

# Ambivalent Revolutionist: Margaret Fuller in Rome

By WILLIAM BRUCE WHEELER\*

For Margaret Fuller, iconoclastic child of nineteenth-century Massachusetts, the climax of life came in the killing and destruction of the Roman revolution of 1848-1849. There in the embattled city of a foreign land she was forced to face the realities of being a revolutionist. There amid the ruins of a once-great world capital her idealism and radicalism met their most severe test. There so far away from her native soil she confronted the difficulties of applying her insurgent doctrines to the social, political, and religious upheavals these ideas hoped to foster. Margaret Fuller's story is indeed a tragedy of idealistic liberalism.

Margaret Fuller's background and environment made it almost inevitable that she would be a revolutionist. Born in 1810, the eldest of nine children, precocious, driven by her stern father to almost superhuman intellectual efforts from the time she was barely six years old, neurotic at an early age, Margaret was a rebel by the time she had reached her thirteenth year and had been enrolled in the Prescott sisters' school in Groton, Massachusetts. Already resigned to being "bright and ugly,"<sup>1</sup> her lack of tact and social graces, her haughty manner and arrogant egotism, her bizarre antics and mutinous individualism won her only contempt from her peers. An iconoclast in religion, Margaret believed in a "God of Beauty and Perfection, who appealed to her more on aesthetic than religious grounds . . . , rejected particular revelations and creeds and disdained the refuge or protection of any institutional form of religion."<sup>2</sup>

The sudden death of her father from cholera in October, 1835, forced Margaret to abandon her full-time quest for self-perfection and support the family. Educated beyond most college men of her day, she found relatively few professions which she as a woman could enter. Visiting Ralph Waldo Emerson soon after her father's

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1. Arthur W. Brown, *Margaret Fuller* (New York: 1964), 23.

2. *Ibid.*, 26.

death, Margaret met the idealistic Bronson Alcott and learned of an opening in his famous Temple School in Boston. Accepting Alcott's offer to fill the vacancy, Margaret taught German, French, Italian, and Latin, driving herself to physical exhaustion and illness. The next year saw her once again assume teaching duties, this time at the progressive Greene Street School in Providence, Rhode Island. Margaret's days and evenings were filled with teaching, writing, and translating.

Already her revolution against conventional society was receiving notice. In 1837, she was invited to join the Transcendental Club formed by Emerson, George Ripley, and others and in 1840, she became the first editor of the club's periodical, *The Dial*. With sharp tongue and pen, Margaret criticized American society for its callous materialism which made people "superficial, irreverent, and more anxious to get a living than to live mentally and morally."<sup>3</sup> In her "Conversations," inaugurated in 1839 and continued until 1844, she emphasized the ability of women to grasp the intellectual mysteries of classical mythology and to discuss questions such as "What is Life?" When the rebels of Brook Farm, led by George Ripley of Boston, attempted to convert idealistic utterances into action, Margaret, although never formally joining the colony, lent her support by enrolling her younger brother as a student there and visiting the utopian community often, several times to give a series of her famous "Conversations."<sup>4</sup>

Margaret's religious iconoclasm and her search for truth and self-realization led her gradually to mysticism. She admitted, "I grow more and more what they call a mystic. Nothing interests me except listening for the secret harmonies of nature."<sup>5</sup> However, she became increasingly convinced that "society was the source of evil."<sup>6</sup> and this discovery kept drawing her back to the field of combat where her ideals could be put to the test, not in hopeless utopian communities but in the rough-and-tumble American life.

While conducting one of her "Conversations" at Brook Farm, Margaret had favorably impressed the wife of Horace Greeley, editor of the New York *Daily Tribune* and champion of many causes. Mrs. Greeley persuaded her husband to establish a literary depart-

3. Margaret Fuller Ossoli, *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, 2 volumes, ed., R. F. Fuller (Boston: 1851), II, 27.

4. Manuscript in Fuller Papers, Boston Public Library. Quoted in Brown, *Margaret Fuller*, 64.

5. Brown, *Margaret Fuller*, 69.

6. *Ibid.*, 41.

ment on the newspaper for Margaret and take the new staff member into their home. Before she left for New York, Margaret expanded an article she had previously written, "The Great Lawsuit," into a ringing appeal for equal rights for women entitled *Women in the Nineteenth Century*, published by Greeley and his partner in February, 1845. Hence, the new staff member on the *Daily Tribune* was already a well-known champion of controversial causes.

In December, 1845, the new literary critic of the New York *Daily Tribune* wrote, "I devote myself a great deal to the paper, as I am more and more interested by the generous course of Mr. Greeley and am desirous to make my own position important and useful."<sup>7</sup> The feeling was hardly mutual. Much as he praised Margaret Fuller's work, her temperamental personality, moody periods of unproductivity, and refusal to work in the noisy newspaper office unnerved the normally patient Greeley.<sup>8</sup> Looking back years afterward, the exasperated but admiring editor wrote:

If I had attempted to say this I should have somehow blundered out that, noble and great as she was, a good husband and two or three bouncing babies would have emancipated her from a good deal of cant and nonsense.<sup>9</sup>

Greeley's flippant remark clearly shows that, like Edgar Allen Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and others, he misinterpreted her search for useful ways to put her ideas to work. Certainly Margaret Fuller's activist liberalisim made many so-called liberals feel uncomfortable in the presence of the "monumentally homely"<sup>10</sup> woman and they chose to remark about the nasal tone in her voice rather than the sharp criticisms it uttered.

As a romantic, Margaret Fuller had wanted to travel to Europe to observe first-hand the glories of antiquity and converse with great figures like William Wordsworth, Thomas Carlyle, Madame de Staël, and others. Since before her father's death, Margaret had longed for the chance to journey to Europe, even though she was terrified of boats and water. In early 1846, Marcus and Rebecca Spring, old and well-to-do friends, proposed that she accompany

7. Margaret Fuller to James Nathan, December 31, 1845, in Margaret Fuller [Ossoli], *Love-Letters of Margaret Fuller, 1845-1846*, ed., Julia Ward Howe (New York: 1903), 172.

8. Henry Luther Stoddard, *Horace Greeley, Printer, Editor, Crusader* (New York: 1946), 98.

9. *Ibid.*, 98.

10. Margaret Fuller [Ossoli], *Margaret Fuller, American Romantic, A Selection from Her Writings and Correspondence*, ed. with an introduction and notes by Perry Miller (Garden City, New York: 1963), xvii.

them on their European tour to commence in August.<sup>11</sup> Ecstatic at the opportunity to at last give her genius wings (as she put it), Margaret was even more eager to go in 1846 than she had previously been because she had been recently injured by an unrequited love affair. The hopeful pilgrim planned to finance the trip with \$1,000 of her own savings, a personal loan from an artist-turned-banker friend, Sam Ward, and an agreement with Greeley to write for the *Daily Tribune* while in Europe, to be paid \$8.00 per letter.<sup>12</sup> Most especially, Margaret yearned to make the pilgrimage to Italy, the haven for romantics of the nineteenth century, to see the land that had thrilled Byron, Shelley, Keats, the Brownings, to meet bankers-turned-sculptors and parsons-turned-painters. Behind her would be callous, materialistic America; ahead would be the unity of romantic theory and practice.

Margaret Fuller and the Springs sailed on August 1, 1846, from Boston aboard the *Cambria* bound for Liverpool. Upon arriving, they took the tour of England and Scotland, visiting castles of the past and factories of the present, paying homage to the aging Wordsworth, the charming but arrogant and overbearing Carlyle, the philanthropic physician, Dr. Southwood Smith, who had built model tenements and who displayed the clothed skeleton of Jeremy Bentham in his study.<sup>13</sup> However, the revolutionist could not shrug off her insurgent spirit as if it were a cloak. Increasingly, Margaret's letters to the *Daily Tribune* showed her rising anger at the conditions of England's working classes. Europe was no romantic, utopian paradise; instead, Europe was as materialistic, cruel, and uncivilized as her native land. On August 23, 1846, she wrote of the horrible conditions of women in the Manchester textile mills.<sup>14</sup> In September, she noted sadly, "To the horrors and sorrows of the streets in such places as Liverpool, Glasgow, and, above all, London, one has to grow insensible or die daily."<sup>15</sup> By December, Margaret was

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11. Margaret Fuller to James Nathan, February 28, 1845, in Margaret Fuller [Ossoli], *Love-Letters of Margaret Fuller*, 176.

12. Brown, *Margaret Fuller*, 90. Margaret Fuller was to write thirty-three letters from Europe to the *Daily Tribune*. They have been collected in the volume *At Home and Abroad; Or Things and Thoughts in America and Europe*, ed., Arthur B. Fuller (Boston: 1874).

13. Margaret Fuller to the New York *Daily Tribune*, Letter VIII, December, 1846, in Margaret Fuller Ossoli, *At Home and Abroad*, 174.

14. Margaret Fuller to the New York *Daily Tribune*, Letter I, August 23, 1846, in *ibid.*, 121.

15. Margaret Fuller to the New York *Daily Tribune*, Letter V, September 30, 1846, in *ibid.*, 150.

hoping for a "peaceful revolution, which shall destroy nothing except the shocking inhumanity."<sup>16</sup>

As her revolutionary spirit was warming in England, Margaret met many political exiles from the continent, struggling to create a new vision of Europe in the post-Napoleonic Age of Metternich. Margaret was not unknown to these expatriates, for almost all were familiar with her declaration of women's independence in *Women in the Nineteenth Century*, which had been well-received by the liberal communities of Europe. In London, she met the high-minded Giuseppe Mazzini, leader of the "Young Italy" and "Young Europe" movements. Son of a wealthy professor at the University of Genoa, Mazzini, like Margaret, had been a revolutionist almost from birth. Since 1837, he had lived in London, supported by loans from his unsympathetic but indulgent father and by some writings which were published in some of England's more radical periodicals. Despite extremely delicate health, Mazzini made great efforts to win to his cause the liberal community in England and to provide leadership for the growing colony of Italian refugees. The Italian patriot believed that "it was the mission of Rome to lead in the social regeneration of Europe."<sup>17</sup> Convinced that Catholicism was a spent force for reform, he wanted to erect in Italy a model republican state for all the continent to emulate.<sup>18</sup> While at a dinner party given by the Carlyles, Mazzini was introduced to Margaret by John Saunders, editor of the radical *People's Journal*. Margaret was immediately won to Mazzini's revolutionary cause, calling the Italian patriot "the most beautiful person I have seen . . . He is one in whom holiness has purified."<sup>19</sup> By the time Margaret Fuller left London for Paris in late 1846, her interest in viewing the treasures of European art and culture had dimmed perceptibly and she had become totally committed to Mazzini's dreams for Italy, even to the point of offering to smuggle him into Italy with her party.<sup>20</sup>

The winter of 1846-1847 saw France suffering from bad harvests of the previous autumn. Margaret wrote, "The people in the prov-

16. Margaret Fuller to the New York *Daily Tribune*, Letter VIII, December, 1846, in *ibid.*, 171.

17. Katherine Anthony, *Margaret Fuller, A Psychological Biography* (New York: 1920), 179.

18. Bolton King, *The Life of Mazzini* (London: 1919), 130.

19. Ossoli, *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, II, 173; see also Margaret Fuller to the New York *Daily Tribune*, Letter IX, n.d., in Ossoli, *At Home and Abroad*, 181.

20. Margaret Fuller [Ossoli] to Giuseppe Mazzini, March 3, 1849, in Margaret Fuller [Ossoli], *The Writings of Margaret Fuller*, ed. Mason Wade (New York: 1941), 581.

inces have suffered most terribly amid the vaunted prosperity of France." <sup>21</sup> The flames of her innately rebellious nature were being stoked higher by the conditions she found in Europe. She lashed out:

The doctrines of Fourier are making considerable progress, and wherever they spread, the necessity of some practical application of the precepts of Christ, in lieu of the mummeries of a worn-out ritual, cannot fail to be felt . . . . The more I see of the terrible ills which infest the body politic of Europe, the more indignation I feel at the selfishness or stupidity of those in my own country who oppose an examination of these subjects—such as is animated by the hope of prevention.<sup>22</sup>

While in Paris, Margaret met other revolutionists-in-exile, especially the noted Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz. The exiled poet's mysticism gave him a common bond with the American traveler and she was deeply impressed by him, calling him the "Dante of Poland." <sup>23</sup> Mickiewicz, a handsome and dashing figure, was also a lonely man, his wife having been confined in an insane asylum. Gossips misinterpreted the relationship between the two revolutionists, intimating that Mickiewicz was seeking a divorce in order to marry the American romantic.<sup>24</sup> Rumors did not abate when Margaret and the Springs left Paris for Italy while Mickiewicz stayed in the French capital with his mystic cult.<sup>25</sup>

Margaret rejoiced, "Italy received me as a long-lost child, and I feel myself at home here." <sup>26</sup> Following Goethe's route through the peninsula, visiting the spots which had thrilled Shelley and Byron, drawn to the Eternal City of Rome, Margaret believed that here at last she had found a land that was "worthy to be loved and embraced, not talked about." <sup>27</sup> Of Rome, she wrote, "The whole heart must be yielded up to it. It is something really transcendent, both spirit and body." <sup>28</sup>

21. Margaret Fuller to the New York *Daily Tribune*, Letter XII, n.d., in Ossoli, *At Home and Abroad*, 205.

22. Margaret Fuller to the New York *Daily Tribune*, Letter XII, n.d., in *ibid.*, 205.

23. Manfred Kridl, ed., *Adam Mickiewicz, Poet of Poland: A Symposium* (New York: 1951), 262.

24. *Ibid.*, 259; see also Faith Chipperfield, *In Quest of Love; The Life and Death of Margaret Fuller* (New York: 1957), 256.

25. Kridl, ed., *Adam Mickiewicz, Poet of Poland*, 259.

26. Ossoli, *The Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, II, 220.

27. Margaret Fuller to the New York *Daily Tribune*, Letter XIV, May, 1847, in Ossoli, *At Home and Abroad*, 220.

28. Ossoli, *The Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, II, 216.

Yet the political ferment of subjugated Italy could not escape her perceptive eyes. The American revolutionist, fired by what she had seen in England and France and by what she had heard from the lips of the ardent Mazzini and the mystical Mickiewicz, looked on Italy less as a place to escape from revolution and more as a land where the ideals she shared with Mazzini and Mickiewicz should be fought for and won. In May, 1847, she wrote to William Henry Channing, "Art is not important to me now . . . I take interest in the state of the people."<sup>29</sup> The American traveler was caught up in the revolutionary fervor that was spreading through the land of the Caesars. She scorned the "priest-ridden, misgoverned, full of dirty, degraded men and women, yet still most lovely Naples;"<sup>30</sup> she praised Pope Pius IX for his liberal concessions, yet noted how little had actually been accomplished; she predicted that "the new Romulus will need to be prepared for deeds at least as bold as his predecessor, if he is to open a new order of things."<sup>31</sup>

While events were moving swiftly in Italy, Margaret Fuller's days were not idle. While attending Holy Week services at St. Peter's Cathedral, she accidentally had met the Marchese Giovanni Angelo Ossoli, a titled but impoverished nobleman who was ten years her junior. Extremely handsome but shockingly ignorant, due to his poor education at the hands of a lazy priest,<sup>32</sup> the young aristocrat pursued Margaret with passionate zeal until, after her return to Rome from touring northern Italy and bidding farewell to the Springs, she consented to take him as her lover. It seems that she had no intention of marriage when she entered into this arrangement.<sup>33</sup> However, before Christmas, 1848, Margaret realized that she was to bear Ossoli's child. Almost immediately her joy at being in Italy and supporting the coming revolution turned to doubt, fear, and anguish. To her friend, Caroline Sturgis, she wrote:

I have known some happy hours, but they all lead to sorrow; and not only the cups of wine, but of milk, seem drugged with poison for me. It does not *seem* to be my fault, this Destiny; I do not court these things—they come.

29. Margaret Fuller to William Henry Channing, May, 1847, quoted in Brown, *Margaret Fuller*, 99.

30. Margaret Fuller to the *New York Daily Tribune*, Letter XIII, n.d., in Ossoli, *At Home and Abroad*, 219.

31. Margaret Fuller to the *New York Daily Tribune*, Letter XIV, May 1847, in *ibid.*, 224-226.

32. Anthony, *Margaret Fuller, A Psychological Biography*, 152.

33. *Ibid.*, 155.

I am a poor magnet, with power to be wounded by the bodies I attract.<sup>34</sup>

Adding to her depression was the constant rain which drenched Rome for forty days in December and January, 1847-1848, forcing the brooding woman to remain in her room.

The only news that arrived to cheer the American rebel in the depths of despair was the reports and rumors of the spread of the revolution throughout Italy. In the early months of 1848, popular uprisings took place in Rome, Leghorn, and Genoa; Sicily flamed in open revolt while Naples stood on the very brink of upheaval. In Milan, the Austrian masters were so afraid of losing their grip on the situation that popular demonstrations were put down with great severity. Unconfirmed rumors excited the Eternal City. It was reported that Metternich had been killed, that the King of Naples had been forced to flee from his kingdom, that he had suffered an apoplectic stroke when he heard of the uprising in Sicily.<sup>35</sup> All these rumors were without foundation.

Rome followed popular Pope Pius IX who had granted many limited concessions. However, these were but a fraction of what Romans were demanding, and the new pontiff was besieged with countless proposals.<sup>36</sup> In exasperation, he complained, "They want to make a Napoleon of me, who am only a poor country parson."<sup>37</sup> Of the Pope's dilemma, Margaret Fuller wrote, "I often think how grave and sad must the Pope feel, as he sits alone and hears all this noise of expectation." Most of all, Italians wanted unity of the various states of the peninsula into an Italian nation. In their drive toward unification, they could rally behind either the autocratic Charles Albert of Piedmont, the strongest state in Italy, or under the ecclesiastical banner of the Vatican. Margaret Fuller earlier had found both alternatives to be wanting. She wrote to the *Daily Tribune*:

Rome, to resume her glory, must cease to be an ecclesiastical capital; must renounce all this gorgeous mummery, whose poetry, whose picture, charms no one more than myself, but whose meaning is all of the past, and finds no echo in the future.

34. *Ibid.*, 156.

35. Mason Wade, *Margaret Fuller, Whetstone of Genius* (New York: 1940), 224-225.

36. See Giuseppe Mazzini to Pope Pius IX, September 8, 1847, in Ossoli, *At Home and Abroad*, 285-289.

37. Stringfellow Barr, *Mazzini: Portrait of an Exile* (New York: 1935), 174.



From the people themselves the help must come, and not from princes; in the new state of things, there will be none but natural princes, great men.<sup>38</sup>

The spring of 1848 brought good tidings to the American rebel. She and Ossoli had decided to marry. Because of Ossoli's family, the couple decided on a secret wedding ceremony, which probably took place in April, 1848, and afterward agreed to tell no one about their union.<sup>39</sup>

Even more exciting was the news of the progress of the revolutions throughout Europe. Metternich had been forced out of power in Austria and had been obliged to flee Vienna in a common cab;<sup>40</sup> Louis Philippe had tottered and fallen in France; the Germanies seethed and the Magyars and Czechs both had risen against their Austrian masters. In Italy, Naples was in open rebellion and in Rome itself, Austrian arms were dragged through the streets and burned and the dreaded doubleheaded imperial eagle was torn down. Most exciting to Margaret was the report that Mazzini, after seventeen years in exile, was back in Italy, fusing his own indomitable spirit with that of his countrymen.

Yet disturbing and ominous warnings were present everywhere. The Pope, who actually had intended to improve the lot of his flock without making any major reforms, had withdrawn his hand of support. A crowd of Roman workers seeking admission to the papal chambers to present a petition for redress of grievances was fired on by the Swiss Guard. The enraged citizens retaliated by murdering the Pope's confessor. Soon the pontiff fled the Eternal City to Gaeta, putting himself under the protection of the restored King of Naples. The loss to the Italian cause was a great one.

Elsewhere in the peninsula, ancient provincial jealousies and petty quarrels prevented the united effort of Italians to throw off their Austrian oppressors. The stumbling block was that no one could agree as to what road the new nation would take once it had become united, that of monarchy or of republicanism.

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38. Margaret Fuller to the New York *Daily Tribune*, Letter XVIII, October 18, 1847, in Ossoli, *At Home and Abroad*, 242-245.

39. Some scholars have expressed doubts as to whether there ever was a marriage ceremony. See Miller, ed., *Margaret Fuller, American Romantic*, 300-301. There have also been many interpretations of the relationship between Margaret Fuller Ossoli and her husband. For an interesting psychological one, see Anthony, *Margaret Fuller, A Psychological Biography* 161.

40. Priscilla Robertson, *Revolutions of 1848: A Social History* (New York: 1960), 215-216.

Margaret desperately wanted to become an active participant in this uprising for freedom. During the past winter, she had written to Emerson:

I find how true was the hope that always drew me toward Europe. It was no false instinct that said I might here find an atmosphere to develop me in ways that I need. Had I only come ten years earlier! Now, my life must be a failure, so much strength has been wasted on abstractions, which only came because I grew not on the right soil.<sup>41</sup>

She had found in Italy what she believed to be the spirit that America had had in the days of its own revolution but had lost in the scramble for material gain and profit. She wrote to the *Daily Tribune*:

My friends write to urge my return; they talk of our country as the land of the future. It is so, but that spirit which made it all it is of value in my eyes, which gave all of hope with which I can sympathize for that future, is more alive here at present than in America. My country is at present spoiled by prosperity, stupid with the lust of gain, soiled by the crime in its willing perpetuation of slavery, shamed by an unjust war.<sup>42</sup>

However, despite her desire to join hands with the Roman revolutionists, Margaret was forced to leave Rome to preserve the secret union between her and Ossoli. She went to Rieti, a small village in the mountains outside the city, leaving her husband, by then converted to Margaret's liberalism, to parade with the Roman Civic Guard. On September 5, 1848, Margaret gave birth to a son, later to be baptized Angelo Eugene Philip Ossoli. The ordeal that had paralyzed the thirty-seven year old Margaret with fear was over.

Torn between staying with her child and her desire to find her appointment with history, Margaret decided to leave the infant with a nurse in Rieti and return to Rome. Still keeping her secret, she wrote, "Indeed, I left what was most precious, but what I could

41. Margaret Fuller to Ralph Waldo Emerson, December 20, 1847, quoted in Horace Greeley, *Recollections of a Busy Life* (New York: 1868), 183.

42. Margaret Fuller [Ossoli] to the New York *Daily Tribune*, Letter XXIV, April 19, 1848, in Ossoli, *At Home and Abroad*, 326-327. Margaret also beseeched her native land to aid the Italian cause. See Margaret Fuller [Ossoli] to the New York *Daily Tribune*, Letter XVIII, n.d., in *ibid.*, 247, 254.

not take with me." <sup>43</sup> When she returned to Rome in November, 1848, the city had assumed a martial air. Tourists had vanished; the Civic Guard paraded everywhere; the Constituent Assembly was preparing to meet to decide the future of Italy; the red liberty cap was worn by aristocrat and common laborer alike. When the Constituent Assembly met, it proclaimed the Roman Republic and on February 9, 1849, at 1:00 a.m., the bells of the city announced the news to the awakened populace. In early March, the former exile, Giuseppe Mazzini, entered Rome for the first time in his life, glowing with an air of triumph. When the Roman Assembly created a Triumverate with extraordinary powers during the great crisis, Mazzini was the leading member.

Since ecclesiastical authority had broken down in Rome, the new government was faced with a host of internal problems. Most pressing was the currency dilemma, as solid coin was hoarded and the economy trembled. The Republic issued brass coins and printed paper money to keep the Roman economy moving.

More serious were the enemies without. Charles Albert had been routed and dethroned by the Austrians and severe repressions followed. Rumors of a peninsula-wide clerical conspiracy threatened to lead to violence against the priests. Reports told the disheartening news that the revolutions were failing throughout Europe. In April, 1849, troops of Louis Napoleon, President of the Second Republic, landed in Italy to return the Pope to power in Rome. That the pontiff feared and distrusted the French as much as he did the radicals of Rome did not concern the devious and ambitious Napoleon. The French drew up 6,000 to 7,000 troops before the walls of Rome and demanded admittance.

Margaret Fuller Ossoli had reached the climax of her commitment to her revolutionary principles. In a note to Mazzini, she despaired that she was not "an Italian and a man of action" <sup>44</sup> but as a devoted rebel she would support the cause with all her energy.

Refused admittance to the city, on April 30, the French troops under General Oudinot attempted to force their way inside. Aiming their charge for the Porta Pertusa, an entrance to Rome which had been walled up for years but was still on the French maps, the French soldiers reached the walls to find no gateway and were

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43. Margaret Fuller [Ossoli] to the New York *Daily Tribune*, Letter XXVI, December 2, 1848, in *ibid.*, 336.

44. Margaret Fuller [Ossoli] to Giuseppe Mazzini, March 3, 1849, in Margaret Fuller [Ossoli], *The Writings of Margaret Fuller*, ed. Mason Wade, 582.

driven back with losses of 400 to 500 killed and wounded and 350 captured. Later, Mazzini praised the bravery of his countrymen by telling them, "Yesterday we said to you: Be great. Today we say to you: You are great."<sup>45</sup> After this disastrous attempt, Oudinot was content to bombard Rome into submission with his artillery. On the other side of the walls, the Roman Civic Guard had been reinforced by the fierce legions of Giuseppe Garibaldi and by a small group of exiled European rebels, among them Margaret's friend, Adam Mickiewicz.

Despite the protection of the walls, the toll of the defenders was high. Christina Belgiojoso-Trivulzio, an exiled Milanese princess and an ardent republican who jealously guarded her aristocratic title, was put in charge of caring for the sick and wounded. Frail, epileptic, erratic, and egotistical, the liberal noblewoman nevertheless used all her energy and ability to completely revamp the city's hospitals. She chose as one of her assistants the American rebel, Margaret Fuller. Margaret was put in charge of the Hospital of the Fate Bene Fratelli.

Here at last was Margaret Fuller's opportunity to actively aid the cause of revolution in Italy. Yet here at last she saw the destruction, the killing, the suffering, the waste that often must accompany any great social, political, and religious upheaval. Here at last her idealistic hopes and thoughts about revolutions were put to the supreme test. Here at last she came to see what the practical application of her ideas meant to the participants in rebellion. She wrote with great awakened feeling:

War near at hand seems to me even more dreadful than I had fancied it. True, it tries men's souls, lays bare selfishness in undeniable deformity. Here it has produced much fruit of noble sentiment, noble act; but still it breeds vice too, drunkenness, mental dissipation, tears asunder the tenderest ties, lavishes the productions of Earth, for which her starving poor stretch out their hands in vain, in the most unprofitable manner. And the ruin that ensues, how terrible! . . . Then I have, for the first time, seen what wounded men suffer. The night of the 30th of April I passed in the hospital and saw the terrible agonies of those dying or who needed amputation, felt their mental pains and longing for the loved ones who were away.<sup>46</sup>

45. Robertson, *Revolutions of 1848*, 376.

46. Margaret Fuller [Ossoli] to the New York *Daily Tribune*, Letter XXX, May 27, 1849, in Ossoli, *At Home and Abroad*, 383-384.

The French bombardment created ruin and havoc in the Eternal City. The lists of casualties lengthened. All the hospitals were crowded with wounded, attackers and defenders alike, and the abandoned Pope's palace was converted for use by convalescents.<sup>47</sup> Margaret's superior, Princess Christina, surpassed the efforts of all her assistants, once working for three days and two nights without resting. The fantastic noblewoman was everywhere, one minute checking one of the 6,000 women who offered their services in the Roman hospitals, another minute reading Dickens to a wounded defender.<sup>48</sup> Margaret herself was forced to remain in the hospital every day and many nights during the siege.

The strain on the defenders was maddening. Of Mazzini, Margaret later noted, "All the vital juices seemed exhausted; his eyes were all bloodshot; his skin orange; flesh he had none; his hair was mixed with white."<sup>49</sup> The bombardment continued. To Emerson, Margaret wailed, "Rome is being destroyed; her glorious oaks; her villas, haunts of sacred beauty, that seemed the possession of the world forever . . . all must perish, lest a foe should level his musket from their shelter. *I could not, could not.*"<sup>50</sup>

The Roman cause was hopeless. Oudinot had been reinforced to 30,000 men and on June 22, the walls were breached. The defenders, sick from the extreme heat and from lack of sleep nevertheless "fought like lions,"<sup>51</sup> losing 600 to 700 killed and wounded. On June 30, the twice-wounded and exhausted Garibaldi, "his sword bent so that it would only go halfway into the scabbard," appeared before the Assembly, announced that further resistance was impossible and urged immediate escape while there was still time.<sup>52</sup> The desperate Mazzini, who disliked and distrusted Garibaldi, begged the members of the Assembly to lead house-to-house resistance in a battle to the end, but was overruled by an Assembly which was tired of fighting and had no stomach for escaping to form a government in exile. On July 2, Garibaldi and his band escaped from the doomed city and on July 4, the invaders marched into the fallen town. Margaret, her high-strung nerves having almost broken

47. Ossoli, *The Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, II, 264.

48. H. Remsen Whitehouse, *A Revolutionary Princess: Christina Belgiojoso-Trivulzio, Her Life and Times, 1808-1871* (London: 1906), 225-226.

49. Barr, *Mazzini*, 209.

50. Margaret Fuller [Ossoli] to Ralph Waldo Emerson, June 10, 1849, in Ossoli, *The Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, II, 266.

51. Margaret Fuller [Ossoli] to the *New York Daily Tribune*, Letter XXXI, June 10, 1849, in Ossoli, *At Home and Abroad*, 397.

52. Robertson, *Revolutions of 1848*, 376-377.

under the pressure of her hospital duties, cut off from news of her child, and worried about her husband defending the walls, sobbed, "O Rome, *my country!* Could I imagine that what I loved would heap such desolation on your head."<sup>53</sup>

The French commander issued a proclamation ordering "all foreigners who had helped the Republic to be out of Rome in twenty-four hours."<sup>54</sup> Their marriage no longer kept a secret, Margaret Fuller Ossoli and her husband left Rome for Rieti to get their child. Due to lack of competent attention, the infant was near death from malnutrition, and the exiled family was forced to remain in Rieti until the child regained his health. However, fearing the Spanish troops that had occupied the little mountain town and almost without funds, the Ossolis traveled to Florence where they were befriended by the American and British colony there and were kept under surveillance by the Austrian police. Here Margaret completed her full account of the Italian Revolution, hoping to have it published when she returned to America.

Ironically, the family of revolutionists found that what Margaret had called the degenerated and materialistic America was the only suitable place for the exiles to go. Fugitives from continental Europe, unable as foreigners to secure copyright privileges in England to Margaret's manuscript of the Italian Revolution, America seemed to be the only land where opportunity offered itself. Although New England gossips whispered about Margaret's recently-announced union with Ossoli, many of her friends bid her return to her native shores. Despite her fears about whether or not her friends would accept her husband, the family made ready for the dreaded sea voyage. Hence, they began the journey that was to end tragically off the coast of Fire Island, New York, on July 19, 1850. While onlookers watched in helpless horror, the doomed ship was battered and broken by a fierce storm. The three Ossolis were unable to save themselves. Upon hearing of her death, Emerson mourned, "To the last her country proves inhospitable to her."<sup>55</sup>

Margaret Fuller had realized the ambivalence of her revolt. On one side, she sought to participate actively in creating a new order. On the other side, she was unable to abandon her emotional ties to beauty, life, and peace, things that often must be sacrificed temporarily in the pursuance of immediate goals of the insurrection. Re-

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53. Chipperfield, *In Quest of Love*, 284.

54. Brown, *Margaret Fuller*, 107.

55. Wade, *Margaret Fuller, Whetstone of Genius*, 273.

plying to William Henry Channing soon after the fateful siege of Rome, she wrote with great self-perception:

You say you are glad I have had this great opportunity for carrying out my principles. Would it were so! I found myself inferior in courage and fortitude to the occasion. I knew not how to bear the havoc and anguish incident to the struggle for these principles.<sup>56</sup>

Margaret Fuller was a revolutionist. Whether rebelling against the bustling New England materialists, the religious dogmatists, the anti-feminists, the imitators of European culture, or the political and social injustices of her time, she gave voice to a new hope and a new spirit. Like Emerson, Alcott, Thoreau, and others, she yearned to translate her ideas and words into positive actions, to show the world the truths she had discovered. She called for great insurrections which would supplant materialistic values with those of self-realization and humanitarianism.

Yet Margaret Fuller was never able to fulfill her insurgent mission. Like Emerson and many other transcendentalists, she was unable to accept the reality that the ends of freedom and self-fulfillment justified the means of sacrifice and destruction. Therefore, Margaret Fuller's tragedy was one which climaxed at the walls of Rome as she discovered that she was an ambivalent revolutionist.

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56. Margaret Fuller [Ossoli] to William Henry Channing, August 28, 1849, in Ossoli, *The Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, II, 269-270.