

KEYWORDS: Italy, literature, women, violence, nationalism

***Warrior Women:
Patriotic Violence in the Novels of Giuseppe Garibaldi***

**By Dr. Diana Moore
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY**

Though he is better known for his military and political exploits, Italian patriot Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882) also wrote three novels published during his lifetime, *Clelia: il governo del Monaco* (1870), *Cantoni il volontario* (1870), and *I Mille* (1874). In his novels, Garibaldi portrayed fictionalized accounts of key moments in his political career not only as a way to ensure his own legacy, but also to prompt a new generation of Italians to seize the revolutionary moment for themselves and fight against both political moderatism and the Catholic Church. While Garibaldi's novels contain fairly expected images of male patriots, his female heroines are more unique. Inspired by his late wife Anita, who had fought alongside him in their South American battles, Garibaldi created female characters unafraid to wield a pistol or knife, dress as a man to fight on the frontlines of a revolution, or violently defend themselves against a predatory cleric.

This paper will focus on these figures, in particular Ida from *Cantoni*, Lina and Marzia from *I Mille*, and Clelia and Irene in *Clelia*, as a way to better understand Garibaldi's feminism. Though Garibaldi is known more for his amorous appeal to and pursuit of women, he also called upon the women of Italy to participate in the formation of their state and frequently engaged with women as collaborators in his political work. As most novels of the day only depicted women

engaging in symbolic revolution or in revolution as symbols, Garibaldi's heroines are unusual and worthy of further study.

Garibaldi's Inspirations

Though much of nineteenth-century literature praised female meekness and domesticity, Garibaldi was able to draw on a long history of literary female fighters when constructing his warrior heroines. These include ancient Roman characters like the goddess Diana, Virgil's warrior maiden Camilla, or the legendary Clelia, who swam across the Tiber to escape her captor and was released as a reward for her bravery (Prandi 1985, 404; Orvieto 2011, 246). Showing a strong interest in the figure of Clelia, Garibaldi chose her as the namesake of not only his first book, but also his daughter, born in February 1867. Though he would become quite anticlerical, Garibaldi was also likely inspired by stories from the Bible of women who utilized violence for the good of their people, including that of Judith and Holofernes or Jael and Sisera. Finally, he may have also drawn upon the stories of Renaissance authors Ariosto, Boiardo, and Tasso whose characters of Marsifa, Bradamente, and Clorinda all fought and were accepted by their male comrades (Prandi 1985, 404).

He was also able to find further inspiration in the real-life women who fought in the battles of the Risorgimento. There are numerous accounts of women fighting in the battles of 1848-49. One such woman, Colomba Antonietti, cut her hair short, donned a man's military uniform, and fought in the Roman Republic alongside her husband, dying in defense of the city walls in 1849 (Doni 2001, 25-33). Only one woman, however, officially participated in Garibaldi's expedition to Sicily in 1860, known as the Campaign of the Thousand. Though his novelistic interpretation of this event in *I Mille* would include two fictional female fighters, the

only woman who sailed with the actual troops was Rosalie Montmasson Crispi. Like Antonietti, Montmasson Crispi was accompanying her husband, future Italian Prime Minister Francesco Crispi. Though the couple did not fight directly in the battle, they entered the battle field and dodged enemy bullets while tending to the wounded. (Duggan 2002, 191)

Garibaldi's greatest inspiration, however, was certainly his wife Ana Maria de Jesus Ribeiro da Silva (1821-1849), more commonly known as Anita Garibaldi. In his memoirs and autobiographies, Garibaldi proudly recounted his wife's participation in battle during the early days of their love affair in South America. In a tale repeated in multiple versions of his autobiography, Garibaldi claimed that Anita played an invaluable role in a difficult naval battle against the Brazilian state. Describing Anita as having more bravery than the male soldiers around her, Garibaldi recounted that,

Others remained mutinously on shore, not choosing to expose themselves to the risk of hard fighting at heavy odds....When I arrived, my Anita had already, with her wonted fearlessness, levelled and fired the first cannon, while her words reanimated the flagging spirits of the crew. (Garibaldi 1889, 79)

In a different description of the battle he claimed that, "Anna gave incredible proofs of courage, self-possession and coolness. Our cannon having been dismantled by the enemy, she took a musket, and continued firing it as long as the enemy were passing us."(Garibaldi 1859, 217) Tragically, Anita Garibaldi also lost her life as a result of this desire to fight alongside her husband, dying in 1849 while fleeing the falling Roman Republic heavily pregnant, sick, and malnourished. By the time he wrote his novels, Garibaldi had been a widower for nearly twenty years and had engaged in numerous affairs, including one unsuccessful marriage, yet his inclusion of these Amazonian heroines reveals how he clearly still held up the image of Anita as his ideal woman.

Heroines Fighting in Self-Defense

Garibaldi's novels include similar and often parallel stories of his heroines violently fighting in their own self defense against men, usually Catholic priests, who were attempting to sexually assault them. In both *Clelia* and *Cantoni*, for instance, the respective heroines Clelia and Ida each attack licentious priests, who have managed to get them isolated in close quarters, with a dagger hidden on their bodies. In *Clelia*, when the evil Cardinal Procopio attempts to attack the eponymous heroine, she, "pulled from her hair a dagger that was usually carried by Roman women- and after having considered it and tasted its tip- she hid it under the folds of her dress" (Garibaldi 1870b, 90). In the comparable scene in *Cantoni*, Ida revealed that she too, "religiously had hidden under her clothes," a type of brooch-dagger which the Romans often used. (Garibaldi 1870a, 129) Both Clelia and Ida also claim that they would rather plunge their daggers into their hearts before submitting to rape. Before attacking him, Ida yells at her persecutor Gaudenzio, "cowardly reptile!" and adds, "I will die a thousand times rather than give in to your wicked desires. Do you see this pin? I will look for your viper heart and there I will fully immerse it!" (Garibaldi 1870a, 130).

Some scenes celebrate the violence these women inflict upon their persecutors with vivid imagery. In an earlier scene from *Cantoni*, the young heroine Ida is recovering from a head wound in a carriage with Don Gaudenzio who had just abducted her. After a failed attempt to woo her with words, Gaudenzio "bowed his snakelike face over the gagged mouth of Ida and tried to kiss her." At the last moment, however, Ida wakes up from her stupor and, "a solemn punch fell on face of the impudent cleric, which made the carriage appear to him like a starry room, and his blood, particularly from his nose, smeared across his robe, making him appear like a butcher, even in the dim lighting." (Garibaldi 1870a, 96–97) Similarly, when the evil

Monsignor Corvo approaches Marzia, the heroine of *I Mille* in her prison cell, her first instinct was “to launch herself at him and tear him to pieces”(Garibaldi 1874, 77). Corvo flees Marzia’s wrath, but later reenters the cell, believing Marzia to have fainted. Having feigned her faint, Marzia swiftly and fiercely attacks him. Celebrating her fury, Garibaldi claimed that, “lighting does not hit the lofty oak or the bell tower as quickly as our heroine hit the criminal would-be seducer.” She flies over the Jesuit with the force of her attack, knocks him over, “and as if they were made of steel, stuck her fingers in his neck.”(Garibaldi 1874, 82) The graphic depictions of violence in each scene, from Gaudenzio’s blood to Marzia’s nails, reveal that Garibaldi did not try to gloss over the realities of their attacks.

Garibaldi also describes his heroines as bravely fighting even when the odds are against them with Clelia and Ida each attempting to defend themselves against three men. Ida’s attacker Gaudenzio, for instance, relies on help from his two henchmen to subdue Ida in his carriage. Though she was unable to escape, Garibaldi praised her efforts, claiming, “she had attempted what was humanly possible for a girl of fourteen years; bites, scratches, punches, countered with death threats by the assassins and brutal violence to prevent her from moving, and above all from shouting.”(Garibaldi 1870a, 103) The villainous Procopio also needs assistance from his two henchmen Don Ignazio and Gianni to disarm and subdue Clelia. In Garibaldi’s eyes, therefore, it took three men to defeat one robust and worthy Italian woman. While the women were clearly acting as stand-ins for Italy, who Garibaldi believed was being violated by the clergy and needed to fight even when the odds appeared poor, by allowing them to stand up for themselves and fight back, he constructed strong models of female strength and independence.

In all of these instances, though the women valiantly fight against their attacks, they are ultimately unable to defend themselves and rely on *deus-ex-machina* rescues by each novel’s

male heroes. During Ida's fight against Gaudenzio, for instance, she is saved at the last moment by the male patriots Cantoni and Zambianchi while Clelia is rescued from her battle with Procopio and his henchmen by the novel's heroes Attilio and Muzio. Garibaldi thus placed clear limits on how well his heroines could fight. While he celebrated female Italian physical strength and emotional courage, he would not allow it to come at the expense of heroic male strength and saved the key victories for his chosen male figures.

Warriors in Defense of the Nations

Garibaldi's heroines did not just fight for themselves, but also fought for Italy. In *Clelia*, Clelia and Irene both fight alongside the republicans against the Papal forces near Viterbo, after which Garibaldi described them as, "new amazons in search of a fight." (Garibaldi 1870b, 265). Setting up the women as a model for Italian bravery, one of the heroes Muzio celebrates them after the battle saying, "Courageous and worthy daughters of Rome- be blessed for the example you have given- not to these brave companions who do not need it- but to the idlers of Italy- who are waiting for manna from heaven and from their enemies their freedom." (Garibaldi 1870b, 267) In *Cantoni*, meanwhile, Ida dresses in boy's clothing and enrolls as a volunteer in the army of the Roman Republic. This is another instance where Garibaldi's tale follows not only in literary tradition, where female warriors often dressed in male clothing, but also draws on his history with Anita Garibaldi. In his autobiography, Garibaldi recalled how a heavily pregnant Anita dressed as a man while fleeing the Roman Republic in 1849, saying, "at the first house we came to, having asked a woman to cut off her hair, she put on men's clothes, and mounted a horse" (Garibaldi 1889, 22).

Lina and Marzia, the heroines of *I Mille*, however, were Garibaldi's most warlike heroines by far. Though most of their fighting is referred back to rather than described directly, in numerous instances Garibaldi notes that Lina and Marzia had each fought in twenty battles. Emphasizing their valor, rather than their sex, Garibaldi introduced the women without reference to their gender, stating, "but who were those two youths who in the group of the most daring among the Argonauts still wanted to precede them towards the enemy, competing to see who would confront him first?" Though they were young, he noted that, "they handled the musket like veterans." Moreover, as the muskets often failed, they more often resorted to the use of the bayonets, an even more personal and forcefully violent weapon.(Garibaldi 1874, 29–30)

Recognizing that he had actually forbidden women to participate in the battles of 1860, Garibaldi included a scene where he (as the historical figure of General Giuseppe Garibaldi) was sitting around a campfire after a battle and heard Lina's brother and a friend discussing how their female companions had refused to stay behind and obey Garibaldi's directive. As the women had fought bravely and were always in the front, however, he decided to pardon them, claiming, "when a transgression earns one such valiants as your sister and her companion, I, who am no model of order, can easily get comfortable with it."(Garibaldi 1874, 31) In doing so, Garibaldi attempted to reconcile his historical exclusion of women from the Mille with his literary promotion of patriotic female violence.

While some narratives of female involvement in warfare excuse female violence as a necessary evil due to the exigencies of war or show women participating against their desires and instincts, Garibaldi described Ida as happy to fight alongside Cantoni. He claimed,

Great was the happiness of our heroine! She had obtained her objective and found the adored object of her thoughts- she lived a life of adventures, of danger, of Glory alongside the one who mastered her entire soul and whose look had become the supreme need of her existence.(Garibaldi 1870a, 36)

She enjoyed life and danger and was not afraid or alienated by it. This is similar to Garibaldi's description of Anita in his memoirs where he claimed that, "she looked upon battles as an amusement, and the inconveniences of life in the field as a pastime." (Garibaldi 1859, 69) In a later scene, Garibaldi explained that Marzia and Lina also felt at home in the army and "disdained to march on horseback," wanting, "to share the hardships of the basic militia." Moreover, he claimed they urgently wanted to acquire muskets, which were, "much more comfortable than a parasol to these Amazons in the troops of the Mille." (Garibaldi 1874, 305) Marzia, Lina, and Ida, therefore, were not fighting against their feminine natures when acting violently, but were embracing the full spectrum of possibilities for female behavior.

Garibaldi also makes it clear that he believes these women have not lost their sexual attractiveness by engaging in warfare. In one scene in *Cantoni*, for instance, Ida fights alongside Cantoni with the spear of a lancer who had fallen and Garibaldi claimed that, "I would never have believed the beautiful girl capable of such heroism: she resembled a demon with the face of an angel" (Cantoni, 267-8). Her beauty and ferocity were able to coexist and one did not negate the other. In an earlier scene in which Cantoni discovers Ida's femininity, Garibaldi also focused on Ida's female beauty. Though Cantoni had previously not seen past Ida's male disguise and believed her to be just another male youth, after she is attacked in the street, he carries her unconscious body to a fruit vendor's shop, and taking off her shirt to tend to her injuries, discovers her female form. In an oddly sexual description of a fourteen-year-old, Garibaldi wrote, "when he untied the red shirt, he discovered the ivory-white apples, which nature had sculpted with a master hand, that neck, that delicate flesh, that slope of the shoulders that had nothing of the virile to it, also had all the delicacy of the most beautiful of the daughters of Eve." Continuing the romantic plot of the novel, the pair passionately kiss after Ida awakens. (Garibaldi

1870a, 84) Throughout the novels, Garibaldi repeatedly mentions the beauty of both his male and female soldiers as a way to emphasize their perfection. In the case of the female heroines, this also serves to sexualize them and titillates the audience, but simultaneously reinforces that their violence does not strip them of their femininity or beauty.

Though he glorified the bravery and violence of his female patriots and celebrated their attacks on those men he considered weak, like the clergy, Garibaldi would not allow his heroines to challenge the primacy of his male patriots, who are always described as superior creatures in charge of protecting these women. The novels include numerous instances of male patriots sending their female companions away and protecting them from the dangers of the battlefield. While Attilio and Muzio die as martyrs at the end of *Clelia*, their love interests, Clelia and Giulia, to escape to safety after the men's urging. In *I Mille*, Lina's brother and her lover both ask her to stay behind when they attack the convent where Marzia was being held out of a desire to protect her. Garibaldi explained that while, "Lina burned to storm the convent and contribute for the first time to the liberation of her beloved companion," she agrees stay behind. (Garibaldi 1874, 227) The male patriots' desire to protect their loved ones again echoes Garibaldi's relationship with his wife. In his memoirs he frequently expressed guilt over his wife's tragic demise during the flight from Rome in 1849 and explained that he had attempted to protect her and keep her safe from the battlefields, but she refused to listen.

Garibaldi did not restrict the glories of martyrdom to just his male heroes, however, and Anita's patriotic martyrdom seems to have in some ways inspired the battlefield deaths of Irene from *Clelia* and Ida from *Cantoni*. In the final battle scene of *Clelia*, Irene's husband Orazio dies from a revolver's bullet and as he dies, utters her name prompting Irene to run over to the barricade and, "heedless of her own danger- she wanted to climb up- but fell, struck in her

beautiful brow by a musket ball.”(Garibaldi 1870b, 452) The final scene of *Cantoni* even more so emphasizes this ideal of martyrdom. Though the book primarily looks at the campaign of 1848-49, the final scene jumps forward to 1867 and the failed attack upon Rome where we see, “two corpses, wounded in the chest and embracing.” Garibaldi lamented the loss of this physically beautiful couple, who represented all that Italy could be, but argued that it was a good death because they died fighting against priests and foreigners. (Garibaldi 1870a, 290)

Conclusion: Female Civility & Restrictions Upon Male Violence

Though his novels were full of celebrations of both male and female violence, Garibaldi also included occasional pleas for restraint and civility and tasked women with accomplishing this task. In *I Mille*, for instance, he expounds his theory of the civilizing power of women through the story of Talarico, a one-time villain and brigand who converted to the cause of justice and Italy after falling in love with the virtuous and patriotic Lina. Garibaldi argued that Talarico’s conversion proved, “the Power of woman over our sex as hard and depraved as it is.”(Garibaldi 1874, 163–69) These arguments could also be used to justify female authority, however. As Garibaldi explained in *Cantoni*, “Man in his arrogance conceived God in his own form: and yet, the Almighty would have the form of a woman, if he could have a form.” He added that this meant that a woman should naturally govern a man, saying, “if the spirit is to command matter-intelligence over brutal force-the man over the elephant- the woman should lead the human family.”(Garibaldi 1870a, 31) These claims that a woman’s claim to power and influence in society came from her moral authority place Garibaldi’s views on women back into the mainstream and reveal the limits of his transgressive ideology.

Works Cited

- Doni, Elena. 2001. "Rose Bianche per Un Soldato. Colomba Antonietti." In *Donne Del Risorgimento*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Duggan, Christopher. 2002. *Francesco Crispi, 1818-1901: From Nation to Nationalism*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Garibaldi, Giuseppe. 1859. *The Life of General Garibaldi: Written by Himself. With Sketches of His Companions in Arms*. Translated by Theodore Dwight. New York: A.S. Barnes and Burr.
- . 1870a. *Cantoni Il Volontario: Romanzo Storico*. Milano: Enrico Politti Editore.
- . 1870b. *Clelia: Il Governo Del Monaco (Roma Nel Secolo XIX)*. Milano: Fratelli Rechiedei.
- . 1874. *I Mille*. Torino: Tip. e Lit. Camilla e Bertolero.
- . 1889. *Autobiography of Giuseppe Garibaldi. Authorized Translation by A. Werner with a Supplement by Jessie White Mario*. Translated by A. Werner. London: Walter, Smith, and Innes.
- Orvieto, Paolo. 2011. *Buoni e Cattivi Del Risorgimento: I Romanzi Di Garibaldi e Bresciani a Confronto*. Piccoli Saggi 48. Roma: Salerno.
- Prandi, Julie D. 1985. "Woman Warrior as Hero: Schiller's 'Jungfrau von Orleans' and Kleist's 'Penthesilea.'" *Monatshefte* 77 (4): 403–14.