

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Rome or Death

Daniel Pick

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About the Book

In 1875, General Garibaldi left his island retreat in the Mediterranean for Rome. His battle cry no longer required, he was pursuing a mission that would become an obsession in his old age: to divert the River Tiber from Rome. The flood-prone Tiber had caused havoc, disease and death throughout history. In the capital, the General sought to replace it with a Parisian-style boulevard that would be a wonder of the modern world. But behind his florid promise to revitalise 'Italy' lay a complex and shadowy history, including a traumatic event felt by Garibaldi as the defining tragedy of his life: the loss of his wife Anita. Through this forgotten episode, Daniel Pick explores Garibaldi's passionate attachment to Rome and to Italy. In the bitter debate that ensued many myths were laid bare, and prevailing medical, social and political anxieties about the future of the state were exposed.

About the Author

Daniel Pick was educated at Jesus College and King's College, Cambridge, and subsequently trained as a psychoanalyst at the British Psychoanalytical Society. He is currently Professor of Cultural History, Queen Mary, University of London, and is the author of numerous articles and three previous books, including *Svengali's Web: The Alien Enchanter in Modern Culture* (2000).

Also by Daniel Pick

*Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c.1848-
c.1918*

*War Machine: The Rationalisation of Slaughter in the
Modern Age*

Svengali's Web: The Alien Enchanter in Modern Culture

Editor, George Du Maurier's *Trilby* (Penguin Classics)

Co-editor (with Lyndal Roper), *Dreams and History: The
Interpretation of Dreams from Ancient Greece to Modern
Psychoanalysis*

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GARIBALDI'S FLIGHT FROM ROME IN 1849





ITALY UNIFIED
 at the time of Garibaldi's death
 in 1862

A Chronology

1807

Birth of Giuseppe Garibaldi in French-occupied Nice.

1814

Abdication of Napoleon. Nice returns to the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia.

1824

Garibaldi sails to Odessa.

1824-33

Works as a sailor in the Mediterranean and Black Sea.

1825

Sails with his father on the *Santa Reparata* to Rome.

1833

Travels to Constantinople on a ship carrying followers of Saint-Simon. At the Taganrog port, on the Black Sea, Garibaldi learns about the ideals of Mazzini's Young Italy movement.

1834

Participates in a mutiny attempt in Genoa, part of a failed invasion of Savoy by the Mazzinians; flees to France. Condemned to death for high treason.

1835

Journeys to Constantinople, Odessa and Tunis, and then to South America where he establishes himself in Rio de

Janeiro.

1836

Works as a merchant sailor. As an exile representing Young Europe, Garibaldi's task is to enlist volunteers to go back to Italy and fight for the peninsula's unification.

1836

Rebels, seeking to break free from the Brazilian Empire, proclaim a republic in the province of Rio Grande do Sul. This rebellion, the longest Brazilian conflict in the nineteenth century, endures until 1845.

1837

Garibaldi fights for the independence of the province of Rio Grande do Sul. Unable to put into Brazilian ports controlled by the imperials, arrives in Gualeguay, a port town in Argentina, where the local governor, Major Leonardo Millán, captures and tortures him.

1839

Garibaldi meets Ana Maria de Jesus Ribeiro (Anita), at Laguna.

1840

Birth of Anita and Garibaldi's son, Domenico (known as Menotti), at Mostardas, Rio Grande do Sul.

1841

Death of Garibaldi's father, Domenico Antonio. Disillusioned with infighting among his Brazilian commanders, leaves Rio Grande do Sul for Montevideo with Anita, Menotti and nine hundred cattle. Works as a shipbroker and as a teacher of mathematics and history.

1842

Garibaldi is appointed a naval commander of the small Uruguayan fleet. His task is to fight against the former Uruguayan president Manuel Oribe, now leading the opposition and allied with the Argentine dictator, Juan Manuel de Rosas. In March, he marries Anita in a Catholic church in Montevideo.

1843

Garibaldi becomes the commander of the newly formed Italian Legion. Birth of Rosa (Rosita), Garibaldi's first daughter.

1845

Birth of second daughter, Teresa (Teresita). At the end of the year, Rosita dies.

1846

Garibaldi fights his most important South American land battle at San Antonio del Salto. His fame spreads to Europe. Named a general by the government of Uruguay; takes charge of the defence of Montevideo. Election of Pope Pius IX on 17 June.

1847

Together with a comrade, Garibaldi writes a letter offering his services to Pius IX. At the end of the year, Anita, Menotti, Teresita and Ricciotti (their recently born second son) leave for Nice.

1848

Insurrection in Milan against the Austrians. Garibaldi sails to Italy with sixty-three legionaries (and his daughter Rosita's remains). Offers his services to the King of Piedmont, Charles Albert. Commands a volunteer unit, fights against the Austrians at Luino and Morazzone; retreats across the frontier to Switzerland. Murder of Count Pellegrino Rossi in

Rome. Pius IX and his entourage flee to Gaeta, in the Kingdom of Naples.

1849

Establishment of the Roman Republic. Garibaldi leads the resistance to a French military attack on the Janiculum Hill but his forces are overwhelmed. Rome surrenders and Garibaldi is forced to flee. He leads a few thousand soldiers through central Italy, avoiding combat with the French and Austrian armies. Disbands his men in San Marino; chased by the Austrians; Anita dies on 4 August, at Mandriole, near Ravenna; Garibaldi makes his escape.

1849-53

Exile.

1850

Pius IX returns to Rome. Garibaldi works as a candlemaker in New York. Giovanni Battista Cuneo, who had fought alongside Garibaldi in South America and in Italy, publishes his biography.

1851-4

Garibaldi travels extensively, visiting Panama, Peru, Tasmania and the Far East.

1852

Death of Garibaldi's mother, Rosa Raimondo. Count Cavour becomes Prime Minister in Piedmont.

1853

Mazzinian rising in Milan. Death of Angelo, Garibaldi's elder brother, born in 1804.

1854

Garibaldi returns to Italy. Buys part of the island of Caprera, off the Sardinian coast.

1855

Death of Felice, Garibaldi's younger brother, born in 1813.

1856

Visits Cavour in Turin. Attempts unsuccessfully to secure the release of political prisoners held by the Bourbon king of Naples.

1858

Travels to Turin again to meet Cavour. Offered the rank of major general in the Piedmontese Army.

1859

War breaks out against the Austrians; leads his *cacciatori delle Alpi* (Alpine huntsmen) into conflict. Captures Varese and Como. The Villafranca armistice puts an end to the dispute. Acquisition of Lombardy by Piedmont. Garibaldi's plan to invade the Papal States overruled by King Victor Emmanuel II, ruler of the Piedmont-Sardinian Kingdom. The first edition of Garibaldi's autobiography is published in New York. Battistina Ravello gives birth to Garibaldi's child, Anna Maria, known as Anita.

1860

Marries the eighteen-year-old Giuseppina Raimondi, but abandons her within hours of the marriage. Rare appearance in the Piedmontese parliament to protest the cession of Nice by Cavour and Victor Emmanuel to France. Official annexation of Nice and Savoy to France. Without government backing, Garibaldi and his thousand Red Shirts sail from Quarto in Liguria to Sicily. In the name of Victor Emmanuel, Garibaldi proclaims himself dictator at Marsala. Defeats the regular army of the King of Naples at Calatafimi. Captures Palermo. Wins the Battle of Milazzo. Crosses the Strait of Messina and marches through Calabria. Enters Naples and proclaims himself 'Dictator of the Two Sicilies'.

With 30,000 men under his command, wins an extraordinary military victory on the Volturno River, north of Naples. Meets Victor Emmanuel at Teano; hands over his powers to the King. Victor Emmanuel makes a triumphal entry into Naples, with Garibaldi sitting beside him in the royal carriage. Garibaldi leaves for Caprera. Alexandre Dumas the Elder's *Mémoires de Garibaldi*, based on the General's original manuscript, with commentaries by George Sand and Victor Hugo, is published in Brussels.

1861

Proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy; Victor Emmanuel assumes title of King of Italy. Death of Cavour. Abraham Lincoln offers Garibaldi a Union command in the American Civil War. A Garibaldi biography, *Denkwürdigkeiten*, by Marie-Espérance von Schwartz, under the pseudonym of Elpis Melena, is published in Hamburg. Publication in Paris of *Les Garibaldiens: Révolution de Sicilie et de Naples*, by Alexandre Dumas the Elder.

1862

In an attempt to march on Rome, Garibaldi is seriously wounded and arrested by Italian troops at Aspromonte, in Calabria. His famous catchphrase of the time is 'Rome or death'. Granted an amnesty by Victor Emmanuel.

1863

Resigns from parliament.

1864

Visits England and receives huge public acclaim.

1865

Italian capital moved from Turin to Florence.

1866

Italy secretly sides with Prussia against Austria. Wounded again at the Suello Battle, in the Trento area. In a second war of independence, Garibaldi and his volunteers engage the Austrians at the Bezzacca Battle. '*Obbedisco*': Garibaldi agrees to obey after receiving a telegram from Victor Emmanuel II, in which the King orders him not to pursue his military campaign. Austria cedes Venetia to France which, in turn, concedes it to Italy. Death of Michele, Garibaldi's youngest brother, born in 1816.

1867

Plans to invade Rome, but Garibaldi's forces are routed at Mentana, where he is arrested by the Italian government. Set free in Florence; returns to Caprera. Birth of Clelia, Garibaldi's first daughter by Francesca Armosino.

1869

Birth of Rosita, Garibaldi's second daughter by Francesca.

1870

Italian troops invade Rome; Rome and Lazio annexed to the new Italian state by plebiscite. 29 December: Exceptional flooding of the Tiber.

1871

As a general in the French Army in the Vosges, fights in the Franco-Prussian War. Elected a deputy in Paris but soon resigns. Commission of inquiry into flooding appointed. Rome becomes the capital city of Italy.

1872

Mazzini dies in Pisa. Garibaldi's memoirs published in Italy.

1873

Birth of Manlio, Garibaldi's first son by Francesca.

1874

Menotti's land-restoration project at Carano (a disease-infested expanse of about nine hectares later renamed Carano-Garibaldi), in the Agro Romano, results in the construction of schools, churches and simple health centres (*stazioni sanitarie*).

1875

Garibaldi arrives in Rome and declares his plans for the diversion of the Tiber. Attends parliament. Submits his proposals for the preservation of Rome from flooding. Government agreement to finance studies of various schemes for the defence of the city against inundations. The commission approves a project put forward by the engineer Canevari; Garibaldi's project turned down. Further modifications are made to the Canevari plan. Death of Anita, Garibaldi's daughter with Battistina Ravello.

1876

The government contracts the first round of building works on the Tiber.

1878

Death of Victor Emmanuel II and succession of Umberto I. Close of correspondence on the Tiber.

1880

Garibaldi's twenty-year-old marriage to the Marchesina Raimondi annulled by the Court of Appeal. Marries his third wife, Francesca Armosino.

1882

Garibaldi dies at Caprera. Publication of Giuseppe Guerzoni's biography, *Garibaldi*, and Jessie White Mario's *Vita di Giuseppe Garibaldi*.

1889

Publication of a further version of his autobiography in English, with a supplement by Jessie White Mario.

1900

Exceptional flooding of the Tiber. The banks, close to completion, succeed in containing much of the flood. Appointment of a further commission of inquiry results in additional building works and fortification of embankments and bridges. Death of Manlio Garibaldi.

1903

Deaths of Teresita and Menotti Garibaldi.

1924

Death of Ricciotti Garibaldi. Introduction of Mussolini's radical bill on 'integral land reclamation', the start of a new campaign to conquer marshland. In the Pontine Marshes, south of Rome, work begins to transform thousands of hectares into villages and small farms.

To Isobel



General Garibaldi in Rome, 1875

'Roma o morte'
General Garibaldi

Rome or Death

The Obsessions of General Garibaldi

Daniel Pick



JONATHAN CAPE
LONDON

1 *Roman Fever*

'Let us turn to Italy: the fairest portions of this fair land are a prey to this invisible enemy, its fragrant breezes are poison, the dews of its summer evenings are death. The banks of its refreshing streams, its rich and flowery meadows, the borders of its glassy lakes, the luxuriant plains of its overflowing agriculture, the valley where its aromatic shrubs regale the eye and perfume the air, these are the chosen seats of this plague, the throne of Malaria.'

William North, *Roman Fever*

TOWARDS 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. The old man proposed to enlist support for a civic mission that had become his personal crusade: to divert the course of the River Tiber away from the Eternal City. His ambition was to overcome flood and malarial fever, drain marshes and provide irrigation for rural land, make the river navigable, create docks and fill in the water channel through the Eternal City, building over it a Parisian-style boulevard, which he anticipated would be a wonder of the modern world.

Word of the General's imminent arrival on the mainland quickly spread and a vast surging crowd (a 'human ocean', said one contemporary observer) gathered to see him step ashore at Civitavecchia.¹ Many who now observed Garibaldi were struck by his aged appearance – he was by then in his sixty-eighth year. He made no secret of his intention to undertake a last great adventure that would fittingly mark, as he wistfully declared to assembled well-wishers, 'the sunset of my career'.² Every assortment of dignitary was there to greet him, as were representatives of the Italian

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

The trip began promisingly enough and was undertaken in typically eye-catching fashion. Garibaldi's style was, as ever, spectacularly understated - his flamboyance of purpose in seeking the resurrection of Rome was in stark contrast to his humility of manner and vulnerability. The General's rejection of fripperies, worldly wealth and stuffy manners was always among his most captivating public gestures. He appeared decidedly frail in health - brought low by arthritis and rheumatism - and required the steadying arm of his oldest son, Menotti.³ Even Garibaldi's increasingly exhausted appearance as the day wore on added to public approbation, graphically suggesting the fortitude that was so central to his reputation. It was well known that Garibaldi did not seek to puff himself up as one of the 'great and the good'. Onlookers were excited to see that he had donned his famous red shirt and had a poncho casually spread over his shoulders - costume that recalled his rough military adventures.

After refreshments and rest, Garibaldi stepped calmly through the throng, as though he was merely an ordinary passenger taking the train to Rome.^{fn1} In this period, there were three classes of carriage available to the railway traveller; it was a measure of the General's relaxed attitude to such social hierarchies and gradations of comfort that newspaper reporters expressed no astonishment when he took the modest option.⁴ He was a celebrity renowned for the fact that he eschewed the accoutrements of pomp and power. Even the journey had its symbolic resonance: it took Garibaldi through the Roman countryside (the Campagna) in which he had previously fought and suffered for the Italian national cause, and across the Tiber, on a modern iron bridge, itself a sign of changing times. The railway timetable for this route was notoriously prone to cancellation due to river flooding, but nothing went wrong that day.⁵



Garibaldi's tumultuous reception before Termini railway station in Rome, January 1875

When the train finally pulled into the railway station in Rome, there was loud applause. He was greeted by music and the welcoming cheers of working men's associations. Garibaldi was now wearing a blue cap embroidered with gold. Some tried to touch or kiss him; among these overeager admirers, an Italian journalist drily observed, were a number of swooning English ladies. The police were out in force, although the army was confined to barracks. The atmosphere was generally relaxed on the streets, if not in government circles or the Vatican. The Pope was said to be terrified that Garibaldi was intent on fomenting further anarchy and revolution.⁶

The triumphal procession moved slowly through the cheering crowds. Garibaldi ordered his carriage to halt at his hotel earlier than expected, expressing concern about public safety. He rested briefly, but soon reappeared on the balcony, to make an emotional address to the throng below. He told the Romans how moved and proud he felt to be among them once again. At 8 p.m. that same evening, he made a brief visit to the residence of Menotti, near the Pantheon, but there was little time for private retreat. Everybody wanted access to him, and even the empty carriage was pawed over: it was taken to the Gianicolo (the

hill that had been the scene of his famous exploits a quarter of a century earlier, on behalf of the Roman Republic, against the invading French Army) and, amid chaotic celebrations, was accidentally smashed on its way down the steep descent.⁷

News that Garibaldi planned to attend parliament the next day led to a flurry of interest; entry entitlements were a prized possession for the well-connected few.⁸ His power of attraction remained considerable: right through the period of his Roman residence, and even in the sweltering heat of an exceptionally warm May, Garibaldi's parliamentary appearances led to crowds of well-wishers queuing for admission.⁹ To much approbation, he addressed his colleagues on the environmental task that lay ahead. Many public figures were keen to appear as his devoted ally, or at least as his admirer: within days of his first arrival he had been presented with more than three hundred visiting cards by members of parliament, of very diverse political persuasions.¹⁰ Meanwhile, poetry was penned to mark the event of his arrival in the Eternal City, and to bless his project for the Tiber.¹¹

Notwithstanding his precarious physical state, Garibaldi quickly embarked on a round of appointments. He visited the scene of his earlier campaign of 1849, met old combatants, delegations of workers and numerous politicians.¹² But he was not to be distracted for long by reminiscences about the past; his concern with future flood measures, rural reclamation, irrigation and flow rates remained at the front of his mind. He spent much time studying the precise nature of the building work required along the Tiber; he summoned his kitchen cabinet of experts and went about jockeying for influence, as best he could, with senior members of the government. He vigorously pursued his objective over the months that followed, pitting his energies against the deadly floods, the decrepit river banks and the 'Roman fever' that was generally thought to

result from exposure to the invisible 'miasmatic' vapours rising up out of the contaminated earth.

Before the General could accomplish the regeneration of Rome and its region, he knew he had to persuade the politicians that his plans were viable. He intended finally to claim the parliamentary seat that had been his for the taking for many years. At the time this story begins, Garibaldi was internationally famous and, at least in liberal eyes, perhaps the most widely admired living person in the world. It would be hard to exaggerate the degree of public excitement that his long-postponed trip aroused. For decades, he had been a household name, known to millions in Europe, and beyond, as an enormously attractive figure and as his country's most extraordinary foot soldier, the very 'personification of Italy'.¹³

News of Garibaldi's arrival in the Eternal City had been the worst-kept secret of the year so far. For months, he had made it clear to various confidants that he was in earnest about making the journey, and using all his might to help free Rome from the dangers of the Tiber. He was prepared to lobby tirelessly to promote the cause of the city's physical revival, and to advocate ways to stem the floods and the fevers that were thought to be linked with stagnant water. Disappointments would soon follow, but, at the outset, he appeared wholly confident that fundamental changes could be made, to sanitise Rome and restore its glory.

To say that the General was temporarily preoccupied with the issue would be a gross understatement. He wrote numerous letters discussing the problem of Rome and the Tiber. In the months and years to come, he continued to study the river's currents, depths and angles. As soon as he was in the city, he gave speeches, pressed politicians and even the King for their support, took exploratory boat trips downstream, addressed parliament, proposed legislation, endeavoured to establish a public fund to accept the

investments of members of the public (modelled on the Suez Canal scheme) and actively sought the advice of engineers and financiers from Italy and abroad.



Garibaldi and his advisers on the Tiber in 1875

Garibaldi pointed out the benefits that a sanitised Tiber and a navigable route would hold for future generations. Even the microclimate might be changed by grand engineering and landscaping. Freed from the dangers of flood, dampness and decay, he promised, young Italians might be spared malaria; scrofula, arthritis and various other diseases of blood and nerves might also be eased. He urged scientists, sanitary experts, archaeologists and artists to support his plans. These engineering proposals were cast as a war for Civilisation against Anarchy. The General described a future waterway pulsing with economic life rather than spilling dirty refuse and exuding the mysterious vapours of fever and death. He was adamant that an 'internal' solution – that is mere river-bank constructions – would be insufficient; 'external' measures were vital as well, although the precise nature of these measures kept shifting. Rome's future required that a definitive solution be found to the crisis of bursting banks; all that must become a thing of the past. Garibaldi's designs for the city took their place