

Margaret Fuller in Rome

by E. Christian Kopff

*“Oh Rome! my country! city of the soul!
The orphans of the heart must turn to thee!”*

—Lord Byron, *Child Harold’s Pilgrimage*



Krzysztof Jachniewicz-Zarobski

What is the greatest lost work of ancient literature? Was it Arctinus’ epic *Aethiopsis*, which told of the battles of Achilles against Penthesilea, the Amazon Queen, and Memnon, black King of the Ethiopians? Was it Ovid’s tragedy *Medea*, or Livy’s account of the Civil Wars that ended the Roman Republic? In American literature I do not suppose there is much competition with *The History of the Roman Republic of 1848-49* by S. Margaret Fuller, alias Marchioness d’Ossoli.

In her day—she lived from 1810 to 1850—Margaret Fuller was one of the best known intellectuals in America. Her father, Massachusetts Democrat Timothy Fuller, gave his eldest child a man’s education: Latin, some Greek, much German, French, and Italian. He was a demanding teacher whose lessons left her with terrifying nightmares. She grew up learned, witty, and physically plain. When she was 25 her father gave up his successful political career to write history. He promptly died of cholera and left the family for her to support. She was up to the challenge. Her famous “Conversations” attracted Bostonian ladies of culture to the Peabody sisters’ bookstore, where they paid twenty dollars a head to hear Margaret lecture on subjects from Goethe to Greek mythology. Afterwards they would browse through the bookstore looking for books she had mentioned, including her own translation of *Eckermann’s Conversations with Goethe*. The

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Conversation on Greek mythology was so popular she was persuaded to repeat it for men.

In 1840 she became the first editor of the Transcendentalists’ short-lived journal *The Dial*, for which she wrote her famous feminist essay “The Great Lawsuit: Man vs. Men, Woman vs. Women.” She expanded the essay into a best-selling book, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845). Horace Greeley lured her from Boston to write social and literary criticism for his New York *Daily Tribune*. She mingled articles on poverty, prostitution, and women’s rights with praise of Emerson, Hawthorne, and Poe and condemnation of James Russell Lowell and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Today these assessments are standard, but then her comments on Longfellow created a sensation.

Her emotional life was equally unconventional. In 1840 she lived for a while at Emerson’s home. (A strange man named Henry David Thoreau was staying there, too.) Emerson and Fuller were so aroused by each other that they could not converse, but retired to their respective bedrooms to pen impassioned letters back and forth. In New York she lived at Horace Greeley’s house. They were close, though not romantically involved. She fell in love with a footloose immigrant, James Nathan, who, when they broke up, refused to return her love letters without suitable financial remuneration, which Margaret refused to pay—or could not.

At 35 she talked Greeley into financing a trip to Europe in return for 15 long articles for the *Tribune*. *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* had made her a celebrity in England, and she

was invited everywhere. We finally have adequate editions of her *Tribune* articles in Larry K. Reynolds and Susan Belasco Smith's "*These Sad But Glorious Days*": *Dispatches from Europe* (Yale, 1991), and her letters up to 1849 in five volumes by Robert N. Hudspeth (Cornell, 1983-88). Both sources tell us of her meetings with Thomas Carlyle. She expected the sage of *Sartor Resartus*. She met a bitter, angry, though witty man and his sad, frustrated wife. Carlyle expected a frigid New England schoolmarm and discovered instead a cultured and brilliant conversationalist who knew German as well as he did. He soon tired of the wealthy Quakers who were serving as her chaperones. They would go on about slavery, while he wanted to talk about masters and heroes. During their debates, Margaret was meeting Giuseppe Mazzini, intellectual leader of the fight for a united republican Italy. Many reports describe him as the most beautiful man in Europe. Dressed always in black in mourning for his country, he was vowed to celibacy until Italy was free. The early chapters of his masterpiece, *The Duties of Man*, began by addressing Italian workingmen with the words, "I have come to speak to you of your duties," and only then of their rights. Margaret warmed to him immediately. When years later Mazzini finished *Duties of Man*, he declared the emancipation of woman as important as that of the working class, perhaps under Margaret's influence. Neither could foresee that they were soon to meet again, in Rome.

Margaret went on to Paris and met George Sand, whose latest lover, Frédéric Chopin, was lurking about the house. Sand appears to have been an important influence on Margaret's radicalism. The experience was somewhat spoiled by Margaret's inability to converse in French with the flair she showed in English and the depressing rainy weather. So the Quaker family and Margaret went on to Italy, first to Naples and then to Rome.

Chesterton tells of a man who set sail to find a new country and after many adventures discovered that his new country was England, his own home. *Heureux qui comme Ulysse*. Others have ended up not in England or New England, but Rome. Some of them spend the rest of their lives there, like Margaret's new friends, William Wetmore Story and his wife Evelyn. Story, the son of distinguished jurist Joseph Story, had deserted a promising career in law to move to Rome and become a sculptor. Others return to America, like the great sculptor of the next generation, Augustus Saint Gaudens. After his return he kept the faucets in his New York studio always running, because the sound reminded him of the fountains of Rome. That is the country to which the orphans of the heart must turn, the land of their lost content, and Margaret Fuller was one of them.

Wandering through St. Peter's, she became separated from her Quaker chaperones. While searching for them, she met Giovanni d'Ossoli. He was 25 and handsome as only young Italian men can be, shy and perhaps not very bright, certainly not well educated. Margaret was cultured and inarticulate in five foreign languages. Together they found their way back to her lodgings. For the next few days he showed her around Rome, after which it was time for Margaret and her chaperones to continue on to Milan and Venice. At Venice Margaret parted company with her escorts and headed back south. Margaret's infatuation with Giovanni is enough reason for most biographers. They cannot understand what Rome means to a woman who grew up reading Vergil and Livy. There may

have been another reason. Margaret was a born newspaper-woman—that Horace Greeley knew—and in Rome was the story of a lifetime.

In 1846, only a year before, the aged Pontiff Gregory XVI had passed away, after inspiring some of the most brilliant anticlerical poetry ever penned, the sonnets of G. G. Belli, written in *Romanaccio*, the dialect of Rome. All Europe knew *A Dog's Life*: "Nun fa mmai ggnente er Papa, eh? nun fa ggnente?" ("Duh Pope he don't do nuttin'? Whaddya mean, he don't do nuttin'?" and so on to detail the leisurely schedule of a modern Bishop of Rome). The Consistory voted for a young moderate, Giovanni Mastai, as Pope Pius IX. Pio Nono was inspired by the Abbé Gioberti's vision of an Italy cleansed from foreign domination and reunited under Papal Supremacy to enjoy her old cultural hegemony in Europe. Reform would proceed hand in hand with tradition and without the need of republicanism, revolution, or communism. The new Pope granted a constitution, allowed the formation of a *Guardia civica* (what we would call "a well-regulated militia"), and even the appointment of lay ministers among his advisors. Italy rang with the cry, "Viva Pio Nono!"

William and Evelyn Story were amazed at the Margaret they saw in the fall of 1847. She was a changed woman, almost beautiful. They never even considered that there are things besides Rome and liberal politics that can produce a woman's rosy cheeks. The glorious fall became a rainy December. Margaret grew depressed and the bloom faded from her cheeks. She awoke every morning feeling sick to her stomach. George Sand had neglected to mention this aspect of living life to the full. Margaret Fuller was pregnant.

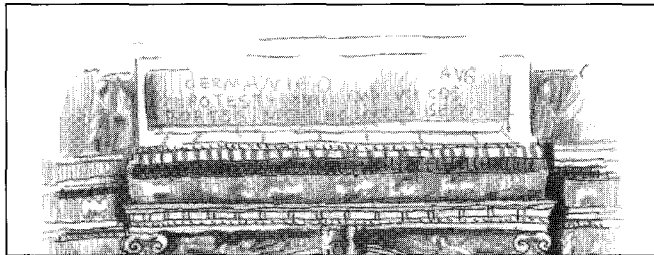
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Margaret had long since rejected traditional Christianity—who among her friends had not?—but part of her was still a Puritan. She was convinced that she was going to die in childbirth. Giovanni proposed but she declined. It was not that she was too old to give him children. That objection was now resolved. She was, however, as the Ossoli family still put it a century later, "old, ugly, Protestant, and poor." Marriage to a Protestant required a Papal dispensation and his hostile older brother, now head of the family, was not inclined to give his assent. In addition, Giovanni had joined the *Guardia civica*, a virtual proclamation of republican sympathies and the Ossoli family blamed Margaret.

Giovanni did not share Margaret's depression. He explained that under Italian law he could recognize his baby, give the boy (as he was sure it would be) his name, and even baptize him without marrying the mother. It is doubtful whether these legal details soothed Margaret's anxious heart. She left Rome to

bear her child in seclusion, pleading ill health, while Giovanni stayed with his regiment in Rome.

Horace Greeley was not sympathetic. It was the spring of 1848 and all Europe was exploding with revolution. In France Louis Philippe fell and Metternich was chased from Vienna. The Austrian hold over northern Italy was shaken. Milan and Venice declared themselves republics and King Carlo Alberto of Piedmont was doing his clumsy best to liberate the north from Austria. Ferdinando II, Bourbon King of Naples and the Two Sicilies, granted his people a constitution. Pius IX was excited to see foreign rule disappearing from Italy but not enthusiastic about the rise of republicanism. Giovanni procured a leave to be with Margaret at the birth of their son, Angelo (April 1848). In the fall, Margaret left Angelino with a wet nurse and returned to Rome. There was much to write about, and Margaret's dispatches for the *Tribune* in 1848-49 are important historical documents. Perry Miller thought them her best writing.



The Pope's chief minister was a layman, the cultured, eloquent Count Pellegrino Rossi, but he was widely hated for a simple reason: he was opposed to both reaction and revolution. For him as for his Pope, the road to progress and freedom involved slow reform that maintained continuity and tradition. The followers of Mazzini called Rossi a "tyrant." Their leader was the huge demagogue Angelo Brunetti, better known as Ciceruacchio, the big, fat, filthy Cicero. On November 15, 1848, Rossi rode to the Cancelleria, the beautiful High Renaissance building near the Campo dei Fiori where the popular assembly was to meet. As the count stepped out of his coach, Ciceruacchio's son Luigi stabbed him to death. The noisy crowd fell silent. The Papal troops did nothing. Margaret Fuller rejoiced. "For me," she wrote her mother, "I never thought to have heard of a violent death with satisfaction, but this act affected me as one of terrible justice." Garibaldi noted in his diary his pleasure at the death of the "tyrant," then recalled that he was opposed on principle to capital punishment. Such second thoughts were rare among the Mazzinians, who marched through Rome arm in arm, hymning the death of moderation. (In distant Concord, Henry Thoreau was composing the lecture later published as "Civil Disobedience.") That evening a crowd marched on the Pope's residence, the Quirinal Palace, and in panic the Swiss Guard opened fire. Pius IX wanted to be neither murderer nor victim. On the evening of November 24, disguised as a simple priest, he fled to Gaeta on the coast halfway between Rome and Bourbon Naples. Margaret was furious. There were two types of people who would not go along with Mazzini, the weak and the wicked. In her gentler moments, she called Pio Nono weak.

She was also indignant because the American ambassador refused to recognize the newly constituted Roman Republic. If only she were ambassador, but she was a woman. In a century things would be different. (Indeed, in 1953 President Eisen-

hower appointed Clare Boothe Luce ambassador to Italy. What would Margaret have thought of "The Women?") Recognition was hardly enough for Margaret Fuller. She wanted the United States to intervene to support the Roman Republic. Her radicalization was proceeding apace. She even had a kind word for the Abolitionists, whom she admitted she could not stand when forced to live among them. Meanwhile, Mazzini entered Rome in triumph.

While this was going on, the French people voted, by an enormous majority and by universal adult suffrage that did not exist in England or the United States, to elect Louis Napoleon their president. Napoleon had no intention of leaving Rome in the hands of Mazzini and Garibaldi and soon French troops were approaching the walls of Rome. The trees of Rome were chopped down to prevent sniper fire. ("I could not, could not," sobbed Margaret.) Famous villas were destroyed before and during the fighting. Resistance seemed hopeless, but Mazzini wanted Rome martyred and he got his wish. The city fell in June 1849 for many reasons, among them Garibaldi's insubordination and reckless though courageous tactics. Mazzini and Garibaldi went into exile; Pius IX returned. Margaret, Giovanni, and little Angelino fled north to Florence, which she detested. ("It seems like Boston to me.") As impoverished exiles, their only hope was to sail to America. It was time to tell people about the baby.

The Storys were thunderstruck. How had she kept the secret so long from them? Margaret had told only one close friend. She had written to her brother Richard, but burnt the letter. In one letter to her mother, she had compared herself to Mary Magdalene and asked forgiveness "because she had loved much." It was not just that she was a "Fallen Woman." The Ossoli family chapel was in the baroque church of la Maddalena, a short block from the Pantheon. In the end she had not been able to write the words and had to write them now, in late 1849 from Florence. Giovanni was doing his best to learn English, without much success. Margaret tried to prepare her family and friends. During her pregnancy she had corresponded with him in Italian. She, who read so many languages so fluently, made every kind of mistake in speaking and writing. We can deduce from her Italian letters what Giovanni's English was like.

Amid all the unhappiness she felt the joys of family life. Edgar Allan Poe, news of whose death reached her in Florence, had quipped that the human race was divided into three sexes: men, women, and Margaret Fuller. Italy had turned Margaret into a woman, a mother, and a wife. More or less a wife, at any rate. One of the many mysteries surrounding Margaret Fuller is her marriage. Did she and Giovanni ever tie the knot and if so, when? Evelyn Story says she was shown the marriage certificate and no one doubts that she thought she saw it. Margaret was convinced that her new family's love and her now completed history of the Roman Republic would enable them to weather all storms. One storm she did not foresee: just off Fire Island, within sight of New York, a hurricane hit their vessel and sank it with all on board. Margaret, Giovanni, and her precious manuscript were never found. Only a baby's body, little Angelino, was recovered, to find peace at last in American soil.

Her Transcendentalist friends breathed a sigh of relief. They were not ready for George Sand in America, and her husband was no De Musset or Chopin. They were sure that

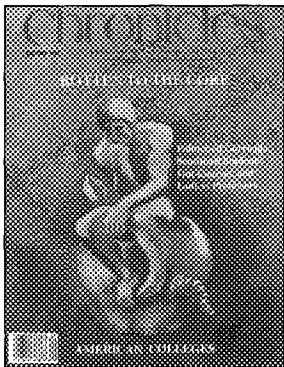
he was no nobleman, wrongly. It is somewhat droll to see Margaret's modern defenders insist that she was a radical feminist democrat who slept only with a true scion of the Roman nobility.

Around Margaret hangs always the fascinating aura of the *opus imperfectum*. Her best writing is found in her letters and her articles, literary and historical, for Greeley's *Tribune*. She wrote *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* before her style had been pruned by writing for Greeley, and it lacks the charm and character of Emerson or Thoreau. The content, however, anticipates contemporary feminism in almost every area, from her insistence that women can hold men's jobs, even be ship captains, to her belief that women's moral sense is distinct from men's.

Would her history have won her the place in American literature she was sure of? She called it "a possession forever for man," echoing a famous phrase of Thucydides. In her best literary essay for Greeley, she had discussed American historians, praising Prescott for the readability of his great histories of the Spanish conquest of America, but she was bothered by his lack of a guiding idea, a lack she found filled in Bancroft's work. The people, democracy, would have been her guiding idea, and she had a hero in Mazzini. Would the impartiality that Thucydides claimed to possess have replaced the partisan attitude of her newspaper articles? We know from comparing her letters with the articles that she often knew better. In the *Tribune* she insists on the unanimity of popular

support for the republic. In her last letter to Emerson she tells of visiting the wounded during the siege of Rome. Her knowledge of languages proved useful because the soldiers came from all over Europe. "Indeed, I am afraid that it is too true that there are comparatively few Romans." When she described Garibaldi leading his troops out from the Square of St. John Lateran, she railed at those who called them "brigands and vagabonds." In an earlier letter to Giovanni she wrote that Garibaldi had little control over *questi desperati di sua banda*, "these desperadoes in his band," who were murdering priests, civilians, and one another. Could she have included such observations in her account of an event that had given her so much hope and so much heartache?

This is only one of the questions about Margaret Fuller that we cannot answer. There are many others. Would she have raised little Angelino as her father had raised her? Can we trust the partial pictures of her we find in female characters in Hawthorne's *Blithedale Romance* and *Marble Faun* and Henry James' *Bostonians*? Did she ever feel at home in the world? This last question I think we can answer. Writing from Rome she often quoted Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, always in the same way: "Oh Rome! my country!" with "my" underlined, against the meter. She knew what she was doing. The orphans of the heart know how to scan their own poetry, as they know their own country, no matter how late in life they come to it or how little time it is granted them to stay there.



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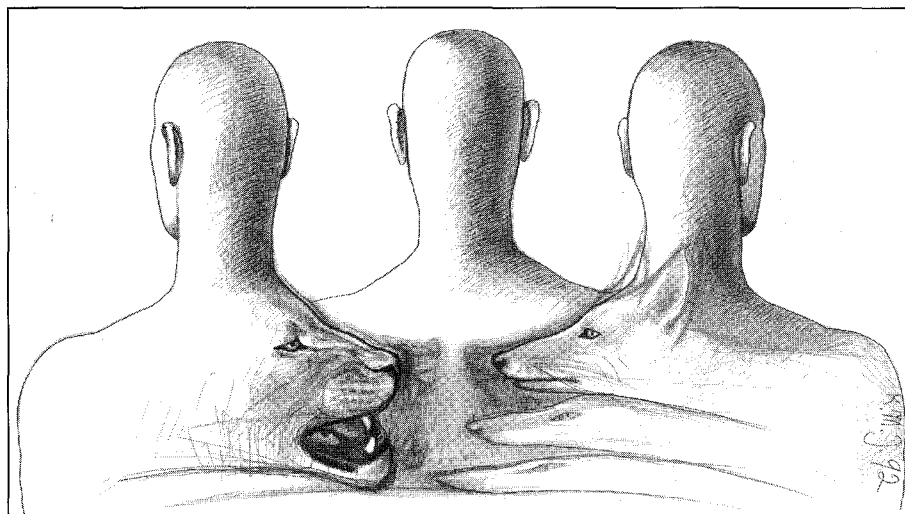
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Crime Story

The Godfather as Political Metaphor

by Samuel Francis



Probably not since Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* has a popular novel influenced Americans as deeply as Mario Puzo's *The Godfather*. Appearing in 1969, the book remains, according to the inflated come-on of its publisher's blurb, "the all-time best-selling novel in publishing history." If true, that claim in itself is no mean accomplishment, considering that Mr. Puzo's competitors have included such deep-pocketed wonderboys of the book trade as Stephen King, Harold Robbins, and the late Isaac Asimov.

Yet the permeation of pop culture by *The Godfather* is not measured by its publishers' ledgers. The novel has given its name to a national pizza chain, suggesting that even the teenagers who habitually consume pasta for the masses still readily recognize the literary allusion; and twenty years after the release of the first of Francis Ford Coppola's three movies based on it, the book's major characters and events remain familiar to millions of Americans. Moreover, the book and films excited mass interest in the subject of organized crime in the United States and spawned entire new shelves of reading, fiction and nonfiction, as well as inevitable and innumerable cinematic spin-offs, almost all of which are thin reruns of the novel's distinctive characterization of criminal intrigue as delicate family matters. The novel and films contributed to American colloquialism almost as much as the Watergate scandal, which was contemporaneous with the first two movies. Even today, expressions such as "an offer he can't refuse" and "sleeping with the fishes" remain current, and common words such as "godfather" and "don" acquired new and enduring meanings from the *Godfather* cycle. Coppola and Puzo together have turned out almost as many movies based on the epic of *la famiglia Corleone* as there have been trials for John Gotti, though with the third installment released in 1990 and its final liquidation of the dwindling band

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of characters who had not been shot, eviscerated, blown up, or garroted in the first two films, it is hard to see how even Hollywood can come up with any more.

Long dismissed as a cheap glamorization of organized crime, a 450-page sex-and-violence wallow in the pignen of mass culture, *The Godfather* has nevertheless evolved into no less a classic than *Gone With the Wind* itself, though it would be idle to pretend that Puzo's contribution to literature ranks with the work of the more serious novelists in the American canon. The book is dependent on sensationalism, with graphic depictions of bedroom tussles and physical brutality and a reliance on the improbable that always attends low fiction. Nevertheless, there are in both the novel and in at least the first two *Godfather* movies consistent, disturbing, and powerfully presented themes that deserve closer inspection than the literary merits of the book suggest. Read or viewed not simply as thriller for beach and boudoir but as an extended metaphor of American and perhaps of human society, the novel and Parts I and II of the film series rip the mask off certain mythologies of America and modernity and offer perceptions that may reveal truths that no grand jury and no congressional subpoena has uncovered as successfully or dramatically.

"Crime," wrote Daniel Bell, "in many ways, is a Coney Island mirror, caricaturing the morals and manners of a society." Just as anthropologists glimpse in the cultures of primitive peoples persistent truths of human nature and society obscured by the more complicated institutions of modern life, so the brutally simple relationships among criminals expose and highlight similar patterns on which all human social and political institutions rest. The bloody antics of mafiosi and their molls may amuse, titillate, and horrify the readers of the tabloid press, and Puzo's novel, to be sure, lends them a dignity that in real life they neither possess nor ought to acquire. But far from merely romanticizing and whitewashing organized crime in America, *The Godfather* uses it as the center of