 2. The Tiber with embankments (1980). Image from Isola Tiberina website (http://www.isolatiberina.it/muraglioni_e.html).

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ARTICLES AND ESSAYS



Fig. 3. Garibaldi/Christ. From Gustavo Sacerdote, *La Vita di Giuseppe Garibaldi*, Milan, 1933.

'Roma o morte' Garibaldi, Nationalism and the Problem of Psycho-biography

by Daniel Pick

At the end of January 1875, General Giuseppe Garibaldi, the popular hero of Italian unification, left Caprera, his austere island retreat in the Mediterranean, on a journey to Rome. Once there, the old man proposed to garner support for a civic mission that had become his personal obsession: to divert the course of the river Tiber from Rome. Nearly five years earlier, the city had finally – and controversially – been incorporated into the national state of Italy which had itself emerged in 1860, thanks in no small part to the astonishing military campaigns of Garibaldi. With his enthusiastic volunteers, he had seized Sicily and the mainland South, before handing over his prize to Victor Emmanuel, the ruler of Piedmont and Sardinia, whose army had marched down through northern and central Italy to meet him.

Since the early 1870s, however, with the struggle for Italy complete, the General had become preoccupied by a particular hydraulic initiative which would involve redirecting the unruly water flow that across recorded history had caused such havoc in the Eternal City. In 1875, entering Rome for the first time in over a quarter of a century, he declared his intention to

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overcome flood and malarial fever, to drain marshes and provide irrigation for parched rural land, to make the river navigable, divert its course, create docks and fill in the water channel through the city, building over it a Parisian-style boulevard, which he anticipated would be a wonder of the modern world. The public causes and consequences of this proposal to tame the river and 'liberate' the country and the city, together with the private motives that may have lain behind Garibaldi's reasoning, are the subject of this lecture By taking the idea of contextualization to something of an extreme, my aim is also to draw attention to possibilities, and uncertainties, of historical explanation, particularly regarding the interpretation of the motives of the dead. Through this forgotten historical episode we can discern a great deal about the General, his passionate attachment to Rome, and the nature of the myth that surrounded both the man and the city.

Garibaldi was an enthusiast for the application of science to modern affairs. No intellectual or scientist himself, he was a keen follower of that most famous champion of the scientific cause, the French philosopher Saint-Simon, whose disciples had already played a role in the construction of the Suez Canal (completed in 1869) and in the pre-planning of the Panama Canal (eventually opened early in the twentieth century, but already on the cards much earlier). Garibaldi proposed to restore Rome to its former glory by harnessing the latest technology and moving the Tiber, courtesy of a sympathetic firm of English engineers who, together with various bankers and other influential figures from across Europe, had temporarily rallied to the beloved General's personal appeal for support in the 1870s. We glimpse, in the debates that preceded his intervention and followed after it, many of the prevailing medical, social and political anxieties of the time. The reconstruction of these ideas helps, in part, to explain the nature of Garibaldi's motivation. But in the ebb and flow of his curious water project, submerged currents of passion and myth swirled from and towards this larger-than-life Victorian hero and the city to which he and so many of his contemporaries were deeply committed. If they were riveted by Rome's artistic and historical greatness, they were also connoisseurs of its decadence, its sclerotic, backward-looking administration, its peculiar association with feverish illnesses and its portentous symbolic significance for the future of Italy and civilization at large.

Before Garibaldi could accomplish the regeneration of Rome, he knew he had to bend the ears of the politicians. He had opinions on various other matters besides, and planned, finally, to claim the parliamentary seat that had for many years been his for the taking. At the time this story begins, Garibaldi was internationally famous, perhaps the most widely-admired living person in the world (at least for liberals), and it would be hard to exaggerate the degree of public excitement that his long-postponed trip aroused. A vast surging crowd (a 'human ocean', said one contemporary observer)[1] gathered to see him step ashore at Civitavecchia. Every assortment of dignitary was there as were representatives of the Italian and

foreign press. A musical fanfare had been arranged, courtesy of the National Guard's own band.

News of his planned visit had been the worst-kept secret of the year. If this was billed as but the latest triumphant twist in a life filled with eventful excursions, it was also the start of a further frustrating odyssey that took the General slowly and painfully through the political and moral labyrinth of the new national capital, and ended in the deepest dismay. He wrote countless letters to promote the cause of Rome's physical revival, and to advocate ways to stem the Tiber's flood. But the necessary reforms could not be executed with the boldness and swiftness that Garibaldi had found possible in war. Accusations of inertia, corruption and folly became the backdrop to his entire Tiber project. His endeavour to effect material change in this region of Italy ran up against opposition, driving him (not for the first time) to express his outrage with the governing class. He hurled accusations of sloth and sleaze at the politicians, drawing attention (amongst his other hobby horses) to the plight of the peasants who eked out so miserable a living in the Roman Campagna,[2] and not uncommonly died before their time on its notoriously malaria-ridden land.

At the time that this affair begins, Garibaldi was often perceived as the nation incarnate, the very 'personification of Italy' (as his French admirer, George Sand, had earlier put it).[3] He had been born in 1807 in Nice (then in French hands), the third child of Domenico Antonio, a sailor. His mother, whom he adored, was called Rosa Raimondo. The family were of fairly modest means and could not afford an education for their several children, but Garibaldi's father did own a substantial vessel, through which he made his living and on which young Giuseppe was taken to sea, for increasingly adventurous expeditions. The General retained many fond memories of his youth and in later years seemed to be shadowed by a powerful sense of nostalgia.

His famous battle cry, 'Rome or Death', that provides my title, was to be immortalized in the course of the struggle for the Eternal City. Both 'Rome' and 'Death' run like red thread through the life of Garibaldi; not only because the city was the most coveted of all national sites for visionaries and soldiers, but also because, in the thick of battles, the General had appeared to court and to defy death. A survivor himself, he was chronically faced by the loss of loved companions who had died before him, sometimes directly for him, or at the least with him, not least in his several abortive effects to hold, or to seize, Rome. Leaving aside fallen comrades, just recall his family circumstances. Garibaldi had three brothers and a sister, Teresa, who at the age of two had died together with her nurse in a fire – the first of many losses. His much-loved first wife died in 1849. His mother, from whom he was separated for many years by exile, died in the 1850s. (Intriguingly Garibaldi's second wife, with whom he had had a lightning romance in 1859, was to be abandoned by him in disgust almost immediately after he had married her in 1860 when he discovered that she had had other

lovers; her surname, Raimondi, was almost identical to that of his revered dead mother, Raimondo.) Two of his daughters died in childhood, both named after his mother. Add in the death of his father, of a brother and of a third, deeply-unhappy adolescent daughter, Anna Maria Imeni (who had come to be called Anita, the name of his long-dead first wife), and one gets a measure of his misfortune, exceptional even by the standards of the day. This daughter, with whom he had only very recently been reunited after years of neglect, died in the summer of 1875, amidst his hapless campaign to remove the Tiber and save Rome from mortal danger.[4]

Whilst still a youth, Garibaldi had several times risked his life and nearly died at sea. Storms had not deterred him, however, from becoming a merchant seaman. He travelled far and wide. In the 1820s, he made his first trip to Rome, with his father, transporting a cargo of wine; they had great difficulty sailing up the barely-navigable Tiber and got into financial and legal difficulties in Papal Rome after a dispute with a buffalo farmer whose animals had been deployed to drag the cargo upriver and who sought more money than Garibaldi's father thought fair. (In 1875 Garibaldi remarked that his concern with Tiber navigation ran back fifty years to that first trip.)[5]

Despite these early water-borne difficulties, Rome's ancient ruins made a deep positive impression upon the young traveller, whilst the Church continued to make a very bad impression. By the early 1830s 'Rome' and 'Italy' had both become political ideals for young Garibaldi, cast as potentially good communities and salubrious places. Such political potential was sharply at odds with the present unhappy reality. To close the gap between the ideal and the reality of Italy became his declared goal: and in the service of that nationalist aspiration, he was drawn more deeply to the ideas and the conspiracies of that indefatigable mover and shaker of Italian hearts and minds, Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–72). Two years older than Garibaldi, Mazzini came from Genoa. The birthplaces of the two 'Giuseppes' were not far removed from one another, although they were only to link up at the time of European revolution, 1848–9. Both were to be central figure of the Risorgimento, that diffuse movement for Italian national awakening, self-rule and unification that had gradually spread its optimistic message through nineteenth-century culture and thought. Garibaldi was to become the Risorgimento's best known soldier (often cheered on by his legion of doting English admirers, drawn from all classes of Victorian society), but all this still lay in the future; as a young man he had fallen in love with the very idea of the Risorgimento, committed to the ideals of individual sacrifice and heroic personal endeavour.

Although the careers of Garibaldi and Mazzini often connected in the years of the battle for Unification, the two were of decidedly different temperaments. Mazzini was to become, in the period from 1830 to 1870, a hugely influential, but decidedly squeamish revolutionary, certainly not some simple firebrand. He was to be accused of extremism where compromise was required, and the other way round. It is true that many of Europe's

other political radicals came to dismiss Mazzini's assertions about the need for a revived moral 'spirit' in Italy as cant, the confused ravings of a closet reactionary, but in this regard Garibaldi had no quarrel with him.

Mazzini was to acquire a reputation for vacillation and depression (sometimes visitors reported how he would fall into sobbing fits); he had a strong preference for dark clothes. His more energetic or extreme supporters were sometimes dismayed by his tendency to dither and backtrack, rather than implement decisive martial plans – hardly an accusation that could hold against the decisive Garibaldi, although even he sometimes frustrated the hot-heads in his ranks by biding his time. Many found Mazzini charismatic. His very eye was said to compel. There was a touch of extravagance, a sombre tendency to isolation, that some found winning. He lived for many years in exile, much of the time in considerable poverty. With the passing years he became more sociable and had a penchant for canaries which he allowed to fly around his room in London, to the amusement or consternation of his visitors. Yet he took himself very seriously indeed. When he was briefly in charge of the Roman Republic in 1849, after the Pope had fled, critics accused him of delusions of grandeur. 'He thinks he is [the] Pope and infallible', wrote one. Or as another observer acerbically put it: 'He is pontiff, prince, apostle, Priest . . . He has the nature of a priest more than a statesman. He wants to tether the world to his own immutable idea.'[6]

The 'prophet of Italy' wrote prolifically, although it is unclear quite how much of this literature Garibaldi waded through himself. The central ideas, repeated again and again in published declarations, no doubt reached him. Various influential books, setting out the aspiration of a unified Italy, were penned in the early Victorian years; some of these appealed directly to the Papacy to lead the national cause. Mazzini's interventions were to prove the most far-reaching and influential of these appeals for change, directed first to the Pope, and then, after Pius IX's turnaround in 1848–9 (from apparent sympathy for the liberal and nationalist vision, to unequivocally hostile reaction), past him. It was a torture, Mazzini insisted, for any 'true', native-born Italian, to endure governance by 'the caprice of eight detested masters', that is to say, the various rulers of the patchwork states of the Peninsula.[7] The very principle of monarchy was anathema to Italy, Mazzini argued. It was a system imposed in the sixteenth century, under the domination of the foreigner. Garibaldi's shift from republican to loyal servant of King Victor Emmanuel II eventually grated on the more intransigently anti-monarchist Mazzini. Nonetheless, they shared the belief that a social, political and moral revolution was now required in Italy, which would take up the word of Christ, but without the constraint of orthodox religion. It was a fight of and for the soul. Mazzini appealed to his compatriots and to kindred spirits across the world:

Working men! We live in an epoch similar to that of Christ. We live in

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> the midst of a society as corrupt as that of the Roman Empire, feeling in our inmost soul the need of reanimating and transforming it and of uniting all its various members in one sole faith, beneath one sole Law, in one sole Aim, the free and progressive development of all the faculties of which God has given the germ to his creatures. We seek the kingdom of God *on Earth* as it is in Heaven, or rather, that Earth may become a preparation for Heaven, and society an endeavour after the progressive realisation of the Divine Idea.[8]

Mazzini stressed the sacred value of the Italian struggle and the essential nature of the fight against corruption. Purity and health were crucial designations of the revolutionary spirit. 'Rome was the dream of my young years, the religion of my soul', Mazzini wrote: 'I entered the city one evening, early in March [1849], with a deep sense of awe, almost of worship . . . as I passed through the Porta del Popolo, I felt an electric thrill run through me a spring of new life.' Or as he declared to the Assembly in Rome:

> Rome shall be the holy Ark of your redemption, the temple of your nation . . . Rome, by the design of Providence, and as the People have divined, is the Eternal City to which is entrusted the mission of disseminating the world that will unite the world . . . Just as to the Rome of the Caesars, which through action united a great part of Europe, there succeeded the Rome of the Popes, which united Europe and America in the realm of the spirit, so the Rome of the People will succeed them both, to unite Europe, America and every part of the terrestrial globe in a faith that will make thought and action one . . . The destiny of Rome and Italy is that of the world.[9]

Having initially hoped the Papacy would lead the struggle, Mazzini came to the conclusion (by the 1850s) that it was past redemption. The Papacy, he repeated again and again thereafter, was dead, as a result of its unholiness and its corrupt alliances (so much 'fornicating with princes', as he put it). The Papacy had been destroyed by the inquisition and medieval schisms, and by the Church's desertion of 'the people' in the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, however moribund the Papacy, Rome, he always argued, was 'the city in which broods the secret of our future religious life'.[10] Mazzini sought to reclaim the concepts of holiness, purity, cleanliness and morality *from* religion. Democracy must mould itself to these ideas, to the mission of a holy collective life. The highest individual virtue in this cause was said to be self-sacrifice. Even as he denounced the existing Church, Mazzini drew upon a quasi-religious language and offered a paean to the collective spirit of protest, all mixed in with denunciations of tyranny and the despotic forms of mind-control that kept the people subdued. Thus he spoke, with varying shades of enthusiasm and horror, of the Apostles of the Italian Campaign, of Heresy, the Soul, the Sacred, Sacrifice, Faith,

Corruption, Egotism, Fatalism, Tyranny, Individualism, Virtue, Vice and the Holy Alliances of Peoples.

If there was a single, pivotal year in Garibaldi's life, it would surely be 1833. At this time he discovered Mazzini's own embryonic vision of a united Italy and also encountered, on board ship, clandestine followers of the French socialist and champion of science, engineering and industry, Saint-Simon. The ideas of the French thinker evidently made some impression, although, again, how far Garibaldi studied the literature in detail we do not know. Nonetheless, on Garibaldi's death, his book collection was found to include an old copy of Saint-Simon's *Le Nouveau Christianisme*, alongside Shakespeare and Byron, Plutarch, La Fontaine, Voltaire and Humboldt, as well as various works on ancient history. He was also known to have read Foscolo and to have admired the ideas of Enlightenment sages such as Voltaire, Rousseau and Beccaria.[11]

After the failure in 1834 of a mutiny attempt in Liguria into which he had been drawn by the less than organizationally brilliant Mazzini, Garibaldi fled (eventually reaching Latin America), using false papers made out to Joseph Pane. In Latin America, where Garibaldi lived in exile for a good many years (returning only in 1848), he became something of a folk hero; he fought for small aspiring states against those giants Brazil and Argentina, whilst thoughts of the broken-up homeland and the various powers that dominated and divided Italy, not least the Austrian colossus to the north, were never far from his mind.[12] These had been years of ship-wreck, capture and torture, fighting and recuperation. [Figs 4, 5, 6, 7] In the literature about the life of Garibaldi that was to snowball, after 1848, in so many different parts of the world, these early struggles and agonies, would be cast, retrospectively, as quasi-sacred examples. They were pictured as the first stage in a drawn-out passion that was to play a fundamental part in nationalist mythology and historiography, but also in Garibaldi's self-perception, as we know from his own autobiographical writings. In the second half of the nineteenth century, aspects of Garibaldi's life story (and even his facial features) would gradually be merged with the image of a saint, even of Christ. Many peasants in the South did greet him directly as the Messiah. [Fig. 2.] Garibaldi loathed the Church, but had no problem in accepting this public identification with Christ, believing that the people needed spiritual ideals. He was even known to baptize children. Religion, he once declared to his followers, was good, but the Pope was anti-Christ. To a large degree, Garibaldi and the Risorgimento, even at its most fervently anti-clerical, drew upon the language and rituals of the very Catholicism it excoriated.

In 1839, still in Latin America, had come Garibaldi's fateful meeting with Anita Ribeiro, the woman who would be the great romantic love of his life and mother of four of his children.[13] He grieved at length after she died in 1849, although in due course he was to have other affairs and to be married twice more. His third wife, late in life, was Francesca Armosino. She had

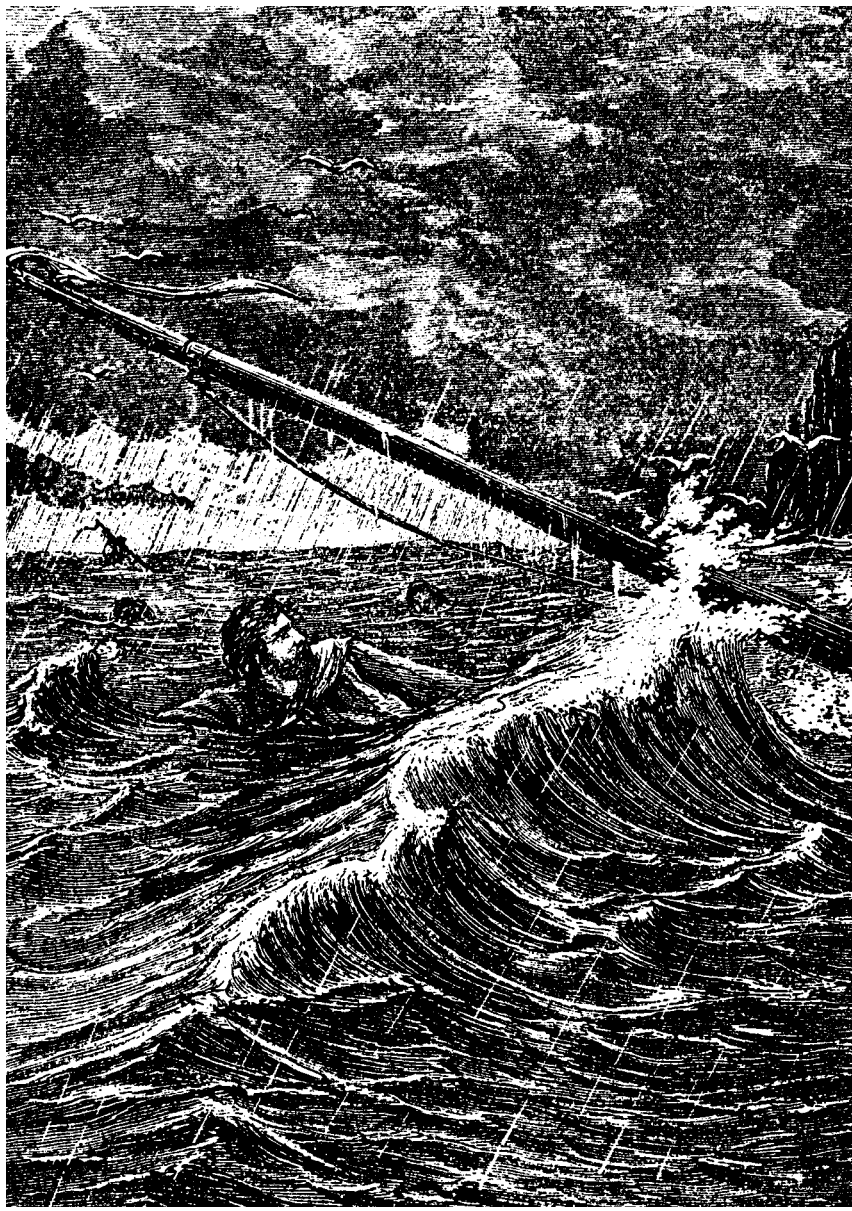


Fig. 4. Garibaldi, shipwrecked, tries in vain to save his comrades. From Gustavo Sacerdote, *La Vita di Giuseppe Garibaldi*, Milan, 1933.

first appeared in his household as a wet-nurse employed to help his daughter, Teresita, who had married very young and went on to have a large number of children. Many onlookers considered Francesca coarse but to the social embarrassment of some, he lived openly with her on Caprera, before (perhaps worse still) tying the knot. They had a couple of children in the early 1870s. Garibaldi died on his island in 1882.

In this thumb-nail sketch, I've passed over the best-known features of his life, the campaigns of 1849 in a failed defence of the Roman Republic and his triumph in Sicily and the mainland South in 1860, which was followed, to the astonishment of the great statesman Cavour and many others, by Garibaldi meekly handing over his territorial conquests to Victor Emmanuel, asking for little more than a bag of macaroni as reward.

That Rome eluded both him and the King at this juncture was a source of regret to Garibaldi. His sense of unfinished business, his disappointment, his surrender of power and refusal of trappings at that fateful meeting with the King at Teano became the stuff of legend. He made two further failed military attempts to take Rome in the 1860s, when either the Italian government, or the French, or both, thwarted him. Again and again his desire to capture Papal Rome proved elusive. He had often declared his willingness to die for Rome, and the fact that he survived, whilst having lost the city in 1849, clearly agitated him. The Eternal City was eventually seized, not by Garibaldi and his volunteers, but rather by Piedmontese troops, who marched in to take the prize, after the Pope's French defenders were finally removed.

For forty years, Garibaldi had cut a politically contradictory but enormously attractive public figure. A red-blooded warrior and a squeamish sentimentalist; a left-winger, even a self-declared socialist, yet also an authoritarian military commander; a republican who became a monarchist; an opponent of France in one period but a staunch defender of its sovereignty in another; a draconian punisher of wrong-doing and an advocate of leniency in law. In studying Garibaldi one almost inevitably succumbs at least partially to the charm of his contradictions, his foibles, his burning sense of justice, his quixotic air of puzzlement and his apparent indifference to class and rank.

The attraction of Garibaldi may be apparent enough in my account now; certainly it shines through in all those classic Victorian representations of the General. There were no end of eulogies from nationalistic journalists and companions in war such as his old-Etonian white-suited sidekick, Colonel Forbes; hymns on his mesmeric attractiveness penned by a phalanx of French literary admirers, such as Sand, Hugo and Dumas;[14] fond accounts by various friends and memoirs by one or two mistresses (not always so exclusively fond); and the grand oratory of his innumerable Italian devotees, including Carducci, D'Annunzio and many others.[15] His twentieth-century chroniclers were at least half-smitten, as we see in the studies of the General penned in the inter-war period by Sacerdote (who



Fig. 5. Garibaldi the prisoner receiving a visitor who brings food and medicine. From Gustavo Sacerdote, *La Vita di Giuseppe Garibaldi*, Milan, 1933.

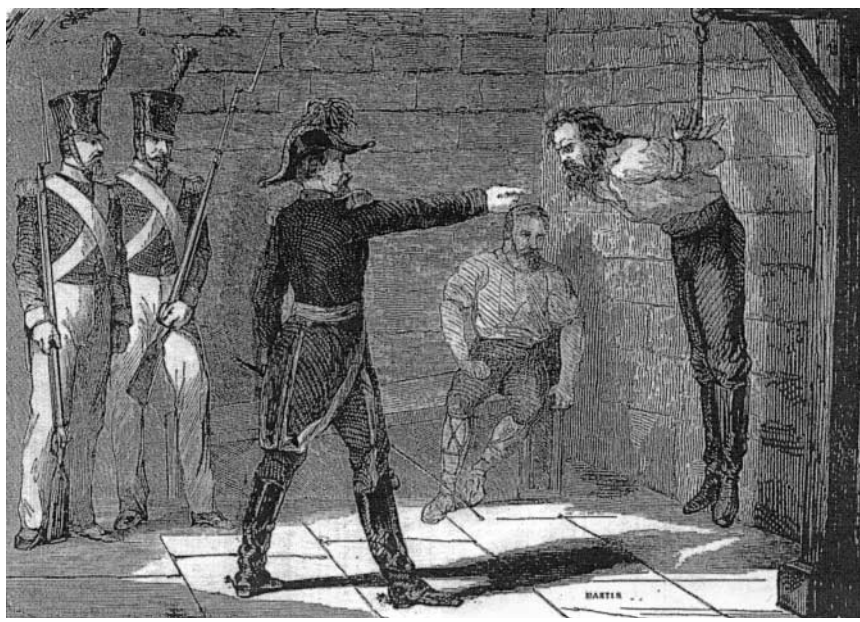


Fig. 6. Garibaldi subjected to torture in a Latin American prison. From Camille Leynadier, *Mémoires authentiques sur Garibaldi . . .*, Paris, 1860.

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valiantly rebutted, on behalf of the Italian nation, the preposterous claim that Garibaldi was really no Italian at all, but was, in fact, by descent, a German).[16] In this country, Garibaldi was always an honorary Englishman, or at the least, 'simpatico', as we can see, in the Victorian literature, and even in several recent books. Few have quite matched the passionately enthusiastic rendition of the General by Trevelyan, before 1914, who in his swashbuckling three-volume account of Garibaldi's extraordinary exploits represented him as the quintessential hero of the nineteenth century. Only in the inter-war period did Trevelyan come to worry that Garibaldi might have paved the way for a fascist politics that had proved increasingly distasteful to the English historian's own Whiggish sensibilities.[17]

* * *

Arriving to much fanfare in Rome in 1875, Garibaldi was wined and dined, given an audience with the King (to whom he spoke fervently about the Tiber) and invited to address Parliament, where he set out his plans to deal with floods and spoke loftily of creating a new canal to the east, rebuilding the crumbling ancient sewers, and filling in the water channel that ran through central Rome. He expected Parliament to jump to it and provide the necessary legislation and funds, not simply to talk about it and slap him on the back.

Garibaldi made exploratory trips down river, plumbing the depth, studying river angles and flow rates. He hoped to create new docks at Fiumicino, to make the Tiber easily navigable to the city, as it had been in ancient times, and to reclaim a vast territory of marshy land in the notorious 'Campagna Romana'. None of these in themselves could be called idiosyncratic or irrational aims and, given the remarkable engineering and technological achievements of these years, they were by no means implausible.

Yet I suggest this Tiber project encapsulated not only realistic environmental and economic goals, but also, in microcosm, many of the cultural fears and fantasies, the utopian political dreams, anti-clerical hatreds and medico-moral terrors, that dominated the period in which modern Italy was created. They also bring to light something more personal, obsessive and self-defeating in Garibaldi himself. It remains to be seen how far the interpretative task I have set myself – assessing why Garibaldi sought to divert the Tiber – can be pursued with conventional historical methodology (more on the methodology later).

Before admitting defeat for his Tiber plan (he finally threw in the towel as late as 1878), Garibaldi and his acolytes insisted that this drastic blueprint was the only way to revitalize the city and restore public health. Keep in mind how malaria shadowed the social experience and the cultural perception of Rome and the entire region, and how it was thought to be linked with the climate of wetlands such as the marshy areas of the Roman Campagna and the flood-prone city.

In this period, some 15,000 deaths a year were the norm for malaria in the Italian peninsula. It is true that cholera, tuberculosis and typhoid rates were sometimes higher than this, but malaria was a source of much public debate, for several reasons, not the least the fact that the disease was prevalent in and immediately around Rome itself. Moreover, if it killed 15,000, its debilitating effects were felt by vastly more, perhaps as many as two million people a year. Small wonder then that malariology loomed so large as a political and scientific priority in post-Unification Italy.

Quite how malaria came about nobody could be sure; many explanations appeared during Garibaldi's lifetime to seek to understand the disease. A few years after Garibaldi's last Roman adventure, a remarkable group of Italian researchers were to be at the forefront of the international scientific campaign that successfully pinpointed the parasites and the vector of the mosquito that indeed brings us malaria. But pondering the problem in the 1870s, Garibaldi knew nothing of that, and still adhered to the explanation widely believed since ancient times: the disease was the product of noxious vapours. The very words '*mal aria*' point us to the underlying miasmatic theory: the fever was thought to stem from bad air, itself a product of sick soil. But in Garibaldi's view the detritus of the city and the noxious effects of its sinister vapours were also symptoms of a deeper corruption. Like many of his contemporaries (and indeed predecessors), he pointed a finger at the evil swamps of the Roman Campagna and warned of the untold harm that polluted, sodden ground in and around the city produced.

Rome's economic problems and medical dangers were chronically compounded, so it was feared, by the unbounded state of the Tiber. Disastrous Tiber floods, as Garibaldi well knew, had been noted across the ages, and solutions had been discussed by any number of leaders, from the Caesars to the Popes and on to Napoleon. The roll-call of those who sought to redirect Italian rivers includes Leonardo da Vinci and Machiavelli, who in 1503 launched a plan to move the Arno and make it navigable. Brunelleschi too had plans to divert the river and swamp the unruly city of Lucca. How much Garibaldi knew of all that, we cannot say, but to continue a moment longer with this excursion into an earlier age, one might also mention that when Shakespeare's Antony declared to Cleopatra, 'Let Rome in Tiber melt and the wide arch / Of the ranged empire fall!', his words of love resonated with the recent history of death and destruction, namely the terrible floods that submerged Rome in 1598.

In moving the Tiber, Garibaldi was consciously continuing a grand tradition and furthering noble historical ambitions: he wanted Rome restored to its past glories; indeed he wanted modern Rome to eclipse its predecessors. Like Mazzini, Garibaldi dreamed of a morally regenerated 'third Rome', a worthy heir to the ancients.

Garibaldi's speeches and his novels, published in the early 1870s, depict the Roman Church as fallen into a sink of debauchery. To the embarrassment of his followers, he wrote and even published several pot-boilers

about the sexual and political corruption of Papal Rome. (One was translated into English under the title, *The Rule of the Monk*.) These fictions tell us much about his wish for purification and cast light on his campaign against miasma and disease. In turning back the Tiber, Garibaldi sought to provide a practical demonstration of the 'derring do' that might prevail in the new secular state, an antidote to the lethargy and sloth of the past.

In fact however, things did not go well for Garibaldi in Rome in 1875 and he spent much of his time writing letters calling on his colleagues to rise to the task, or complaining about the disappointing intransigence of the new Roman authorities. Despite the enormous public good will he enjoyed, Garibaldi's initiative was to prove a drawn-out saga of deferred decisions, worthy of Kafka, or perhaps, more to the point, of the twentieth-century Italian writer, Leonardo Sciascia who, in the course of one of his fictional evocations of the sinister social collusion and omnipresent underworld of Sicily, memorably described the masochistic moment, well-known to all citizens, of entering 'the labyrinth' of any public office, most especially the Ministry of Justice in Rome.[18]

The government enmeshed Garibaldi in committees and inquiries. He was led by the nose as the sceptical politicians, technicians and administrators balked at the cost, or muttered about his suspect motives, whilst ostensibly welcoming his interest in reform. In practice, they ensured that a quite different practical (and more economical) solution to the floods was found, namely the vast embankments that now contain and channel the river, a solution that can be witnessed by any visitor strolling along the Tiber today.

The 1870s crisis around Rome and the Tiber (to say nothing of the flood-prone Arno and Po) owed a great deal to recent political events, in particular outrages to the dignity of the Church. No surprise that images of the Virgin Mary were placed beside swollen rivers such as the Po in these years. No surprise in the sense that the tenacious beliefs and superstitions of the population of rural Italy had often been remarked and had caused raised eyebrows on many earlier occasions. Nowhere was the peasant thought-world of magic spells and curses found to be more alive than in the hinterlands of Rome itself. Stendhal, author of the *Promenades in Rome* (1829), observed that the people of the Campagna were so steeped in Catholicism that in their eyes, no natural event ever occurred without a miracle.[19] Or consider this description of the lives of rural folk, offered by an Italian historian early in the twentieth century:

> The most laborious, most unhappy, most resigned, and least exacting of this population were the labourers of the Campagna and the vine cultivators. They visited Rome on Sundays, dressed in their primitive costumes, their faces showing traces of malaria; they assembled in the piazzas to buy provisions, to get their letters written by the public letter-writer, or to be shaved, sitting under the characteristic . . . umbrella.[20]

Even after the First World War, medical specialists lamented that peasant ignorance and false beliefs severely hampered educational efforts in the so-called national 'war on malaria'. Folklore and an 'industry of miraculous cures' were still being used as prophylactics, despite being completely useless, complained one seasoned campaigner, Dr Cremonese, in 1924.[21]

Rome's river had catastrophically immersed the streets at the end of 1870, soon after Christmas, in the very year in which the Eternal City was taken from the Pope and incorporated into Italy. This historical event, the flood of December 1870, provides another tier of explanation for Garibaldi's project. Whilst the priests thundered that this was God's punishment for the secular overthrow of Holy Rome (echoes of Noah and the flood), indignant patriots were desperate to ensure there was no repeat. The superstitions of the King, who believed God would take revenge and he might well die on his first night in Rome (following predictions from various angry clerics), added to the air of uncertainty, and contributed to the pressure on the political class to do something about the alarming 'omen' of the Tiber.

The public mood, then, was sombre at the end of 1870 as Victor Emmanuel and the royal procession headed past the Coliseum and the Forum. Talk of dead bloated bodies floating downstream can have done little to lighten the atmosphere or reassure the royal party. Some observers reported seeing luxurious items – carpets, silks, velvets and other costly fabrics – from shops in and around the Corso, bobbing along on the water, or ending beached up in some filthy corner. The King, who disliked the city of Rome to start with, was only too relieved to be able to appeal to a pressing appointment in Florence. Due to his superstitions his head never touched a pillow and he left the Eternal City by train, at the end of his first day there.[22]

Thus we go a long way towards understanding Garibaldi's purpose by pointing to the perceived humiliation of the 1870 flood, to secular republican desires to scotch religious claims about its significance, and to Saint-Simonian inspired enthusiasm for industry and engineering which clearly informed his thought. Yet despite these highly-charged circumstances, he was caught up in a slow-motion psycho-drama, replaying a familiar Roman scenario in which naive reformers fell foul of the wiles of the intransigent old guard or were stabbed in the back. Inevitably, it seemed, benign wishes for change were ensnared in the seductive but deadly political labyrinth of Rome, a world of smoke and mirrors, intrigue, self-interest and disillusionment, which various intellectuals and novelists of the time were also busy exploring, and which even in far more recent times has informed political perceptions of the meaning and malaise of Italy. We might also see in this polarized Roman rhetoric of Garibaldi and Mazzini a powerful imaginary fashioning of the Papacy into the demonic and poisonous 'other' of liberalism and republican nationalism. By the 1850s, both men had moved a long

way from the early hopes that the Pope could lead this new nationalist crusade.

Certainly there was no shortage of Victorian accounts in which the Catholic Church was seen not merely to have neglected the Roman Campagna, but indeed to have aided and abetted its physical destitution for the most perverse 'spiritual' or 'aesthetic' purposes. Garibaldi had rather relished such tales of clerical malice and had accused the Pope and his underlings of contriving to produce environmental and social neglect. He railed against the cruel indifference shown to the plight of the rural people. The priests, he complained, look stupidly to the past or the hereafter, averting their eyes from the practical tasks of the present, thereby obstinately barring development. For Garibaldi, the Campagna was a painful monument to historical decline and the people's suffering. In *The Rule of the Monk*, he gave characteristic expression to his dismay at the unhappy changes brought about in this environment.

> That country once so populated and fertile, is now all barren and deserted, indeed, it would be difficult to find another spot on earth that presents so many objects of past grandeur and present misery as the Roman Campagna. The ruins, scattered on all sides, give pleasure to the antiquary and convince him of the prosperity and grandeur of its ancient inhabitants, while the sportsman finds beasts enough to satisfy him, but the lover of mankind mourns over it as a grave-yard of past-glories, with the priests for sextons.[23]

As late as the 1930s, the great Roman malariologist Angelo Celli had to explain afresh that it was not strictly true to say that the Papacy had wished to kill the people by deliberately creating the conditions of malaria.[24] To a large degree, after 1848, it was rational to perceive Catholicism as inimical to the nationalist cause, but the rhetoric of Garibaldi, Mazzini and their followers was as freighted with sacred symbolism and as tinged with spiritual ideals and moral dictates, as the 'tyrannical' religious organization they attacked. Close exploration of the image of Italian corruption and deadliness in the past could no doubt serve as an intriguing point of comparison in assessing the shifting political circumstances and cultural image of Italian morbidity in more recent times – and what subject could be more topical today as Berlusconi, the Italian prime minister, continues to fend off the investigating magistrates? To trace an earlier history of representation of the labyrinth of Rome might enable us to question certain aspects of the narrative of Italian historical peculiarity and to compare and contrast the anti-Roman laments that have dominated political life in the last two *fins de siècle*. None of this is to imply some unchanging Italian destiny, nor to dissolve the material and social complexity into the mists of recurring political dreams and laments. Still less is it to deny that the country faces real problems of political debasement, corruption, crime and

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graft, but it is to ask how far our commonplace views that the state is fatally flawed, even uniquely grotesque in its political fate, may contain earlier representations and myths. For an inquiry into contemporary political circumstances and the pitfalls of interpretative 'fatalism', Paul Ginsborg's recent study, *Italy and its Discontents* (2001), is exemplary.

Ginsborg provides a far-reaching assessment of corruption and a concise summary of the rhetorical uses of anti-Roman rhetoric today; he sets out the complex contemporary difficulties of life in the Peninsula, the remarkable upsides and downsides of the economy, polity and social life in a state weakened by maladministration, indeed 'crippled' from the outset, its public services so often wholly inadequate to the task. Wherever one stepped in the field of public services in the late twentieth century, 'one sank immediately into a bog'; indeed as a critical variable in Italy's competitive capacity, most of such services can be judged a 'dismal failure'. According to an estimate in the 1990s, each Italian citizen lost an average of fifteen to twenty working days a year in having to cope with bureaucracy. The remarkable exposure in the 1990s of the vast system of patronage, clientelism, corruption and inefficiency that proved to be pervasive across the country, was often to be summarized under the name of 'Rome'. 'As for Rome', Ginsborg remarks,

> it had never succeeded in becoming the driving force of the country. During the 1980s, its image as a centre of consumption and of bureaucracy had become more marked, both in reality and, more importantly, in the collective imagination. Its identity as the '*capitale corrotta*' [corrupt capital] of the Republic was one it had difficulty in shedding; its dual nature, as capital of the Italian nation but also of world Catholicism, granted it a special but ambiguous status.[25]

Meanwhile, the period saw the rise of a political movement in the North, intent on undoing the historic bond between North, Centre and South, freeing the individual from the 'thieves of Rome'. In short, notions of the capital as the '*cloaca maxima*' [main sewer] of Italy, or worse still, the fatal cancer in the national body politic, still resonate, albeit in quite different social and political circumstances. Anathema though his separatism would have been to Garibaldi, the anti-Roman rhetoric of Umberto Bossi (leader of today's Northern League) certainly keys in with that powerful Risorgimento contempt for the ineptitude of 'Rome' sketched in this lecture. In their meteoric rise to national prominence Bossi and the League frequently provided thundering denunciations of 'thieving Rome'.[26] Of course, descriptions of the government's sleazy accommodations with, and lazy indifference to, graft cannot simply be put down to the expediency of politicians on the make, nor to the sometimes flamboyant posturing of investigating magistrates. But recognition of the reality of direct and indirect corruption, conflicts of interest and the deep-rooted obstacles to progressive change has

often given way to catch-all diagnoses, to ominous narratives and political solutions, not least, the lure of fascist moral supremacism.

* * *

Is it also a kind of convenient fiction that we, as historians, deploy, when we claim to know the motives or even the underlying psychological attitude of the dead? Garibaldi's biographers often assume that we can. But was he, as is often said, out of his depth, in seeking to seize and regenerate Rome? In the present context, one wonders whether naivety is the right word to describe his campaign, as he entered the capital and sought to clean it up, taking on the government (first of the Right, and then, in 1876, of the Left), pushing them to wage war on the very elements, the air and water of Rome? An alternative explanation may be worth considering: that he indulged in a kind of performance, allowing himself to be 'set up', staging (consciously or unconsciously) a final bitter defeat, an object lesson in the political and moral incapacity of the new leaders to live up to the aspirations of the Risorgimento's founding fathers.

The diversion of his Tiber project was to prove a further chapter in the legend of Garibaldi's martyrdom, even of his crucifixion, (a myth after all that he himself had actively and knowingly shaped). The final failure of his Tiber scheme confirmed the General's critical attitude, his profound disappointment in the calibre of the state's new rulers, his realization of the vast gap between the romantic ideal and the sordid reality of 'Italy'. It was in part to redeem the failure of his 'heroic spirit', that, half a century later, Mussolini made reference to the General's heroic but thwarted example. The *Duce's* own notorious 'march on Rome' was to be followed by his declaration of the urgent task of draining the Pontine Marshes and the need to wage a new 'fascist war' on malaria.

Mussolini referred back to the General's inspiration, and linked this with his own struggle for Rome. In a speech in Udine in 1922, he declared that '[w]e think of making of Rome the city of our spirit, a city well disciplined, disinfected of all the elements which corrupt it and disfigure it; we are thinking of making of Rome the pulsating heart, the agile spirit of that Imperial Italy of which we dream'.[27] There were other influences upon the *Duce*'s political thought in general and his projects for health reform and land reclamation in particular, but it is striking how the Fascist leader came to place great store in those same regenerative projects for the Eternal City and the Campagna that Garibaldi had already taken to heart in the nineteenth century. As Mussolini declared:

> If Mazzini, if Garibaldi attempted three times to reach Rome, and if Garibaldi placed before his Redshirts the tragic inexorable dilemma, 'Rome or death', that means that amongst the best men of the Italian *Risorgimento*, Rome fulfilled an essential function of the first importance to be carried out in the new history of the Italian Nation![28]

The *Duce's* own skilfully fashioned career mimicked aspects of Garibaldi's life and sought to reverse the trajectory of his political defeat.[29] Mussolini endeavoured to link himself and his burgeoning movement to the greatest of the Risorgimento's heroes and his illustrious nineteenth-century 'volunteers'. It was, by implication, at least in part, as homage to him, that the fascist leader now pursued the unfinished project of Italian detoxification, seeking to conquer the 'swamps' of Italy, literally and metaphorically. Under Mussolini, the Pontine Marshes were drained, as part of his policy of internal colonization. Here the fascists could claim to be achieving a coveted goal that had eluded so many Roman leaders in the past.

Not all of the impetus behind this new 'war on malaria' can be attributed to fascism, of course; and still less can the urgency of the problem in twentieth-century Italy be ascribed principally to Garibaldi. Despite the major anti-malaria initiatives inaugurated at the turn of the century, the death-rate from the disease in Italy had in fact increased during the First World War. Thus malaria was almost bound to have been a political and social priority for any post-war government, and scores of doctors, nurses and scientists continued to devote their lives to alleviating the humanitarian tragedy induced by the accursed anophelene mosquitoes. Whereas in 1914, the numbers of deaths were charted at around 2,000 a year, in 1918 they had risen to about 11,500. Influenza went on to kill many of those already weakened by the insect's pernicious bite. The Italian dimension of malaria remained very much in the public eye, amongst health professionals at home and overseas. An article in the journal *The World's Health* in 1923 went so far as to claim that '[m]alaria is essentially an Italian problem'. Many of the best-known experts on the disease were Italian and the campaign against the fever continued to involve a major political and scientific effort by the national authorities. Seeing the massive endeavour of the Italians in their campaign to eradicate the disease, Dr Wickliffe Rose, Director of the Rockefeller Foundation, declared in 1922: 'This is the biggest piece of work ever done in malaria; it is Faust's dream realized!' But all that said, Italian malariology in the inter-war period was increasingly to be conceived as, precisely, a triumph for fascism. Some admiring onlookers, and working malariologists, celebrated the fact that the reclamation of marshland dreamed of by Caesar, considered by Napoleon and vainly demanded by Garibaldi, was now actually being realized under fascism.

Rural reclamation and campaigns against malaria certainly were of enormous political and medical significance, and long-term public gains clearly followed from such endeavours, across and beyond the first half of the twentieth century. The aim of producing malaria-free land for internal colonization was extended, building on legislative measures that had already been put in place around 1900. Rome and the Campagna, as well as other mainland black spots, together with the islands of Sicily and Sardinia, were gradually liberated from malaria. Sometimes new residential quarters were developed on what had once been marshy wastes. Work

proceeded in order to sanitize streets, improve sewers, contain and regularize the flow of the Tiber; remove unwanted ponds and swamps. But in less material ways too, the example of Garibaldi, his aspirations, achievements and disappointments continued to resonate with the hopes and disappointments of these later generations.

Thinking as a historian about the Tiber affair, I would see our primary task to be the reconstruction of the various contexts (social, cultural, political, medical) that 'make sense' of the venture at the time. As a psychoanalyst, I am inclined to emphasize that for the General himself, the stakes and motives were more personal and painful than any straightforward historical analysis can show. Indeed perhaps we would need to turn back to another passionate lover of Rome, Sigmund Freud, to ponder in more detail the stakes of such a Roman obsession. I do not have time now to go into Freud's own remarks on or dreams about Rome, although cannot resist mentioning that one of Freud's dreams, reported in his great book of 1900, conflated Garibaldi on his death bed with the image of Freud's own dying father: 'Those of us who were standing round had in fact remarked how like Garibaldi my father looked on his death-bed.'[30] A more important question here might be how far the Freudian assumption that there is an unconscious process at work can be brought to bear, in order to illuminate something of the General's own, evidently complex attitudes to the Eternal City, and to enable us to speculate more convincingly about the reasons for his drawn-out defeat.

Garibaldi's life, I suggested earlier, had always been shadowed by death. These losses left him, as he himself acknowledged, a man chronically bereaved. How far he was 'in mourning' and how far defending himself against mourning by his frantic round of war-time and peace-time activity is a moot point. Either way, it appears as if the death of his beloved wife, Anita, a quarter of a century before the Tiber regeneration affair of 1875, continued to haunt him in later life. She had died, prematurely, in 1849, having apparently contracted malaria 'under the walls of Rome'. The illness had occurred as the General and his volunteers were chased from the city, through the boggy Campagna, after the collapse of the Roman Republic in 1849.

Briefly, Mazzini had ruled Rome and Garibaldi had made his name in defending the city from the international forces that were intent on restoring the Pope and rolling back the revolutionary tide that had engulfed Rome, just as it had swept through so much of Europe. When the Republic fell, Garibaldi and Anita, by then six months pregnant, fled hot-foot towards the coast, in an extraordinary cat-and-mouse chase where they were tracked by four pursuing armies fighting for the Pope. Gradually, Garibaldi's followers dwindled in number, as soldiers melted away into the night. (For Garibaldi it was to be one of many moments when even his followers fell short of the ideal.)

The Pope was to re-enter Rome in 1850, by which time Garibaldi had



Fig. 7. Anita and Giuseppe Garibaldi in desperate flight from the Austrians. From Gustavo Sacerdote, *La Vita di Giuseppe Garibaldi*, Milan, 1933.

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escaped his pursuers, to fight another day; but to his intense distress, Anita had grown weaker and weaker in that terrible retreat. Increasingly desperate, he carried her from place to place, through the marshy countryside inland from the Adriatic coast. [Fig. 7.] Many images and writings were produced to commemorate this episode, centred on the perception of Garibaldi's heroic but hopeless endeavour to keep this loved woman alive. As she lay dying, she questioned whether he would stay with her to the very end, and then asked only that he remember her kindly to their children.

We know from several sources, that he found these days, these words, lacerating. Perhaps he never got over it. He and his circle certainly perceived it to be the defining personal tragedy of his life. To tell the story of Garibaldi and the Tiber is thus not only to write a chapter in the cultural and medical history of post-Unification Italy, it is also to explore one man's obsession with avoidable death, with the fate of a loved person. It may be that his feelings for Anita and his concern with the wider catastrophe of life and death in the Campagna were linked. The Tiber affair of 1875 certainly bore witness to his intent to overcome the sorrows and failings of the collective past through a heroic personal act of devotion. With this in mind, we may be better placed to interpret his final public wager on the restoration of health and hygiene, following his painful personal quest to 'make adequate reparation', by breathing new life into the moribund city of Rome.

If the affair of the General and the Tiber can be opened out in a historical direction – that is, used to illuminate a particular cultural and ideological moment – it also takes us to the dilemma of psycho-biography as method. Should we take into consideration what *The Times* newspaper (in a fond obituary of 1882) called the 'unconscious contradictions' of the General's mind?[31] This is thorny ground and many historians, before and after Freud, have declared their scepticism (often well-founded) for forms of historical explanation that rely too heavily upon psychology.

Within anthropology, philosophy and historiography, fictions underpinning the idea of 'the author' were frequently exposed. In the human sciences of the second half of the twentieth century, the very idea that it might be profitable to explore the psychology of the dead seemed entirely the wrong direction to go. Via various versions of Marxism, of intellectual and social history, of structuralism and post-structuralism, even of certain approaches to psychoanalysis itself, biography seemed not only problematic (how could it be anything other than problematic, after Freud?), but profoundly misconceived from the start. It was, on occasion, judged irredeemably naïve to set off from the intention or self-perception of authors. After Lévi-Strauss, Barthes, Foucault and others had so effectively demonstrated the ways in which myths, desires, beliefs and tastes are produced, to chart the history of the 'experience' and private thoughts of an isolated individual became ever more questionable. As Sean Burke copiously illustrates in his book, *The Death and Return of the Author* (1992), reactions against

'biographical positivism' became extreme. The goal of the human sciences, Lévi-Strauss had influentially declared, 'is not to constitute man, but to dissolve him'. Analysis of structure replaced phenomenology. Extreme forms of 'anti-subjectivism' were valorized. We learned to explore the socially-given polarities, the logics of particular systems of thought, or the ubiquitous effects of discourses, and this left little if any space for pondering, other than critically, 'psycho-biography'. Indeed in many respects these influential approaches to thought were constituted in derision of any such a venture. They sought to show the trans-historical systems of human organization that structure our sense of what it is to be a person or conversely helped us discern the historically-contingent languages through which even concepts as fundamental as life and death could be produced and transformed.

Whatever their considerable merits, these diverse traditions of thought often led, as Miri Rubin has put it in the recent collection of essays, *What is History Now?*, to 'notoriously impersonalizing' accounts of the past.[32] When Barthes and Foucault questioned the meaning, or even the possibility, of 'the author', these writers did so in a playfully paradoxical sense, for they were in the profoundest sense, personal stylists. But whatever else was at stake, the death of the author was not announced in a spirit of lament. Inspired by such developments, various genres of historical writing, including for instance, new historicism, sought to show how the very subjectivity of past protagonists was itself fashioned in specific cultural circumstances.

Whether in its old Eriksonian versions (*Young Man Luther*) of the 1950s or in its more recent and sometimes theoretically-sophisticated incarnations, psycho-history has also evoked considerable scepticism amongst the most important current practitioners of intellectual history in Britain. In his wide-ranging work, Quentin Skinner, for instance, has not been tempted to speculate about the unconscious wishes of the various thinkers he considers, and he sets out some compelling reasons for this insistent exclusion. Rather, he urges us to situate ideas in intellectual contexts, in frameworks of discourse. Like many others, I have found his approach cogent, lucid and methodologically useful, although here I want to think aloud about that important area that is so knowingly left aside; the area of exclusion that we might call, in shorthand, the 'internal world'. Drawing particularly on Wittgenstein's later interest in language games and on the speech-act theory of philosophers John Austin and John Searle (with its particular emphasis on the performative aspects of communication), Skinner has also consistently explained how we must look at political language as itself a discursively-constructed performance. In attending to speech, he suggests, we need to be alert to its function in doing something, not simply representing something; words work their effect on an object, in a debate. They are, in a concrete sense, 'interventions' designed to inflect debate, and to impinge upon their readers. Skinner notes that these intentions of speech may or may not

succeed in eliciting the desired response or effect in the recipient of the discourse. The communication may 'get through' or may 'misfire'. Yet curiously this kind of insight has never been fully linked up with the contemporaneous Kleinian psychoanalytic literature on projection, projective identification and enactment, that examines the ways that a patient may unconsciously draw an analyst, into a particular kind of collusion. Nor am I aware that Kleinian psychoanalysts have derived any inspiration from the philosophical tradition that has been central to 'intellectual history'. These streams of thought, developed in such close temporal and geographical proximity, have remained, apparently, entirely distinct from one another. Yet in both cases, 'performatives' are at issue: words functioning as deeds that are consciously, or unconsciously, contrived to achieve a desired outcome, in the mind of the object.

Quentin Skinner shows us that we must endeavour to recognize not only what authors were saying in the past, but also what they were doing by saying it. Alongside, he offers various salutary warnings against the anti-historicist and reductionist tendencies of psycho-history. By focusing on intentions rather than motives, it may be feasible to leave aside the problem of the unconscious. But if, as in the present discussion, we ask a question about motives, it is much harder to see how we could satisfactorily proceed without recourse to the rich vocabulary and clinical experience of psychoanalysis. The choice of intellectual resources required will depend heavily on the question we pose at the start. If we follow the historiographical route impressively developed by Skinner, then, we would not seek to ask a question about Garibaldi's motives; we would not endeavour to enter his head and explore his unconscious conflicts, but rather, would seek to locate the culturally circulating epistemic rationality presupposed by his discourse. We would examine his intentions as manifested in the various texts that he produced, and we should aim to find out, in the context of these, and surrounding statements, what he was doing in saying what he said.[33]

For the most part, Freud has simply been off the radar screen of twentieth-century British historiography. There are exceptions. The shortcomings and possibilities of psycho-history have been central to the work of several editors of *History Workshop Journal*, and I have found discussions with and publications by Lyndal Roper and Sally Alexander (as well as the seminar series that she and Barbara Taylor have run at the Institute of Historical Research) helpful in offering a route out of the traditional stalemate between psychology and history. I owe a particular debt to Gareth Stedman Jones for his advice over many years, not least in this thorny terrain. Gareth has powerfully demonstrated in his work the pitfalls of various forms of historical reductionism, including psycho-biography. As he writes in his recent introduction to the *Communist Manifesto*, '[t]oo often insights derived from psychological speculation turn out to be unfounded or else to be what the French utopian socialist Charles Fourier described as "the fifth wheel on the cart" – an assumption that adds nothing to an explanation

reached more securely by a different route'. Serious attention to the history of ideas, he points out, can lessen these dangers by 'distinguishing more sharply between those propositions or modes of expression peculiar to a particular author and those that derived from a shared genre or theoretical system'.[34]

Here I have sought to keep in mind the pros and cons of such terms of explanation, and to ask how far the conventional historical 'wheels' might prove serviceable in carrying us forward to an understanding of this project. To summarize, these historical factors surrounded Garibaldi's project: 1. The widely-perceived dangers of flood (in turn linked to the dangers of malaria). 2. The political priority given to the moral purification, spiritual salvation and material regeneration of Rome in the wider ideology of the Risorgimento. 3. The practical critique of the inactivity of the Catholic church and the sloth of post-Unification governments that had left the city – and its river – in a perilous and crumbling condition. 4. The Saint-Simonian-inspired vision of harnessing modern science and industry in the creation of new social and economic infrastructure. Each of these headings could be drawn out further. We might well wonder, for instance, whether the dramatic turn around in the fortunes of the river Thames had inspired the General after the notorious 'great stink' of 1858.

But, having drawn your attention to such factors, I have sought to suggest that something still remains to be explained: namely the obsessional stakes of the project. Here we may need Fourier's fifth wheel after all. We may eschew this terrain and decide that the personal stakes are ultimately insignificant to the wider ebb and flow of history, but if we do pursue individual biographical considerations, and specifically if we seek to venture a guess at a subject's motives, we do well to recognize, with Freud, the complexity of the terrain we are entering.

Thus in returning to the conundrum of why Garibaldi sought to move the Tiber, we are left to ponder not only the relevant social and economic material, the medico-moral context, the complex range of ideological constraints, but also the problem of psycho-biography. We can pose the key historical questions as follows: How was Garibaldi represented in discourse and culture? What was Garibaldi himself doing? How were his beliefs fashioned from outside? What did he intend? Who was he arguing against? What theories, ideological positions, intellectual and medico-moral arguments was he explicitly and consciously caught up in, as he sought to move the Tiber? But we can also ponder at a different psychoanalytic level the question of what Garibaldi may privately (even unconsciously) have been staging, or enacting (attacking or repairing), when he entered the Roman quagmire and proposed the diversion of the Tiber, only to see his project end in failure, a failure that many of his contemporaries had had no trouble whatsoever in predicting. And we might also ask for whom Garibaldi may have been unconsciously staging it.

It is of course speculation, but one hard to avoid, considering the

outlandish and obsessive manner in which the venture was pursued, so dogmatically (and yet also whimsically) indeed, as to scupper any faint hope that it might actually have succeeded. This could be put down to the General's political ineptitude (although he was no fool on the battlefield), or it might lead us to wonder what was going on in him. Under pressure, he did compromise and adapt his Tiber scheme, but he also spoke as though any compromise was death.

His failure could be said to have served a strategic purpose. After all, to fail was to dramatize this scenario of political and moral impotence and thus to bequeath a potent narrative of unrequited ambition to the future – and this is what turn-of-the-century nationalists, or later on fascists, including Mussolini himself, clearly picked up, when they made use of the story of Garibaldi's unfinished project. How far this was Garibaldi's fantasy, how far a broader cultural representation (projected upon Garibaldi; introjected by him) is a moot point. Cartoons at the time of Garibaldi's Roman debacle featured him as Gulliver enmeshed by a host of tiny persecutors. [Fig. 9.] In showing that what he called the pygmy politicians of Rome could defeat even its most-admired modern hero, Garibaldi and his followers perhaps silently demanded an ever-more radical rejection of that system.

To ponder Garibaldi's public performance as a performance of failure is not entirely to leave cultural history for the wilder shores of psycho-history. As mentioned, the story of the reforming innocent who comes to Rome but is caught in the labyrinth of the old world was itself culturally encoded in the Victorian period. Many Italian and foreign writers shared with Garibaldi this perception of Rome as the site of inevitable disillusionment and despair, the city in which the weary cynicism of an old world always trumped the naivety of the new world (witness Hawthorne and James's famous Rome-based stories). One example will have to suffice here, an 1885 tale by Matilde Serao, *The Conquest of Rome*, that pulled together many of these familiar images and narrative conventions. Serao conveys, through the eyes of a first-time visitor, the voluptuous personal anticipation of entry into the Eternal City and the ensuing disappointment of its rich first promises. As an inexperienced Southern Italian politician, Francesco Sangiorgio, is introduced into Serao's story and the city, dreamy expectations fade into a more dubious lived reality. First the optimistic young man must cross the Campagna. Despite passing through that 'imperial desert ungraced by any tree, undarkened by any shadow of man, untraversed by any flight of bird', the name of Rome still sounds intimate and sensual, beckoning him from the distance: 'The name was short and sweet, like one of those flexible names of women which are one of the secrets of their seductions, and he twisted it about in his mind in queer patterns, in contorted curves.'[35]

Serao's politician has not yet known Rome; he arrives with a powerful abstract conception of the city 'as a huge, strange vision, as a great fluctuating thing, as a fine thought, as an ideal apparition, as a vast shape with shadowy

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Fig. 8. Garibaldi leads his men into battle. From Camille Leynadier, *Mémoires authentiques sur Garibaldi . . .*, Paris, 1860.



Fig. 9. Garibaldi in Rome, as Gulliver. From *Il Papagallo*, 1875, reproduced in *Garibaldi: arte e storia* (catalogue of exhibition, Museo Centrale del Risorgimento, Rome), Florence, 1982.

outlines'. He is overcome by 'a tumult of fantasies, a crowded jumble of imaginations and conceits'. Desirous of Rome, casting it in a series of alluring feminine forms, '[h]e seemed to hear, through the night, a woman's voice uttering his name with irresistible tenderness, and a voluptuous shudder ran over him'. The man feels he is hastening to Rome, 'like a lover to his lady'. He sees Rome in his mind's eye, 'stretching out maternal arms to clasp him in a strenuous embrace'. Rome demands his obedience, compels his purity and purpose. 'Sacred as a priestess, mother, bride, Rome must have expiations and sacrifices, must have a heart unalloyed and a will of iron!' The story shows it to be otherwise. Purity is in singularly short supply. Rome is marked by 'the fever-tainted breath which seems to be emitted by the houses'. Instead of the Rome of the man's dreamy hopes, the novel explores a stifling and morbid reality. This is the 'sentimental education' that Rome appears to offer up: 'a heavy oppression sank down upon his breast, upon his soul; he must have taken a fever in the bogs of the Coliseum and the Baths, in the tepid humidity of the Churches.'[36]

There is a rich secondary literature exploring the Roman presence in modern culture. Again and again, Rome was to be depicted in Victorian writing, as the site of huge mystique and (mixed with the desire and fascination) of feverish horror. Increasingly, during the nineteenth century the aesthetic attractions and medical dangers of Rome came to be seen as inseparable (as though the city made it peculiarly hard to differentiate Eros from Thanatos). Some of these writers brought together elements of thought and dread from the ancient and Renaissance world and gave them a specific nineteenth-century medico-moral and psychological inflection. In the rhetoric of the Risorgimento's own luminaries, but also more widely in Victorian culture, the regressive pull of Rome upon the hapless visitor fascinated and horrified the city's keenest observers all at the same time.

Historical awe, religious horror, moral disgust and medical dread often converged. Garibaldi wanted to separate out Rome's life and death forces; and his own anti-Papal rhetoric soaked up the complaints and denunciations of many other Roman commentators. Garibaldi's distaste was perhaps also fuelled by the anti-papal rhetoric stoked up by the evangelical revival in England, where Rome was a continuing target for attack, a place, an institution and an idea associated in ever more inflammatory speeches with sickness and death. Mazzini and Garibaldi – Anglophiles both – drew upon the anti-Roman discourse of this revived 'age of atonement', all that evangelical fervour as well as liberal disgust with the despotism of the papal regime. Many English visitors to the Eternal City – Ruskin perhaps foremost amongst them – were fascinated, horrified, appalled at 'Rome', and described the complex of psychological symptoms it triggered in the Protestant visitor.

In a letter of 31 December 1840, Ruskin reported his feelings. In Rome, he was affected by 'a strange horror lying over the whole city'. He could neither describe nor account for it, other than to declare that 'it is a shadow

of death, possessing and penetrating all things.' He complained that 'the sunlight is lurid and ghastly . . . the shadows are cold and sepulchral; you feel like an artist in a fever, haunted by every dream of beauty that his imagination ever dwelt upon, but all mixed with the fever fear.' Lest others might think him too far fetched, he added, 'I am sure this is not imagination, for I am not given to such nonsense. And, even in illness, never remember feeling anything approaching to the horror with which some objects here can affect me'.[37]

For so many writers in this period, death and desire were cast as key terms, often indeed as twinned terms, required to make sense of the Eternal City. Not by chance did the French historian Taine and the novelist Zola home in on Rome as the city of death, of reaction and of sleaze; each writer provided elaborate descriptions of the sick, yellow or brown Tiber; the river itself linked to depravity and corruption, seen indeed as the conduit and symbol of history's waste products. And yet both recognized the indispensability of Rome to any future Italian settlement.[38] Nowhere else was so emotionally charged, so massively, unavoidably meaningful as this.

Garibaldi required Rome for Italy. In his fictions and speeches, he constructed a polarized world of good and evil. He seemed in his discourse and sometimes in his actions to embody the strictness of the religious moralist and sought now, in 1875, to get rid of the disgusting, putrid 'flooding' object that was the Tiber, or whatever it was, psychically and symbolically, that the Tiber stood for – the old regime, the papacy, the forces of decay and degeneration. His representations of good and evil were ferocious and his virtuous and vicious figures remained split off from one another. There were black cockroaches on the one side (his term for the priests) and idealized 'red shirts' on the other; the latter were always 'stabbed in the back'. The cast list of his novels divides the world into the pure and the impure, the good woman on the one side, the sullied whores/pimps/lackeys on the other.

Something of an obsession with corruption ran through his writing, with frequent recourse to metaphors of drains and sinks, smells, illnesses and marshes, and the desire of the heroes of his stories to redeem and purify the world, absolutely. We notice the remarkable schism between a demonized Church and the moralized citizenry and nation he longed to bring into being and which he sought to embody through his own personal example. As a nationalist, he not only imagined a community but also, along with Mazzini and other ideologues, sought to bring into being a community of imaginers who would share in this vision.

Yet I would contend that despite these various forms of potential explanation and contextualization that I have run through here, we cannot claim to have identified Garibaldi's deepest personal motives for these proposals. Although I have cited the horrific chase of 1849, in which Anita died of 'Roman fever', the psychoanalyst or the psychoanalytically-informed historian cannot be satisfied with the demonstration that such terrible

events took place and left their mark. For to be satisfied with this demonstration is still to sanction too simplistic and deterministic a psychology (admittedly one that much psycho-biography does tend to endorse) in which traumatic events are seen ineluctably to lead to certain mental consequences. The psychoanalyst would surely be interested in the story told of the past, but would also want to inquire, as far as possible, about the subject's internal attitude, conflicts and struggles; the uses made of a perhaps undecidable 'past' in the present.

Given that we have no patient, no dreamer or associator on the couch, historical biography must necessarily be tentative when it comes to this kind of discussion. In Garibaldi's case the textual productions were evidently more complex than any simple social or psychological 'imprint' model would suggest, and there is a tension in his writing, between a confident assumption of the role of the omnipotent, disinterested commander on the one hand and his desire to remain faithful to his melancholic self-perception as 'underdog' and loser on the other. On more than one occasion the General spoke directly of his melancholy disposition. And now in these final years, the anticipation of his own decline and death merged with the death of so many loved ones – how terrible it is to outlive one's daughters, he wrote sadly to one of his old flames, Baroness von Schwartz.[39] Despite all his achievements, he appeared to be shadowed by an irresolvable sense of sadness, perhaps, to put it in an analytic frame, by a dead or dying object which he renamed 'Rome' or 'Italy'. He yearned to repair this object, yet however hard he tried never quite seemed to be convinced it was possible.

Psychoanalysis, as mentioned, uses the term enactment to describe the way the patient unconsciously succeeds in getting the analyst to participate in a process of 'acting out': instead of, as it were, experiencing mentally – in thought and feeling – the transference, its dynamics are played out in a series of concrete reciprocal actions, deeds not words. Is one entitled to wonder whether the saga of Garibaldi's entry into the frustrating bureaucratic labyrinth in Rome in 1875 – and his ensuing predictable defeat – was akin to the living out of a dream or an unconscious fantasy, linked with a masochistic need to repeat his failure, or perhaps with feelings of guilt, betrayal, helplessness? And might we use something of this model to understand the way Garibaldi may have incited the very opposition which then thwarted him? If (to borrow a term from Renaissance scholar Stephen Greenblatt) we are to understand the nature of his self-fashioning, it was as a figure who was charismatically powerful but who also savoured and enjoyed his own powerlessness, a man who could be king but chose to be a simple '*agricoltore*' or farmer.

A few words in conclusion: at a practical level, some contemporaries gave Garibaldi the credit for having successfully provoked action in the long aftermath of the 1870 flood. He gave an important lead and raised the profile of urban regeneration, adding through his voice and passion to

the prestige of the engineers of the new Italy. We may eschew psycho-biography altogether and focus exclusively on these material and political achievements, a resolution to the flood problem, albeit not through the method he had championed. Yet this was not how Garibaldi or his circle of followers tended to see it. In a letter sent in 1878 to Crispi, once his chief of staff in Sicily, by now Minister of Home Affairs in Rome, Garibaldi expressed his disappointment and disgust at the final rejection of his own pet scheme. And then his Tiber correspondence dried up. The General turned his attention to a host of other matters. He remained busy and consumed by other modern political and scientific affairs, until the end.

Even a few days before he died, towards the end of May 1882, his mind was still lively and he was to be found occupying himself with astronomical problems and corresponding with the director of the observatory in Palermo. As he lay dying at Caprera he was attended by a young doctor from a nearby ship. Close to drawing his last breath, he expressed anguish about the fate of his children, alive and dead. There was nothing for the doctor to do.

Yet there was one more twist to the affair. Garibaldi had given his third wife, Francesca Armosino, precise but utterly impossible instructions on how she should act to effect his will (his supposed will) after his death. He wanted – unusually for this time – to be cremated, privately, and not buried – a snub of course to religious decorum and to the ceremonial wishes of the secular state. He urged Francesca to see to his cremation secretly before announcing his death to the authorities.

Garibaldi detailed the height of the pyre and the nature of the wood to be used. He wanted an urn of his ashes be left near the remains of his daughters. But once again – predictably, given his colossal national and international symbolic importance – that will was thwarted, as Roman dignitaries quickly arrived to persuade the woman that religious decency and the sentiments of the entire nation required a quite different kind of arrangement, something far more public.

Condolences poured in – King Umberto (an old admirer) was among the first to offer his sympathies. Meanwhile, anxious meetings took place about the fate of the body. Many of Garibaldi's own followers were deeply troubled at the idea of his remains being burnt; some wanted him embalmed, others proposed the transportation of the body to the Pantheon or to the Gianicolo in Rome (the place eventually that Mussolini would chose for the relocation of Anita's remains). Practical difficulties were mentioned as arguments against cremation; it might take twenty-four hours to incinerate the body in the way Garibaldi had specified. The ritual was reconceived: now selected members of 'the thousand' were to be brought in, to put the coffin on their shoulders and take the General along a final ceremonial path, flanked with flags.

Even at the last, with his outlandishly low-key funeral instructions to his wife, the General seemed intent on providing a final object lesson in the

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outrageous deviation from his plans, the politically-motivated violation of his private will. But what was his will? In those final unrealizable instructions, we might see an attempt to retain control, to remain true to the humble style that was his hallmark; or we might discern a posthumous demonstration, even an enactment of a scenario of frustration that had often occurred before, during his lifetime. Was he perhaps the choreographer of his own frustration? We cannot be sure. But unsurprisingly, his funeral was conducted with the necessary pomp and ceremony of the time. The old body was dispatched, the soul released and the nation left to mourn the final departure of General Garibaldi.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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1 *Il Secolo*, 26–27 Jan. 1875, p. 1.

2 Corresponding to the territorial limits of the Commune of Rome in the Middle Ages, the Roman Campagna is an area of about two-thousand square kilometres, traversed by the Tiber and Aniene rivers as well as a number of minor waterways. Also known as the Agro Romano, the Campagna's plain extends along the Lazio shoreline and is limited to the south by the Alban hills and the gulf of Terracina, to the north by the Tolfa and Sabatini mountains and to the east by the Sabini mountains. The American novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne, in *The Marble Faun* (1860) memorably described these circumscribing heights, 'which have gleamed afar, to our imaginations, but look scarcely real to our bodily eyes, because, being dreamed about so much, they have taken the aerial tints which belong only to a dream. These, nevertheless, are the solid frame-work of hills that shut in Rome, and its wide surrounding Campagna; no land of dreams, but the broadest page of history, crowded so full with memorable events that one obliterates another; as if Time had crossed and recrossed his own records till they grew illegible'.

3 George Sand, *Garibaldi*, Paris, 1859.

4 Jasper Ridley, *Garibaldi*, London, 1974, pp. 598, 628.

5 Giuseppe Garibaldi, *Memorie autobiografiche*, 4th edn, Firenze, 1888, p. 10; Denis Mack Smith, *Garibaldi* (1958), Rome, 1993; Gustavo Sacerdote, *La Vita di Giuseppe Garibaldi,* Milan, 1933, pp. 66–7.

6 Quoted in Christopher Hibbert, *Rome: the Biography of a City* (1985), London, 1987, p. 254.

7 Giuseppe Mazzini, *Italy, Austria and the Pope: a Letter to Sir James Graham, Bart* (pamphlet), London, 1845, p. 6.

8 Giuseppe Mazzini, *The Duties of Man* (1860), transl. Mrs E. A. Venturi, London, 1862, p. 27. Cf. 'He who can deny God either in the face of a starlight night, when standing beside the tomb of those dearest to him, or in the presence of martyrdom, is either greatly unhappy or greatly guilty.'

9 Quoted in Hibbert, *Rome*, 1987, p. 254.

10 G. M. Calabrò, *La Dottrina religioso-sociale nelle opere di Giuseppe Mazzini*, Palermo, 1911, p. 66.

11 Hibbert, *Rome*, 1987, p. 324. For details of Garibaldi's first encounter with the Saint-Simonians, see Donn Byrne, *Garibaldi: the Man and the Myth*, (n.p.), 1988. For Garibaldi's reading, see also Alfonso Scirocco, *Garibaldi: battaglie, amori, ideali di un cittadino del mondo*, Rome and Bari, 2001.

12 For Garibaldi's Latin American years, see Ridley, *Garibaldi*; Scirocco, *Garibaldi*. Garibaldi fought for the republic of Rio Grande do Sul. In 1842, he became an officer in the Uruguayan navy. For Anita: Anthony Valerio, *Anita Garibaldi: a Biography*, Westport, 2001.

13 Their children, Menotti, Riciotti, Rosita (who died as a child in 1845) and Teresita, lived for years with their grandmother in Nice, during the period of Garibaldi's second exile. They eventually rejoined him on his return to Caprera during the 1850s; Valerio, *Anita Garibaldi*.

14 Sand, *Garibaldi*; *Garibaldi: an Autobiography*, ed. Alexandre Dumas, London, 1860.

15 Gabriele D'Annunzio, *La Canzone di Garibaldi*, Milan, 1901; Giosué Carducci, *Discorso per la morte di Giuseppe Garibaldi*, Viterbo, 1911.

16 Sacerdote, *La Vita*.

17 G. M. Trevelyan, *Garibaldi and the Making of Italy*, London, 1911; David Cannadine, *G. M. Trevelyan: a Life in History*, London, 1992, pp. 68, 69, 82–3.

18 Leonardo Sciascia, *A ciascuno il suo,* Milano, 1988, p. 75.

19 Stendhal, *Promenades dans Rome* (1829), Paris 1980, 2 vols, vol. 1, p. 48. He also describes how flood and fever were seen as punishments for transgression.

20 R. De Cesare *The Last Days of Papal Rome, 1850–1870*, transl. Helen Zimmern, London, 1909, p. 98.

21 Guido Cremonese, *Malaria: New Views on Doctrine and Therapeutics*, Rome, 1924, p. 8.

22 As a contemporary French diplomat, who had observed the King at close quarters, noted dryly but incontrovertibly, 'Le roi était entré dans Rome, mais n'y avait pas dormi!': Cte H. D'Ideville, *Victor-Emmanuel II: sa vie, sa mort: souvenirs personnels*, Paris, 1878, p. 27.

23 Giuseppe Garibaldi, *The Rule of the Monk; or Rome in the Nineteenth Century*, London and New York (1870); also repr. London, 1882. Original title: *Clelia. Il governo del monaco. Roma nel secolo XIX. Romanzo storico politico*, Milan, 1870.

24 Angelo Celli, *The History of Malaria in the Roman Campagna from Ancient Times*, edited and enlarged by Anna Celli-Fraentzel, London, 1933, p. 120.

25 Paul Ginsborg, *Italy and its Discontents, 1980–2001,* London, 2001, p. 67

26 Giulio Savelli, *Che cosa vuole la Lega,* preface by Umberto Bossi*,* Milan, 1992; cf. Anna Cento Bull and Mark Gilbert, *The Lega Nord and the Northern Question,* London, 2001.

27 Speech of 20 Sept. 1922; Giorgio Pini, *The Official Life of Benito Mussolini,* transl. Luigi Villari, London, 1939, p. 114.

28 Speech of 20 Sept. 1922; Pini, *Official Life*, 1939, p. 114. Cf. Peter Bondanella, *The Eternal City: Roman Images in the Modern World*, Chapel Hill and London 1987, chap. 7.

29 In a speech in 1932, Mussolini insisted on fascism's special claim on Garibaldi. The blackshirts were the 'legitimate descendants' of the redshirts and their great leader: 'Never did he give way, never was he forced to surrender his high ideal – not by men, not by the sects, not by parties or ideologies, nor by the declamation encountered in parliamentary assemblies. These assemblies Garibaldi despised, advocate as he was of an "unlimited" dictatorship in difficult times.' Mussolini noted how Garibaldi had worked on a scheme for draining the marshes around Rome. And then, speaking of the future moral transformation of the capital, the fascist leader mused on how it would have pleased the old General to see what had happened in inter-war Italy: 'With what pleasure he would look upon our present-day Rome, luminous, vast, no longer torn by factions, this Rome which he so deeply loved and which from his earliest youth he always identified with Italy!'

30 Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams,* 1900, Standard Edition, vol. 5, p. 429.

31 *The Times*, 5 June 1882, pp. 5–6, reproduced in *Garibaldi*, ed. Mack Smith, London, 1969, pp. 149–52.

32 Miri Rubin, 'What is Cultural History Now?', in *What is History Now?*, ed. David Cannadine, Basingstoke, 2002, p. 82.

33 In the opening volume of his revised, collected essays, *Visions of Politics* (2002), Skinner provides one or two unexpected and intriguing asides on Freud. Notably, he mentions psychoanalysis as an example of a theory that may indeed constitute an advance of understanding, enabling the historian to go beyond the agent's own self-justifications or rationalizations, to make sense of certain actions, in ways that would not have been immediately conceivable at the time of their utterance. He does not commit himself to pursuing a psychoanalytic approach, but introduces at least the possibility that it may be a worthwhile route for the historian to take: 'If we believe, for example, that Freud's concept of the unconscious represents one of the more important of these enrichments [in our own intellectual tradition], we shall not only want to do our best to psychoanalyse the dead, but we shall find ourselves appraising and explaining their behaviour by means of concepts that they would have found, initially at least,

completely incomprehensible.' He goes on to suggest circumstances in which such explanations may be of help.

34 Gareth Stedman Jones, introduction to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, London 2002, p. 72.

35 Matilde Serao, *The Conquest of Rome*, London 1902, p. 8.

36 Serao, *Conquest of Rome*, pp. 8, 12, 10, 15, 29.

37 Letter of 31 Dec. 1840, in *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols, London, 1903–1912, vol. 1, pp. 380; 381–2. Cf. Tim Hilton, *John Ruskin: the Early Years, 1819–1859*, New Haven and London, 1985, p. 58.

38 Hippolyte Taine 1867, p. 66; Emile Zola, *Rome*, transl. by E. A. Vizetelly, London, 1896.

39 Elpis Melena (Baroness von Schwartz), *Garibaldi: Recollections of his Public and Private Life*, London, 1887, p. 308.