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## **That dangerous serpent: Garibaldi and Ireland 1860-1870**

Anne O'Connor\*

*National University of Ireland, Galway*

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This article analyses the reaction to Garibaldi in Ireland during the Risorgimento, a reaction which, in its negativity, generally contrasted with the Italian's heroic depiction elsewhere. Attitudes towards Garibaldi reflected existing religious divisions in Ireland, with Protestants supporting him and Catholics condemning his actions in Italy. The study examines ballads, pamphlets and newspapers to illustrate the pro-papal fervour felt in Ireland and the strength of anti-Garibaldi feelings. The decision of Irishmen to form a battalion to fight in defence of the Papal States in 1860 reveals that ultimately, denigration of Garibaldi became a badge of Irish nationalism. The study highlights the position of Britain in understanding the relationship between Ireland and Italy in these years, pointing out Irish nationalists' bafflement over Britain's support for Italian unification while it denied similar rights to Irish subjects. The article demonstrates how, in this context, domestic and tactical considerations coloured responses to Garibaldi in Ireland, with Irish issues projected onto the Italian situation, thus leading to entrenched and extreme attitudes towards the Italian soldier.

**Keywords:** Garibaldi; Ireland; Paul Cullen; Papal Brigade; Irish nationalism; Catholic nationalism; Papal States

*It is time now to stop this arch bit of a wag*

*I mean Garibaldi the devils old brag*

(Sadlier, n.d.)

As Garibaldi rose to fame and glory with his exploits in Italy during the Risorgimento, his success was greeted in a very ambivalent and even hostile

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\* Email: [anne.oconnor@nuigalway.ie](mailto:anne.oconnor@nuigalway.ie)

manner in Ireland. This reception was influenced by the dominance of the Catholic Church on the island and its unsympathetic position towards the changes in Italy. Domestic and tactical considerations coloured responses to Garibaldi in Ireland and, indeed, it is to be observed that in this period Irish issues were projected onto the Italian context, often leading to entrenched and extreme positions. Attitudes to the Italian soldier were mainly influenced by the religious divide and he inspired radically contrasting responses from the Protestant and the Catholic communities on the island.

The Irish demonstrated a striking interest in Italian affairs during the Risorgimento; newspapers were full of reports on the Italian situation throughout the 1860s as people avidly followed the unfolding events on the continent. Irish interest in Italy peaked in 1860 with the participation of Irish soldiers in the defence of the Papal States and this particularly unhappy experience of the Risorgimento influenced future perceptions of Italy, with much of the negative feelings generated at this time crystallising around the figure of Garibaldi. Contradictions and contrasts were rife in Ireland in its relationship with Italy in these years: Catholic nationalists rejected the claims of Italian Papal States for self determination; the Protestant Ascendancy championed the cause of the ‘oppressed people’ of these same states; secular Irish nationalism struggled to find a voice in the midst of pro-papal hysteria, and the British State witnessed the departure of citizens from both Ireland and England to fight on different sides of the Italian conflict.

It is important to note at this stage that, in the words of R.V. Comerford, ‘A “nationalist” catholic identity was the largest political fact of Irish life in the mid-nineteenth century.’ (1998, 31). Thus, in the spring of 1860, when Pius IX, fearful of an invasion of his territories, appealed for aid and protection from the wider Catholic world, the Irish responded to this call to arms and troops started to arrive in Italy in the summer of 1860 (Berkeley 1929; O’Carroll 2008; Cryan Pancani 1986; Paganini 1976; Larkin 1987). The decision to send an Irish Papal Brigade to Italy in 1860 is a crucial element in the understanding of the relationship between Garibaldi and Ireland. These troops, who were much celebrated on their departure from Ireland, were ridiculed in the Italian press and encountered open hostility from the locals in the areas they had gone out to protect. Irish military involvement in Italy

stretched to only a few months as most of the Papal States were surrendered in the autumn of 1860. There appears to have been a complete lack of understanding between the two nationalisms at this time of propaganda and warfare and this lack of understanding continued in the Irish depiction of Garibaldi when he was seen (in Catholic circles) in very black and white terms as an aggressive anti-clericalist at best, and a rabid anti-Christ at worst. The ill-fated military venture of the Irish Papal Brigade was highly emotive and generated feelings of frustration and injustice which were to influence Irish-Italian relations for years to come (D'Angelo 1976). **The lack of empathy between Ireland and Italy in the nineteenth century was mutual. On the Italian side, Mazzini had a very ambivalent attitude towards Ireland; in general he did not support Irish independence but expressed support for some Irish patriot leaders. Other Italians such as Gioberti and Cavour felt little sympathy with Ireland, viewing the country more as Britain's problematic region than as a potential national unit (Finelli 2007, 90-99). The Irish in turn were very influenced by their religious allegiances in their attitudes towards Italian unification.**

Indeed, the interaction between Ireland and the Papal States in the 1860s impacted on the emergence and dominance of a form of Catholic nationalism in Ireland: stoked by events in Italy, Irish nationalism rose to a remarkable new crescendo of pro-papal enthusiasm and fervour (Larkin 1987, 7; Gilley 1973, 701). The Papal cause came to be identified with the cause of Ireland, thus illustrating the intertwining of Irishness and Catholicism in this era (O'Brien 2005, 301). The efforts of the Irish Papal Brigade brought church and country together in an unusually international patriotic enterprise and Garibaldi's reception in Ireland must be analysed in the context of a background of pro-papal fervour. This form of nationalism, which vehemently opposed Garibaldi's efforts in Italy, was so dominated by religion that it could not find any sympathy with Italian Risorgimento efforts, even though one might presume that a degree of empathy could have existed between two European nationalist efforts.

It is interesting to point out at this stage that the Irish troops in Italy never actually fought against Garibaldi. Their military endeavours were against the Piedmontese army. It is clear, nonetheless, that Garibaldi was, in

the eyes of the Irish, more than just a military leader, he was the symbol of Italian insurrection and anti-clericalism. One soldier writing home said that if Garibaldi were to come in contact with the Battalion of St. Patrick, they would give him ‘a wrinkle that he never got the like of before’ (*The Nation*, 1 September 1860). This, of course, never happened and Garibaldi’s future hostile depiction in Ireland did not stem from a direct sense of revenge for some act perpetrated against the Irish troops but was rather based on the soldier’s international image as the incarnation of Italian nationalism. He regularly featured as their main enemy and focus in ballads and poems celebrating the Irish Brigade. For example in ‘A new song on the downfall of Garibaldi’ by Michael McCabe (n.d.) the balladeer sings:

Garibaldi he is boasting and says he’ll have fun  
But let him have manners until he has done  
The Irish physicians will shorten his pain  
For an ounce of good lead they will lodge in his brain  
(N.L.S.: Crawford. EB.3779)<sup>1</sup>

During the period of Irish involvement in the Papal States, it is interesting to note the depiction of Garibaldi in the Irish press and in particular in *The Nation*.<sup>2</sup> The gradual unification of Italy was seen in this paper as sacrilegious robbery by infidels, directed by individuals who were the proponents of treason, sedition, rebellion and immorality. It was maintained that the clergy were regularly treated badly (20 October 1860) and the people of Ireland were warned to beware of the ‘deadly virus of Garibaldian teaching’ (22 September 1860). Indeed, from this era, the adjective ‘Garibaldian’ was used as a negative descriptor and the followers of Garibaldi were described as ‘filibusters’.<sup>3</sup>

On 16 June 1860 an editorial in *The Nation* clarified their opinion of Garibaldi stating that:

We can have little sympathy with that Italian Revolution which has made Garibaldi its hero. Our principles are diametrically opposed. Our struggles lead us along a very different path.<sup>4</sup>

At other times, the paper tries to come to grips with the Italian soldier, saying that ‘it is difficult to understand what political principles, if any, Garibaldi

professes to follow.’ (28 July 1860). Similarly in September 1860 the editor asked, ‘Are we to judge Garibaldi by his acts or by his words? And if by his acts, then, by which class of them? For if some are pro-Sardinian, others are unmistakably anti-Cavourian. We confess ourselves unable to interpret the riddle.’ In this questioning, the paper anticipated some of the debates which were to plague historians for years to come. By November 1860, *The Nation* passed its judgment on Garibaldi stating:

When we strip his character of adventitious ornament we do not recognise any of those attributes which surround great names; we do not witness a great capacity or a great influence in him which is to give a lasting impulse to his fame. [...] What is there to fall back upon in his reputation? What is there in this man, that there is such a torrent of British praise poured upon him? Just one quality, and little besides – his bigotry against the Catholic Church, his personal enmity to its Head, and his intolerance of its freedom. [...] We must refuse this charlatan any of the homage so earnestly demanded by his admirers. He has been only the puppet of the wily Cavour. By him he was placed on the scene – by him he was judiciously paraded before the eyes of the dupes who applauded the deception – by him he was removed from it. And if we needed any other proof than that afforded by the investigation of his actions, we have it in the fact of his subsiding from his character of the liberator of Italy into the purchased pensioner of Victor Emmanuel. (24 November 1860)

Although the Irish Papal Brigade started as a venture dominated by the Church, in time it became a vehicle for nationalist outpourings. Archbishop Paul Cullen of Dublin, who was central to the whole endeavour, resisted these developments trying to keep the Irish involvement on its original path; as Paul Bew commented, ‘The Papal Irish Brigade was explicitly inspired by the ideal of Irish Catholicism rather than Irish nationalism.’ (2007, 253) The ‘greening’ of the venture became, however, one of its main features and rallying calls and Comerford even suggests that nationalists may have tried to take advantage of it, using the Papal Brigade as a training ground for future military ventures (1998, 32). As the Brigade became more associated with

Irish nationalism than Catholicism, some Irish nationalists who would normally have been on a collision course with such blatantly religious ventures found themselves celebrating the cause. Indicative of this trend is C.J. Kickham penning the celebratory ‘A song for the Irish Brigade’ (*Irishman*, 29 September 1860) and John Mitchel greeting the volunteers in Paris on their way home from Italy (Comerford 1998, 62).

Nationalist rhetoric dominated debates on the Papal States and a situation developed (via the intercession of the Church) whereby Irish nationalists found themselves diametrically opposed to Garibaldi, when one might have assumed that they would be sympathetic to his cause. The linking of the defence of the Papal States with Irish nationalism ultimately led to an Irish National Petition being forwarded to the Queen which, making reference to the Italian situation, asked for plebiscites in Ireland similar to those in the central Italian states. Throughout the summer of 1860 this Petition gathered momentum and led to meetings and discussions throughout Ireland and in the Irish community in Britain about the justification for self-determination. More than 400,000 people are said to have signed the petition.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the summer of 1860 *The Nation* reported on meetings where the question was asked, ‘If Italy is to be for the Italians, why not Ireland for the Irish?’ (11 August 1860). It was an important moment in the galvanising and political education of many nationalists who would dominate the Irish nationalist scene in future years, and stemmed directly from observations of the Italian situation.<sup>6</sup>

An interesting incident shows the level of emotions with regard to the Italian situation in 1860. In October of that year a Sardinian vessel arrived in the port of Galway, an event which reportedly kept the town in a state of perpetual commotion, disturbance, and excitement. The crew of the vessel were said to be fired with enthusiasm for the revolution in Italy, and omitted no opportunity to shout at night for their hero Garibaldi, hawk his portrait about, and denounce his Holiness the Pope in most unmeasured terms. This caused ‘a most unpleasant feeling’ among the people of Galway which was heightened by the fact that the Italians carried knives and more than once unsheathed them in several public houses. Tensions came to a head when a young boy who was throwing stones at the sailors was chased and stabbed

(*The Nation*, 20 October 1860). Although just a small event, it illustrates how opinion on the Italian situation had permeated Irish society.<sup>7</sup>

### **Ireland – Britain – Italy**

The Irish reaction to Garibaldi cannot, however, be simply assessed on its own as Britain in fact occupied a pivotal position in what might be termed a triangular relationship between the three countries. Britain's support of Italian efforts at unification brought about bafflement on the Irish side. For example, in *The Nation*, it was asked why England upheld certain principles in Italy and not in Ireland, adding that 'These principles are either true or false, just or unjust. They are as applicable to Ireland as to the Romagna. If a people be the best judges of how it should be governed, Ireland has a perfect right to say it is dissatisfied with its present rule and ask for another' (2 June 1860). Further indignation stemmed from the difficulty posed by the Foreign Enlistment Act in putting together a Papal Brigade from Ireland while in England such legislation seemed to be openly flaunted in the recruitment of troops for the Garibaldian cause.

Irish soldiers travelled as supposed 'emigrants' to Italy and on arrival enlisted in the Papal Army. In reality, however, despite the worries of the organisers of the Irish Brigade, very little hindrance was placed in the way of the Irish soldiers travelling to Italy. The legality of the Irish enlistments was questioned in the House of Commons but as McIntire has suggested, 'Russell and Palmerston had no need or wish to infuriate Irish Catholics by interfering with the Irish enlistments. Their political relations with the Irish in Parliament were sensitive already. Besides, the Irish recruits for the pope were a *quid pro quo* for English recruits for Garibaldi. In any case, the disgruntled Irish volunteers were good anti-papal propagandists when they returned to Ireland.' (1983, 204).

In Ireland, particularly in Catholic circles, Britain was viewed as the main instigator of 'sedition' in Italy. Archbishop Paul Cullen, for example, did not give any weight to local desires for unification and did not give any credence to Garibaldi's motivations; rather he saw the events in Italy in terms of international intrigue. In this, he was influenced by Pius IX who, according to McIntire, 'regarded Sardinia as his worst enemy in Italy and Napoleon as



his greatest agony. But he considered England, especially the Palmerston and Russell government, to be his enemy in a more fundamental way.’ (1983, 223). Irish people only became more aware of the nuances of the upheaval in Italy following the return of the Papal Brigade, who realised that they had been ‘dying for people who did not want to be died for.’ (Berkeley 1929, 51).

In general terms, it can be observed that the Italian Risorgimento brought Italy and England closer together but it only served to further distance Ireland from any empathy with either country (Buschkühl, 1982; McIntire, 1983; Matsumoto-Best, 2003). Much of the English press spent the duration of the Irish Brigade’s existence mocking and undermining their participation in Italy. Chief instigator of these hostile reports was *The Times* who lost no opportunity in giving high profile coverage to any Irish misdemeanour or failing in Italy and represented the Irish soldiers as mercenaries, ruffians and adventurers.<sup>8</sup> The paper hoped that the Irish would disgrace themselves and thus prove to the continent what a difficult and trying task the English had in governing them. It sought to argue that Ireland was actually in an excellent state compared to Italy and in an editorial claimed the best thing that could happen to the Irish volunteers was that either they join Garibaldi or else be shot down at once, and put out of their misery (8 September 1860).<sup>9</sup>

The barbs and accusations sent back and forth between England and Ireland formed part of a particularly heated and emotional exchange and looking back on the period, the editor of *The Nation* said that although often bitter and passionate words had passed between the English and Irish press, he doubted ‘if ever the language of taunt and contumely on the one hand, and of hatred and defiance on the other, proceeded to greater lengths than on this occasion.’ (Sullivan 1878, 216).<sup>10</sup> The conflicting British attitude towards Italy and Ireland had the effect of confirming people in their positions and further uniting Irish nationalism and Catholicism. For example, a circular sent to all chapels in the diocese of Cloyne stated that ‘The insults and calumnies dictated by a hatred of everything Irish, will only stimulate the people to honour with deeper feeling and greater solemnity the memory of the dead [troops of the Papal Brigade].’ (*The Cork Examiner*, 7 November 1860). In speeches made to returning Papal troops it was claimed that the British

attitude towards the Irish Papal Brigade would only serve to make the Irish even more zealous in their efforts.

Ultimately, it can be seen that the English response to the Papal Brigade was destined to drive the forces of Catholicism and Irish nationalism towards a closer alliance (O'Carroll 2008, 187). This galvanising of public opinion and the rallying of the Irish people around a nationalist cause was the direct result of the situation in Italy, of England's obvious celebration of Italian nationalism and in particular of Garibaldi. England did not see the need to excuse perceived 'double standards' as it was claimed that the two countries were very different. If, however, we examine the wording of the National Petition of 1860/1861, we see that the focus in the Irish anti-Garibaldi constituency was on the right to self determination of groups of people and that direct comparisons were made between Romagna and Ireland: in Irish nationalist opinion, the former had chosen to join a larger unit, the latter had not. The key factor for Irish nationalists was the right to choose one's own government. In adopting this attitude, Irish nationalists who supported the Papacy's temporal power were flagrantly contradicting themselves in denying the inhabitants of the Papal States a similar right to self determination. This contradiction was, however, ignored by sidelining the rights of these inhabitants in the interests of what was deemed to be the greater spiritual good.

The extremely positive portrayal of Garibaldi in the British press, the fundraising on his behalf and the praise of his heroism did not go unnoticed in Ireland and resulted in heightened resentment at the contrasting treatment of Irish nationalism. For example on 18 August 1860 *The Nation* observed that:

Garibaldi, who is not a Sicilian, collected an armed force, who were not Sicilians, with which he invaded Sicily, and got up a rebellion in that country against its Sovereign. For doing which all England cheered him frantically, and pronounced him a hero, a liberator, a saviour. Garibaldi, it is believed, intends to proceed from Sicily to Naples and get up a rebellion in that country against its Sovereign, and from Naples to Rome to effect a similar object. And all England calls out to him to go on, and wishes him a speedy and complete success.<sup>11</sup>

Thus Garibaldi, already despised in Ireland for his anti-clericalism, saw further damage to his reputation there due to the blatant championing of his cause on the English mainland. Archbishop Cullen raged in a letter to Tobias Kirby (his successor as rector of the Irish College in Rome) about this support of Garibaldi:

Here all the Protestants are Garibaldians. They have got Garibaldi hats and cloaks. Even the ladies have got Garibaldi cloaks – even the ladies (protestant) have red Garibaldi cloaks and a sort of Garibaldi hat with red feathers. The Tory and Orange papers are more revolutionary than the Whigs themselves [...] The whole of England (even many Catholics) is for Garibaldi and Revolution. (PICR, KIR/NC/1/1860/102).

This indignation was to continue long after the end of the Irish Papal campaign and on the occasion of Garibaldi's visit to England, Cullen said, 'What a degrading and disgraceful exhibition of English feeling in favour of Garibaldi'.<sup>12</sup> Joseph McCorry, a former member of the Irish Brigade similarly expressed his disgust at the manner in which Garibaldi was celebrated in England

[...] the freebooter, marauder, and devilish Garibaldi was the hero of the hour with them, as evidenced in the number of his plates – representing him in his red jacket standing by his charger's bridle – decorating the walls of the drawing rooms, the kitchens, parlours and bedrooms of the middle and working classes, as well as the show-windows of the print sellers and furniture brokers of the nation. (1885, 7)

Thwarted by his undeniable military successes in 1860, the Irish had to wait until Garibaldi suffered military and political reverses in later years in order to give full vent to their feelings. Bitterness towards Garibaldi erupted in particular on the occasion of his military campaigns in 1862 and 1867 and when he was defeated in combat, the Irish street minstrel seized the opportunity at once and came out with ballads such as 'The downfall of

Garibaldi', 'The Pontiff's victory over Garibaldi', 'The Pope's triumph over Garibaldi' and 'The premature fall of the rebble [sic] infidel Garibaldi'.<sup>13</sup> The words of 'The **downfall** of Garibaldi' give an indication of prevailing sentiments:

Concerning Garibaldi

This traitor he is caught at last,  
And into prison he is cast  
He'll surely pay for what is past  
This villain Garibaldi

*Chorus*

Let us rejoice both one and all  
From Kerry unto Donegal  
While I relate the sad downfall  
Of poor old Garibaldi. (N.L.S.: Crawford. EB.1925, n.d.).

While elsewhere Garibaldi's exploits in Sicily and Naples were heralded as the actions of a brave and heroic soldier, in this ballad these are termed 'evil deeds' and the song ends:

Now of his wounds if he should die,  
We'll dress in black, you may rely,  
And rub an onion to each eye,  
As we weep for Garibaldi!

A further indication of the strength of feeling in Ireland are the lines from another ballad, 'The Pontiff's victory over Garibaldi', where Garibaldi and the Sardinians are referred to as 'the Antichrist', 'devils', and 'imps and locusts'<sup>14</sup> (N.L.S.: Crawford. EB.3729). 'The premature fall of the rebble infidel Garibaldi' captures the Irish feelings well:

Rejoice you Irish Catholics at Garibaldi's fall  
**[PROBABLY CORRECT BUT COULD YOU CHECK SYNTAX?]**  
Was wounded most severely by a swift Italian ball  
It pierced the vitals of his frame for life he has no hope  
Its now he stands in need of benediction from the Pope

The second flying Lucifer, now sinks into despair  
Too late he feels chastisement to assault Saint Peter's chair  
This holy chair will stand in Rome Saint Peter's flock to guide  
From all devouring heresy we're tested well and tried

John Bull behind the curtain he set Garibaldi out  
He cash'd right well and armed him beyond all shade of doubt  
To upset our holy Pontiff, was Brittainas [sic] crafty scheme  
By divine decree you plainly see she lost her deadly aim (N.L.S.:  
Crawford. EB.3596. n.d.)

These unsympathetic attitudes towards Garibaldi amongst the Irish had a very public airing in the form of the Garibaldi riots in London in 1862. In September of that year there were running battles in Hyde Park between Irish immigrants and supporters of Garibaldi. The Irish claimed to be defending the Pope and the honour of the Papal Brigade in their actions and their shout as they rushed into the affray was 'Down with Garibaldi, hurrah for the Pope.'<sup>15</sup> These clashes in central London demonstrate the extent to which a dislike of Garibaldi had become ingrained in the Irish people and how they were willing to use this anger as a uniting force at home or abroad.

Further evidence of the lingering antagonism towards Garibaldi, and the continued influence of the experience of the Irish Papal Brigade comes in various written works where the images of Garibaldi set forth in previous years are reinforced (McCorry 1885, 22-23, 54; de Ségur 1883, 8). The anti Garibaldian feelings were even taken to America by members of the Irish Brigade who subsequently fought in the American Civil War. Speaking at Arlington just before the recitation of the poem 'The siege of Spoleto', Michael MacCaffery wondered how Garibaldi could have contemplated fighting in America on the Union side given his insurrectionist tendencies (1864, 19).

### **Support for Garibaldi in Ireland**

There were, however, elements in Irish society sympathetic to the Italian cause and to Garibaldi. These sympathies generally came from the minority

Protestant community whose views very often mirrored those on the British mainland and were diametrically opposed to those prevalent in Catholic circles. Protestants hailed Garibaldi as a religious liberator, a ‘visionary’ and the ‘noblest and purest’ of patriots; many evangelicals interpreted him in ‘millenarian terms as an instrument chosen by Providence to scourge the antichristian papacy.’ (O’Brien 2005, 297-298). During events in Italy, the conservative *Irish Times* generally praised the Italian soldier saying in 1860 that ‘The valour of no man shone so conspicuous during the Italian war as that of Garibaldi (17 July 1860).<sup>16</sup> The English *Times* seemed to delight in mentioning any Irish papers which showed evidence of pro-Garibaldi tendencies, citing the *Clonmel Chronicle* and the *Fermanagh Reporter* as examples of such leanings (*The Times*, 4 June 1860; 9 June 1860). Given the larger concentration of Protestants in Ulster, it is not surprising that there were regional differences in the reaction to Garibaldi. Victor Hugo gave a lecture in Belfast on ‘Garibaldi and Sicily’ and the proceeds of the talk were devoted to the Belfast fund for the ‘Wallace of Italy’ (*The Times*, 19 July 1860). A group was recruited in Ulster to join Garibaldi in late 1860; they never left for Italy, however, as the Italian went into retirement before they could set sail (O’Brien 2005, 303).

There is evidence that a few Irish fought on Garibaldi’s side. A letter was printed in the *Irish Times* on 23 November 1860 from a woman asking for details about her husband’s whereabouts. He had joined the Garibaldi Army in Birmingham in September and she had not heard from him since. One particularly enthusiastic supporter wrote to Garibaldi from Dublin expressing his disgust at the formation of the Irish Papal Brigade, calling the volunteers ‘400 misguided fanatics’ and asking permission to organise a band of excursionists, ‘a noble Irish legion’ (Riall 2007, 300). There was also a report (subsequently discredited) that a ship containing 28,000 muskets for Garibaldi passed through Cork Harbour (Bowen 1983, 199). If we are to believe a correspondent to *The Irish Times*, the Irish troops fighting on Garibaldi’s side made a good impression and the letter writer further claims that:

[...] in spite of the efforts of a priestly faction to prove to the contrary, [Garibaldi] has expressed his firm conviction that the Papal Brigade

was not organised with the consent of the Irish nation, and concluded by remarking what pleasure it would give him to see that brave and generous people represented at this 'holy banquet' next spring. I think sir, you will agree with me in saying that some means ought to be adopted to bring about so desirable an event, if it was only to prove that his noble confidence was not misplaced and that, in spite of fanaticism, there still burns within our breasts a love of freedom. (28 February 1861)

The final lines of this letter hint at the belief held by a minority that the causes of Irish and Italian freedom were not irreconcilable. The people holding these views had a difficult task, however, to wrest the disapproving perception of Garibaldi away from the dominant view so influenced by the Catholic Church.

There was of course anti-clerical sentiment present in Ireland throughout this period; indeed, the years following Italian unification saw a fraught relationship between Fenianism and the Church. Various nationalists such as Gavan Duffy had a concept of the Irish nation as a secular community in which Irishmen of all religious persuasions might feel at home and there were many shades and hues of anti-clericalism in the various nationalist movements in Ireland in these years (Comerford 1998; Bew 2009; McGee 2005). Nevertheless, a clear anti-clerical movement did not emerge in the context of the Irish interactions with Italy in the 1860s. There are some rare examples of sympathy in nationalist circles towards the Italian cause but such was the power of the Church in these years that any movements whose views differed from those of the dominant Catholic nationalism found it hard to go against the grain especially on issues relating to Italy. (Finelli 2008, 14-15; Dudley Edwards 1960, 39-40; O'Brien 2005, 293). Any Irish nationalists who supported Garibaldi had to be careful not to alienate such a large section of the Irish population by any blatant championing of the anti-Papal cause in Italy.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Archbishop Paul Cullen happily reported in December 1859 that the only Catholic who had spoken against the Pope was a nephew of Dr. England called Michael J. Barry, 'once a red hot Young Irishman, now a place hunter'.<sup>18</sup> Overall, it can be observed that the division of support in Ireland for both sides in the Papal Wars generally mirrored pre-existing

religious divisions. It is clear that the religious element dominated all others in Irish debates on Italy, leading to the strange scenario of the opposition of Irish nationalism to Italian nationalism and the support of a dominant Anglo Irish community for insurrection and self determination.

### **Paul Cullen**

One of the central figures in the perception and reception of Garibaldi in Ireland was Archbishop Paul Cullen (Rector of the Irish College in Rome 1832-1849, Archbishop of Armagh 1849-1852, and Archbishop of Dublin 1852-1878). During his time in Rome he had witnessed the upheavals of 1848, events that were to mark his attitude to both Irish and Italian nationalism in years to come.<sup>19</sup> He would hitherto oppose all ‘secret societies’ in Ireland and in Italy and all violent attempts to overthrow existing powers. He was vehement, active and compelling in his desire to protect the Papal States from attack as, in the words of Colin Barr, ‘To Paul Cullen, the Roman Republic was not about Italian freedom, but rather an anticlerical, atheistical attack on the Catholic Church’ (2008, 127). Cullen often saw Irish insurrection through an Italian lens, sometimes arriving at inappropriate and unjustified conclusions about the intentions of Irish nationalists. He was deeply involved in sending the Irish Brigade to Italy in 1860 and remained committed to the spiritual and temporal causes of the Pope in the years that followed. He was responsible for numerous collections of money for the Pope and most notably, managed to raise the huge sum of £80,000 in the initial fund-raising drive for the Papacy in 1860. Cullen was one of the most influential figures in Irish society in the nineteenth century and his negative feelings towards Italian nationalism coloured the attitude of many around him, including, importantly, his sympathisers in the Irish press. The British satirical publication *Punch* was very aware of Cullen’s centrality and, during the campaign of the Irish Brigade, singled him out for particular vitriol and mocking (*Punch*, 19 November 1859, 21 January 1860, 27 October 1860). Cullen was similarly targeted in *The Times* and the Brigade was often referred to as Dr. Cullen’s Irish Brigade.

Cullen was particularly involved in perpetuating the memory of the Papal Brigade and to this end he organised masses in honour of the deceased



Irish troops.<sup>20</sup> The paraphernalia of the Church and its extensive influence was used to ensure that the Brigade did not slink home as a defeated army but instead that their actions were heralded and celebrated in their native land. He continued to offer masses in relation to Italian events, for example, on 17 November 1867 High Mass was celebrated for the Papal soldiers who had been killed in the latest 'Garibaldian invasion'.<sup>21</sup> Cullen used these occasions to vent his opinions on Italy from the pulpit and in such a manner, the events in Italy and the consequent hostile depiction of Garibaldi continued to be present in Irish public opinion.

Garibaldi was often the specific target of Cullen's ire at events in Italy. In 1867, Cullen gave a sermon where he recounted a story he had been told about Garibaldi hiding in the confessionals of the Conventualist's Church during the recent skirmishes. He reported in a letter that 'The poor Catholics were delighted to hear the scoundrel so well abused but the Protestant papers say that I dealt in lies and calumnies.'<sup>22</sup> On 2 January 1863, he wrote expressing his delight at the pantomime performed in Dublin by the girls of the Deaf and Dumb Institute entitled 'Garibaldi and the devils'. The girls, he said, did the pantomime 'exceedingly well' and he recounts how Garibaldi, egged on by the devil, sets out for Rome where he is wounded at the Battle of Aspromonte. The devil is greatly alarmed by this development and dances with delight when Garibaldi recovers. Ultimately, Garibaldi is frightened by the spectre of Cavour and 'at length St Michael appears and destroys the devil and Garibaldi. It was very good.' Cullen also told the nuns that if they acted such a piece in Italy they [would] answer for it with their heads.<sup>23</sup>

Cullen followed events in Italy closely organising yet another collection in 1867 and writing that he was glad to hear that Kirby and the students at the Irish College had not been 'molested by the Garibaldians'.<sup>24</sup> His fear of Garibaldi's activities continued throughout the decade and in 1868, he wrote to Kirby worried that Garibaldi would be encouraged by the success of the Spanish Revolution.<sup>25</sup> The Archbishop seems to have had a hierarchy in terms of his disapproving assessment of revolutionary movements. Therefore, although he commented that the three Fenians who were executed in 1867 for their revolutionary activity were 'scoundrels', he added that 'they were not half as bad as the Garibaldians'.<sup>26</sup> His assessment of the Orangemen

was more damning and he said ‘They are menacing us and if able, they’d be as bad as the Garibaldians.’<sup>27</sup>

Letters sent to the Irish College in the latter years of the 1860s reveal continued worries in Ireland about the activities of Garibaldi and concern for both the Pope and the Irish in Rome.<sup>28</sup> Eliza Cronin wrote to Kirby in 1867 saying she hoped he wasn’t afraid of that ‘old detestable bit Garibaldi’, adding that she would not like to be in the Italian’s shoes when he went to meet his maker. She finishes by saying that she hoped that God would ‘mend him’ before he ‘ends him’!<sup>29</sup> Similar letters refer to the Italian soldier as a ‘hateful wretch’ and an ‘old fool’.<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, in one letter the writer states that the Irish interest in Italian affairs of 1867 was as anxious and intense as Roman interest and finishes by thanking God that the Garibaldians have been so soundly thrashed.<sup>31</sup> Another writer claimed that her heart rejoiced at the defeat of Garibaldi and added that ‘The Garibaldians in this country are all terror stricken at the thought of their great hero being put down.’<sup>32</sup>

Stirred on by Paul Cullen and propelled by events in Italy, the denigration of Garibaldi was a constant in Ireland in the 1860s. Those who were sympathetic to his cause could find little leeway given the powerful position of the Catholic Church in Irish society and the manner in which Church structures were used to put down the Italian. One consolation for Garibaldi in all these attacks on his name in Ireland is that no matter how badly he was depicted in the country, he probably was considered less dangerous than Mazzini (Barr 2008). For example in 1867, even the conservative *Irish Times* commented that ‘Garibaldi, indeed has been driven from the scene, but the Arch-plotter, Mazzini takes his place, endowed with infinitely greater powers for mischief.’ (15 November 1867).

## **Conclusion**

As can be seen from the above discussions, any reaction to Garibaldi in Ireland was couched in religious significance and determined by the country’s particular brand of nationalism. Too often, the analysis of the Risorgimento in the Irish realm was reduced to the terms of a straightforward religious struggle. The experience of the Irish Papal Brigade had brought the forces of Catholicism and Irish nationalism closer together and in the words of Larkin,

led to a ‘deepening of Irish national consciousness’ (1987, 50). These positions were further entrenched by the English reaction to Irish involvement in Italy and by the indignation felt at the contrasting treatment of Italy and Ireland at the hands of the British. Different values placed on respective nationalist movements led to tensions between the two groups, particularly on the Irish side, and pre-existing divisions were exacerbated. The perceived contradiction in England’s stance galvanised the Irish cause, resulting initially in a National Petition and eventually in discussions of Home Rule and repeal of Union. Although the Irish troops failed in their battles in Italy, denigration of their opponent Garibaldi became a badge of Irish nationalism and the experience of the Papal Brigade became a motivation for the furthering of the Irish cause. So in a roundabout way, Garibaldi, a hero to so many freedom seekers, actually helped motivate Irish nationalism, albeit not in the positive manner he might have wished for. As the Irish balladeer (McCabe n.d.), who chooses a snake-like image for Garibaldi, proclaimed:

So here’s for Hibernia the Irishmans home  
And long live our Pontiff with comfort in Rome  
Three cheers for the heroes that are now in the field  
From those dangerous serpents that the Lord may them shield.

### **Abbreviations:**

PICR: Pontifical Irish College, Rome  
N.L.S.: National Library of Scotland  
N.L.I.: National Library of Ireland

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<sup>1</sup> See also ‘A new song called The Irish Brigade in battle’ N.L.S.: Crawford. EB.2870; ‘Glorious victory of the Pope’s Brigade at Perugia’ by Joseph Sadleir, N.L.I. MS 5159 (67b); and ‘The Irish Brigade’, N.L.S.: Crawford. EB.3779; and ‘Volunteers for the Pope’. There are also a number of ballads on the Brigade in the Trinity College Dublin, John Davis White Collection.

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Many ballads on this topic are now located in the Crawford Collection of the National Library of Scotland while others are to be found in the National Library of Ireland (MS 5159: 64, 101, 102). None have any publication dates.

<sup>2</sup> *The Nation* newspaper had been founded by the Young Ireland movement as a voice for Irish nationalism. By 1860, its editor was A.M. Sullivan, a man equally committed to religion and nationalism.

<sup>3</sup> The negativity of the Garibaldian adjective continued in subsequent years when, for example, *The Patriot* newspaper was referred to as ‘that malicious Garibaldian rag’. MacEvilly to Kirby, 14 June 1864, PICR Archives, KIR/115. See also the controversy surrounding T. Mason Jones’ candidacy for Parliament in 1868 and the accusations that he was a Garibaldian. (Larkin 1987, 608-609).

<sup>4</sup> And yet there is a small modicum of sympathy with the Italian as the editorial continues: ‘But we cannot refuse to him the testimony that he has beaten men whose defeat none can regret. Out Irish instincts forbid one word of sorrow for the ruin of a system which was strong against the feeble, but weak and defenceless before the first real danger: [...] We can only regret that it has not been by natives – not Sicilians, but by filibusters, invaders, foreigners doing a foreign sovereign’s work, that his victory has been won [...]’

<sup>5</sup> After the return of the Papal troops, A.M. Sullivan said that the Brigade gave ‘a force to the patriotism of their people which will, in the good time of Providence, lead to the accomplishment of grand results for the happiness and prosperity of their native land.’ *The Nation*, 10 November 1860.

<sup>6</sup> ‘From the organisational point of view the national petition was a notable achievement [...] The petition campaign was mainly in the hands of newcomers to politics who were stronger in literacy than in wealth or social standing. They included [...] O’Donovan Rossa and others who already were, or were likely to become fenians. The ‘national petition’ campaign of 1860-61 exemplifies [...] the autonomous exercise of political and social skills (under the banner of nationalism) by groups of young men otherwise condemned to social and political insignificance.’ (Comerford 1998, 65).

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<sup>7</sup> Evidence of the strength of feeling can also be seen by the riots which accompanied the talk of the pro-Garibaldi speaker Alessandro Gavazzi in Galway in 1859 and in Tralee in 1862. Gavazzi, who went on to become an army chaplain with Garibaldi, had a history of incensing audiences with his anti-Papal rhetoric.

<sup>8</sup> ‘But what would be the objectives of an Irish Brigade in an Italian war? Not mere employment, for there is plenty of that at home; for the assertion of a patriotic principle, for that principle would be on the other side, neither could they be promoting Catholic interests, for all their success must be obtained at the expense of Catholics. One thing only would they be doing – they would be helping to establish in tyrannical strength a Government against which its own subjects had risen as utterly intolerable, and that, in our humble opinion, it is not exactly a work in which it is desirable to assist.’ *The Times*, 19 May 1860.

<sup>9</sup> The Editorial claims: ‘The Irish seem to have been a ‘costly mistake’. People had read about their misery and oppression till they believed it, and were surprised to find the ill-used natives of the Isle of Saints much too well-fed to stomach Papal rations, and much too free in their ideas and habits to endure Papal discipline’ (8 September 1860). Similar sentiments can be seen on the pages of *Punch* in 1860.

<sup>10</sup> Sullivan’s paper *The Nation* took particular offence at what it termed the ‘Ponderous columns of *The Times*, insolent invective of *The Press*, silly whinings of *The Herald*, puny attempts at blasphemous witticisms of *The Globe*.’ 14 January 1860.

<sup>11</sup> Some further examples of disgust at English support for Garibaldi include a letter from the Archbishop of Tuam in *The Nation* (1 September 1860); while Paul Cullen’s misgivings are reported in the same paper (15 September 1860). See also Larkin (1987, 406).

<sup>12</sup> Cullen to Myles O’Reilly, [N.L.I.](#), MS 17,886. I am grateful to Colin Barr for access to his transcripts of Cullen’s letters.

<sup>13</sup> [See the Crawford Collection of the National Library of Scotland and the National Library of Ireland \(MS 5159: 64, 101, 102\).](#)

<sup>14</sup> Similar sentiments, though not so colourfully expressed, can be seen in letters to the Irish College in Rome where Irish people rejoiced at the defeat of

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Garibaldi. See for example, English to Kirby, 3 January 1868, PICR Archives, KIR/3.

<sup>15</sup> For a divergent view of events, see *The Times* and *The Nation*, from the end of September 1862 to mid October 1862. For a fuller account of the riots see Gilley (1973).

<sup>16</sup> In 1866 the *Irish Times* defended Garibaldi's reputation claiming that 'the credit of Garibaldi, based on his moral qualities even more than upon his military successes, is too well founded to be thus cast down.' (9 August 1866). In later years the paper referred to Garibaldi in affectionate terms as 'the old warrior' (22 October 1867).

<sup>17</sup> Comerford suggests that, 'In the summer of 1859, when it was possible to envisage a new northern Italian state co-existing with the temporal power of the papacy, Irish ideologists of nationality, such as the editors of the *Nation* and the *Irishman*, could enjoy the luxury of supporting both the Piedmontese and the pope. Later in the year, when it became clear that Italian nationalism and the temporal power could not coexist, both papers expressed themselves in favour of the pope, though not without showing an awareness of some inconsistency. These expressions of fealty were in line with an overwhelming wave of public opinion.' (1998, 59)

<sup>18</sup> PICR KIR/NC/1/1859/5. He is also glad to report that although support for Garibaldi has swept through England it was not yet the rage in Ireland. PICR KIR/NC/1/1860/103, 9 November 1860.

<sup>19</sup> Other priests were also affected by first hand experience of the events of 1848. The Archbishop of Tuam during a meeting held in sympathy with the Pope on 11 February 1860, recalled how he had just left Rome in time in 1848 and dreaded to think what might have happened had he been caught up in events. His speech is transcribed in *The Nation*, 11 February 1860.

<sup>20</sup> Details of the many masses held are to be found in *The Nation*, from 6 October 1860 throughout the autumn and winter of that year.

<sup>21</sup> Cullen to Kirby, 4 December 1867, PICR Archives, KIR/439.

<sup>22</sup> Cullen to Kirby, 20 December 1867, PICR Archives, KIR/466. Cullen also reports that he suffered the abuse of the Protestant press for having called

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Garibaldi a coward. See Cullen to Kirby, 24 November 1867, PICR Archives, KIR/425; 29 November 1867, PICR Archives, KIR/ 436.

<sup>23</sup> Cullen to Moran, 2 January 1863, PICR Archives KIR/1863/4.

<sup>24</sup> Cullen to Kirby, 24 October 1867, PICR Archives, KIR/391.

<sup>25</sup> Cullen to Kirby, 8 October 1868, PICR Archives, KIR/303.

<sup>26</sup> Cullen to Kirby, 24 November 1867, PICR Archives, KIR/425.

<sup>27</sup> Cullen to Kirby, 31 October 1867, PICR Archives, KIR/398. See also Cullen's denunciation of Lavelle as pro-Garibaldian (Bowen 1983, 266). Cullen wrote in 1864, 'The Fenians are as bad as the Mazzinians, or will be soon quite as bad.' (Barr 2008, 41).

<sup>28</sup> See for example, Keane to Kirby, 31 August 1860, PICR Archives KIR/1836-1861/2745; Commins to Kirby, 25 September 1868, PICR Archives, KIR/283; Leahy to Kirby, 5 August 1867 PICR Archives, KIR/276; Whelan to Kirby, 3 September 1867, PICR Archives, KIR/316.

<sup>29</sup> Cronin to Kirby, 18 November 1868, PICR Archives, KIR/418.

<sup>30</sup> Furlong to Kirby, 14 November 1867, PICR Archives, KIR/414; Cronin to Kirby, 18 November 1868, PICR Archives, KIR/418.

<sup>31</sup> Nulty to Kirby, 6 November 1867, PICR Archives, KIR/405.

<sup>32</sup> Byrne to Kirby, 22 October 1867, PICR Archives, KIR/386. Kirby's brother William wrote expressing 'real satisfaction' at Garibaldi's capture. Kirby to Kirby, 28 September 1867, PICR Archives, KIR/349.

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