

William Lloyd Garrison: Abolition, Democracy, and Radical Reform

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Review

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Dal Lago, Enrico *William Lloyd Garrison: Abolition, Democracy, and Radical Reform*. Louisiana State University Press, \$42.50 ISBN 978-0-8071-5206-5

Story of an Unlikely Duo

Since the international entanglements commencing with the Second World War, an exclusive national history of the United States has proven to be a woefully parochial and an inadequate paradigm. Comparative analysis, particularly a focus on the Atlantic world, is now the norm. In the study of slavery and abolitionism, David Brion Davis in 1966 with *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* and Betty Fladeland in 1972 with *Men and Brothers: Anglo-American Antislavery Cooperation* broke new scholarly ground in international connections. In the book under review, Enrico Dal Lago of the National University of Ireland utilizes his own cosmopolitan credentials and linguistic skills in a creative joint portrait of the American abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison and Italian nationalist Giuseppe Mazzini.

Their parallel lives overlapped in time. Both were born in 1805 but of different backgrounds in different parts of the Euro-American world. Garrison in Newburyport struggled with childhood poverty and was an autodidact, while Mazzini in Genoa had a privileged background that included higher education. Nevertheless they shared a broader concern with egalitarian Enlightenment ideals and a commitment to religious individualism. Garrison built upon earlier Anglo-American abolitionism, and Mazzini took inspiration from national struggles throughout the Americas and Europe. Both were prominent nineteenth-century radicals who warmly praised the other's struggle in publications and warmly embraced each other in occasional meetings in London. Garrison was at the center of immediate abolitionism for thirty-five years at the height of the slave power in the United States, while Mazzini was the longtime leader for democratic nationalism in a fragmented Italy of multiple dynastic states. The struggle for liberation from slavery and for national liberation made

them international comrades. As Garrison wrote in eulogy after Mazzini's death, "We cherished the same hostility to every form of tyranny." (viii) The outcomes of their struggles were, however, quite divergent. As an old man, Garrison gloried in triumph with the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment that codified emancipation in 1865 and naively suspended his activity on behalf of racial justice. In contrast, a deeply disappointed Mazzini lived to see in 1870, shortly before his death two years later, the formation of the Italian monarchy in place of the democratic republic for which he had long struggled under extreme conditions.

Dal Lago's balanced approach with deft incorporation of historiography follows the two radicals over time as they reacted to changing circumstances in the United States and Italy as well as to the larger context of international events -- social, economic, and political -- during the transformative nineteenth century. If the world is a stage, the reader is informed by the opportunities Garrison and Mazzini created as well as the limitations that walled them in. Furthermore, the parallel lives, as Plutarch intended in his classical study of famous Greeks and Romans, highlight the characters and ideologies -- the similarities and differences -- of both men in the way a biography of one person cannot. Dal Lago is clear that Garrison and Mazzini are kindred souls. They are also foils, for example, in how they react to the ideals of non-violence and the necessity of armed struggle. The craft of the author illustrates more philosophically the axiom of their contemporary Karl Marx writing in 1852 in "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon": "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past." Both radicals would have appreciated that sentiment but, Dal Lago makes clear, it hit home for Mazzini in the ultimate frustration of his goals for a republican Italy.

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