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FORMS OF EXCHANGE:
PRIVATE CORRESPONDENCES AND THE FORMATION
OF A NATIONAL IDEA, 1830-1850

by

SONIA DI LORETO

A Dissertation submitted to the
Graduate School-New Brunswick
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in Literatures in English

written under the direction of

Myra Jehlen

and approved by

New Brunswick, New Jersey

October 2010

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Forms of Exchange:

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by SONIA DI LORETO

Dissertation Director:

Myra Jehlen

My dissertation examines epistolary exchanges in the 1830-1850 transatlantic world as vehicles for the formation and circulation of ideas about the nation. Some of the innate characteristics of letter writing and letters, such as flexibility and high mobility, a wide temporal trajectory, defiance of national borders, and dialogical openness, made letters the privileged site where a transnational circulation of ideas about the nation could take place. By concentrating on letter writing and epistolary exchanges, I trace how, in spite of its emphasis on the national arena, the process of nation building in the nineteenth century really occurs within a cosmopolitan and transnational landscape, where observations about the nation, and national ideals circulate and are mutually inflected. The interesting status of the letter in the nineteenth century, as a piece of writing in between public and private communication, pointed to that space where

individuals, away from certain conventions of public discourse, could most experimentally articulate their opinions about public issues.

The decades considered in this study are a crucial moment both for epistolary production, and for the historical events revolving around concepts about the nation, in the United States and in Europe. Within these chronological boundaries, I focus on a specific group of writers, who had similar interests, who operated transnationally, and who were corresponding with one another. Margaret Fuller, Costanza Arconati, Giuseppe Mazzini, Thomas Carlyle, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, in fact, were in different ways invested in ideas and ideals of national belonging, and they considered themselves as public figures whether through their political career (as in the case of Giuseppe Mazzini), or through their concern and interventions in the civil and public world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to my director Myra Jehlen and my committee –Meredith McGill, Brad Evans, Giorgio Mariani—for their sustained guidance, for reading this work and commenting insightfully on its future direction.

I am thankful for the funding that enabled writing and visiting archives: the Mellon Summer Fellowship, the Mellon travel grant, the American Antiquarian Society, the “assegno di ricerca” at Università l’Orientale, Naples (Italy). My process was made smooth by, and would not have been possible without, the support staff here at Rutgers, past and present—Nancy Miller, Eileen Faherty, Cheryl Robinson, and Courtney Borack.

Friends on both sides of the Atlantic have provided the confidence and support that have made this transatlantic life both enjoyable and rewarding. My friends in the United States have made homes for me, offering intellectual companionship, emotional sustenance, generous conviviality, and complicity; I cannot thank them enough: Kristen Abbey, Rick Anderson, Kauser Ahmed, Bob Bettendorf, Karin Gosselink, Vera Eliasova, Patrizio Fradiani, Anthony Lioi, Katherine Lynes, Mark Steinberg, Joe Walsh, Aryana Bates, Anjanette Young, Bo Chen, Mary-Lou De Sousa, Stephanie Volmer, Spartacus Abbey, Oshkosh Anderson. In Italy Anna Berardino, Carlo Martinez, Anna Scannavini, Elena Spandri, Mario Corona, the editorial board of *Acoma* have provided emotional support and a stimulating intellectual climate.

Particular thanks to Donatella Izzo without whose prodding and unfailing support this would never have been finished. My debt to her is both intellectual and personal.

During the “Futures of American Studies Institute” at Dartmouth I had excellent advice of Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, Colleen Boggs, and Donald Pease, and I thank them for their steadfast and enthusiastic encouragement.

The constant support of my family over the years buoyed me throughout, and I thank them for their patience and confidence: Anna D’Angelo, Umberto Di Loreto, Stefano Di Loreto, Monica Di Loreto, and my late grandmother Maria D’Angelo.

Finally, thanks beyond reckoning go to Leonardo Cervelli, who has seen me through from beginning to end, and who has always supported me with intellectual curiosity and smiles.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract		ii
Acknowledgements		iv
Introduction		1
Chapter One	Public, Private, National in Letters: an Introduction	6
Chapter Two	“I Shall Return Possessed of a Great History”: the Permeable Boundaries of Self and History in Margaret Fuller’s Letters	49
Chapter Three	Epistolary Exchanges in a Transnational Context	93
Chapter Four	“A Naturalized Yankee”: Emerson, Carlyle, and the Epistolary Construction of a Transnational Public	119
Bibliography		158
Curriculum Vita		163

Introduction

This dissertation originated from an interest in epistolary exchanges, and from the basic observation that during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries they were crucial vehicles for the circulation of thoughts. This focus in turn intersected with an attention to intellectual processes relating to nation building, and with the consideration that, in spite of its emphasis on the national arena, the process of nation building in the nineteenth century really occurs within a cosmopolitan and transnational landscape, where ideas of the nation and national ideals circulate and are mutually inflected. Given the prominence of letters at that time as the major technology of communication between individuals and small groups, both within and across national boundaries, it seemed entirely possible that the process of nation building would find in letter writing a crucial vehicle for discussing and exchanging opinions that involved the nation and the political sphere. My initial hypothesis, therefore, grounded on my reading of numerous correspondences, regarded the possibility of probing epistolary exchanges for what they had to reveal about their role in forming and circulating ideas about the nation.

My hypothesis took into account some of the innate characteristics of letter-writing and letters, such as flexibility and high-mobility, a wide temporal trajectory, defiance of national borders, combined with a vulnerability to external agents, and a dialogical openness. These features made letters the privileged site where a sort of transnational circulation of ideas about the nation, as well as about other topics of general relevance, could take place, and where such ideas were indeed communicated. Furthermore, the interesting status of the letter at that time, as a piece of writing in between public and private communication, pointed to that space where individuals,

away from certain conventions of public discourse, could most experimentally articulate their opinions about public issues. The space of letter writing thus created could best be described as that ideal distance, or neutral ground, described by Henry D. Thoreau as required in order to utter thoughts:

One inconvenience I sometimes experienced in so small a house, the difficulty of getting to a sufficient distance from my guest when we began to utter the big thoughts in big words. You want room for your thoughts to get into sailing trim and run a course or two before they make their port. The bullet of your thought must have overcome its lateral and ricochet motion and fallen into its last and steady course before it reaches the ear of the hearer, else it may plough out again through the side of his head. Also, our sentences wanted room to unfold and form their columns in the interval. Individuals, like nations, must have suitable broad and natural boundaries, even a considerable neutral ground, between them.¹

As I hope to demonstrate, epistolary writing for the letter writers I will examine in this dissertation operates exactly as that space where big thoughts can travel and find enough room to unfold and develop.

As previous works on epistolarity have shown,² attempts at general claims about epistolary writing can hardly be comprehensive and conclusive, and the best examples of critical work have, on the contrary, focused on definite historical periods or specific correspondences.³ Furthermore, I was aware that an attempt to offer my hypothesis as a general theoretical claim about issues of epistolarity and nation building would require an exhaustive study comprised of a large inclusion of texts, such as the scope of this project could not satisfactorily accomplish. What I attempted, therefore, was to limit my focus and historicize my claim, by placing it firmly in the context of the 1830s and 1840s. The

¹ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Resistance to Civil Government*, ed. William Rossi (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1992), 95.

² See for example Mary A. Favret, *Romantic Correspondence. Women, Politics and the Fiction of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook, *Epistolary Bodies: Gender and Genre in the Eighteenth-Century Republic of Letters* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

1840s seemed a crucial moment both for epistolary production and for the historical events revolving around notions of the nation and national entities that were taking place across the western world. On one side of the ocean, the decade in question witnessed debates about democracy and representation and helped define the United States as a nation engaged in establishing its power and influence in the American continent; on the other side, it witnessed the upheavals in Europe that helped the emergence of a new European order based on the creation of new independent nations.

Within these chronological boundaries, my sample comprises a specific group of writers, who had similar interests, who used letters as privileged vehicles for expression, and who operated transnationally. I concentrated my attention on some specific authors, who were in different ways invested in ideas and ideals of national belonging, and who considered themselves as public figures whether through their political career (as in the case of Giuseppe Mazzini) or through their concern and interventions in the civil and public world, such as Margaret Fuller, Costanza Arconati, Thomas Carlyle, and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

The first chapter provides the context for my research. My claim is that private or familiar letters written by public figures become a privileged site for a dialogical reflection on the abstract concept of nation. By looking at examples drawn from Benjamin Franklin's writing, and from Thomas Jefferson and John Adams' correspondence, I discuss how the subjectivity and personal feelings expressed in familiar letters act as mediator for the expression of political opinions, and hence for the confrontation between individuals' ideas of national formation. The chapter concludes on

³ See Elizabeth Hewitt, *Correspondence and American Literature, 1770-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Gary Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity. Vernacular Letters and Letter Writing in Early Modern England, 1500-1700* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005).

the letter written by Ralph Waldo Emerson to President Van Buren, in order to bring attention to the way in which epistolary expression is germane to transcendentalism as a vehicle for reflection about political, national and international issues.

The second chapter discusses epistolary space for Margaret Fuller, showing how for Fuller letter writing is not only the locus where relationships can exist and be discussed, but it is also the proper vehicle for imagining and debating a public dimension of the self. While in Italy, Fuller moves from other genres to the letter in order to cover degrees of public and private communication. By developing a social, political, public self through the medium of private letters that had always a strong public breadth, Fuller, along with her Italian correspondents (especially Costanza Arconati), starts to envision possible versions of a national destiny for Italy, developing a comparative, transnational approach to matters of nation building and of political forms for the nation.

By examining a number of triangular letter exchanges (Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller and Thomas Carlyle; Fuller, Carlyle and Giuseppe Mazzini), occurring in the revolutionary years of 1840s Europe, in the third chapter I consider how different forms of letter writing, such as the letters of introduction and the public letter, helped conceiving of, and then gathering together, circles of people who shared common interests that went beyond the national boundaries of states and the strictly political, contingent actions of both states and political movements or individual patriots. While national states tend to restrain the movements of individuals and limit the circulation of letters, epistolary exchanges become crucial to the circulation of political thought by virtue of their inherent mobility. Because of the historical and political circumstances of the era, private letters show the full range of the potentiality and dangers of the genre.

They are even more fragile and powerful than other times, hence becoming the unique vehicles for ideals, but also threats.

The fourth chapter focuses on the correspondence between Emerson and Carlyle as a case study for the construction of a transnational public. In this chapter I consider the problem of national versus international or supranational readership. Emerson, in fact, in his epistolary exchanges with Carlyle, engages in the operation of building a transnational readership for the Scottish author, based on a community of elected spirits, hence challenging the idea that a writer's ideal audience consists of members of his own nation. Emerson, therefore, by expressing the idea that America is the ideal readership, collapses the concept of national and international: America, as the audience of the future, is already the ideal public for Carlyle.

Chapter 1 Public, Private, National in Letters: an Introduction

1. “Nothing Has ever Hurt me So Much, and Affected me with Such Keen Sensations:” Private, Public and the Nation

When Benjamin Franklin started to write what has become his *Autobiography*, he penned the first part in the form of a prolonged letter to his son William, at the time Royal Governor of New Jersey. While visiting his friend Jonathan Shipley, bishop of St. Asaph in Twyford, England, in 1771, Franklin started to commit to paper the memories of his childhood and his early American professional successes.⁴ This is how Franklin begins his memoirs:

Dear Son, I have ever had a Pleasure in obtaining any little Anecdotes of my Ancestors. You may remember the Enquiries I made among the Remains of my Relations when you were with me in England; and the Journey I took for that purpose. Now imagining it may be equally agreeable to you to know the Circumstances of *my* Life, many of which you are yet unacquainted with; and expecting a Weeks uninterrupted Leisure in my present Country Retirement, I sit down to write them for you.⁵

The use of the conventional form of address “Dear Son,” habitually reserved to a letter, reveals how the writer maintains the addressee as the foremost audience in his mind, addressee who might not be, and will in fact, not be, the sole material recipient of the manuscript. Franklin’s explanation of the occasion for his writing makes it even more evident that he wishes to create a genealogy between his ancestors, himself, and his son. He traces a similitude between his own love and attention to his ancestors’ stories and what he hopes William would appreciate in his own life story. The use of the familiar

⁴ Leonard W. Labaree, Ralph L. Ketcham, Helen C. Boatfield and Helene H. Fineman, eds., *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. Prepared and annotated with an introduction by the Editors of The Papers of Benjamin Franklin, and sponsored by the American Philosophical Society and Yale University (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 22.

⁵ Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography, Poor Richard, and Later Writings*, ed. J. A. Leo Lemay (New York: Library of America, 1987), 567 (italics in original).

mode of address, with its inherent gesture to create an intimate environment for the narration of his story, the insistence on a genealogy, and even more interestingly, the clear and explicit intention to write for his son (“I sit down to write them for you”) makes Franklin’s *Autobiography* not only a personal document by a representative and unique American, but it also shapes it, at least in its inception, as a letter, a piece of an ongoing conversation, a part of a continuum.

The piece of writing that, after a series of vicissitudes in various countries, has come to us as Franklin’s *Autobiography*, retains some of the features of a familiar letter in the tradition of epistolary writing,⁶ especially in the overt purpose of addressing the text to a specific reader,⁷ hence engaging explicitly with the question of what kind of public (in the sense of an audience) Franklin is envisioning for his memoirs. Moreover, the opening of the *Autobiography* in the shape of a letter invokes an idea of social conversations among similar persons, moved by similar interests and sensibility; conversations that are generated from pleasurable incidents (“I ever had a Pleasure in obtaining any little Anecdotes”), and that are conducted in amiable circumstances (“expecting a Weeks uninterrupted Leisure”).

What is of relevance in the context of my study is not so much the figure of Franklin as a typical eminent scientist and politician of the eighteenth century, with his

⁶ I use the term “familiar” here as it is used in the tradition and the genre of letter writing, where familiar letters are the letters written not necessarily to members of the immediate family, but as private individuals writing to each other, in opposition to official, business, public letters, where writers assume public and recognizable positions and social roles. See for example some of the letter-writing manuals, in which this term is employed, such as Samuel Richardson, *Letters Written to and for Particular Friends, on the Most Important Occasions. Directing Not Only the Requisite Style and Forms to Be Observed in Writing Familiar Letters; but How to Think and Act Justly and Prudently, in the Common Concerns of Human Life* (London: Printed for C. Rivington, J. Osborn & J. Leake, 1741), or the anonymous *The Complete Letter-Writer: Containing Familiar Letters on the Most Common Occasions in Life*, (Salem, 1797).

⁷ Jane Gurkin Altman in her *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982), describes the “*particularity of the I-you*” in the epistolary form: “the *I* of epistolary discourse always [has] as its (implicit or explicit) partner a specific you who stands in unique relationship to the *I*” (117, italics in original).

various circles of correspondents and interlocutors, as are the reflections that may be drawn from the use of epistolary language in the *Autobiography*. The reason why I start with Franklin's *Autobiography*, and I will continue with other examples from his epistolary exchanges, is to call attention to the ways in which, in epistolary writing, a series of spheres, such as private and public, intersect and overlap. The text that has acquired the status of the foremost American autobiography, with its strong public relevance, started as a private letter to a family relation. The presence of the epistolary form in the *Autobiography*, paired with actual epistolary exchanges which I will discuss later in the chapter, are excellent starting points to ponder how, for public figures with a clear investment in the national project, the personal missive is the locus where the private and the public meet and oftentimes overlap, with the effect of producing a communication that is very strongly public-oriented. It is precisely at the sites of the intersections between public and private, and especially when the epistolary exchanges move from a national to an international horizon, that projects and ideas about the national can emerge. The unique status of this kind of writing, that stems from a personal dimension, but that encounters the public sphere almost immediately within the space of the epistolary exchange, allows for considerations about national questions to come into view, especially when the national is the preeminent dimension within which the writers are moving and operating. The fact that the epistolary utterance, unlike journal writing, for example, is a public-oriented and collaborative form of writing (since it postulates the existence, attention and interest of a correspondent who is a reader and a writer at the same time) creates a dialogic exchange where public personalities, already interested in debating national issues, find a non-regimented and more dynamic form to negotiate ideas about possible national trajectories and choices. Because of the historical

circumstances enveloping all the writers I will be considering in my work, reflections on national choices and nation-formation are a crucial core of their participation in the public sphere. Therefore, for figures such as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Thomas Carlyle, Giuseppe Mazzini, who were moved by an immediate concern in civil society and common welfare, there is a strong correlation between their engagement in public and civil life, and their interest in the nation.

Before I proceed to illustrate the scope of my study, I will try to briefly explain the concepts that I will be addressing and investigating throughout my work. Public, private and national have been the focus of vast critical attention in various disciplines,⁸ but in this context I will refer to them in their fundamental meanings and within the historical context of the writers here examined. By private I intend the sphere immediately relevant to the self, where interactions take place among a very limited number of people. Conversely, public can refer to interpersonal relations governed by social norms, and occurring in the civil sphere, as well as to groups of people who are attentive and participants in the public arena as audience or audiences.⁹ As public and private are categories that are regarded as one opposing or complementing the other, likewise the concept of nation indicates and presumes an international perspective, since

⁸ Michael Warner offers a useful analysis of the meanings and significance of the categories of public and private in his “Public and Private” in *Publics ad Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 21-63. For a description and discussion of the many possible meanings of “public” and “private” as key organizing categories in numerous fields of study, see Jeff Weintraub and Krishan Kumar, eds., *Public and Private in Thought and Practice. Perspectives on a Grand Dichotomy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). For an exhaustive historical perspective, see Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity. Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005). For a discussion of the relations between private, public and the nation, see Craig Calhoun, “Nationalism and the Publish Sphere,” in Jeff Weintraub and Krishan Kumar, ed. *Public and Private in Thought and Practice*, 75-102. One of the foremost studies on the formation of public opinion and a public sphere in the eighteenth century Great Britain is Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989).

⁹ See Michael Warner, “Publics and Counterpublics,” in *Publics ad Counterpublics*, 65-124.

ideas and groups of people interested in the social welfare of a state often ponder national projects in relation to other states or countries' traditions and models.

This chapter, then, will present a series of examples that, by providing a historical trajectory leading to the period that is the focus of my study, the 1840s, will show how the categories of private, public and national can interact and intersect with one another. By looking at examples from Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*, from his epistolary exchange with his son William, from John Adams and Thomas Jefferson's letters, and finally from Ralph Waldo Emerson's letter to President Van Buren, and by choosing epistolary exchanges that coincide with interpersonal crisis caused by questions of national import, I will try to clarify the multiple facets of the public and private in epistolary exchange, suggesting that, for public figures such as those mentioned above, the national dimension is strictly correlated to a personal and private realm, and even more to the point, that it is indeed the existence of a shared and intimate ground that allows for reflections about the national dimension to emerge. By considering the dialogic construction of letter writing, where one writer is also always one of the readers of the exchange, I will address the dimension of the political, as the world of discussion, debate, deliberation, negotiation centering on questions of national import and issues of polity.

Although the practice of epistolary writing in the eighteenth¹⁰ and nineteenth centuries was such a common occurrence and it was so encompassing that it influenced

¹⁰ There is a vast body of critical literature attending to the centrality of letter-writing in the eighteenth century, especially in the British and French contexts. Some of the studies include: Howard Anderson, Philip B. Daglian, Irvin Ehrenpreis, eds., *The Familiar Letter in the Eighteenth Century* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1966); Bruce Redford, *The Converse of the Pen. Acts of Intimacy in the Eighteenth-Century Familiar Letter* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986;); Rebecca Earle, ed. *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-writers, 1600-1945* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1999); Amanda Gilroy and W.M. Verhoeven, eds., *Epistolary Histories: Letters, Fiction, Culture* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000); James How, *Epistolary Spaces: English Letter-Writing from the*

and it transitioned into other genres that were still in search of stability, I deem it useful to pay attention to the epistolary mode in its specificity in order to understand certain fundamental premises relevant to it. While in fact the epistolary mode or style could be found in different genres, such as epistolary fiction, essays, or even autobiography, as the case of Franklin's text demonstrates, it is important to delineate the differences between various forms of epistolary fiction on the one hand, and actual epistolary exchanges and letter writing as such, on the other. A large number of studies have attended to the epistolary form in its various incarnations,¹¹ but in the current work I will concentrate my analysis on some specific functions of the epistolary practices for public figures operating on a middle ground between private and public.

Similarly to other modes of writing, but in a more direct and explicit way, the epistolary mode links the private world and the personal expression of the writer, with the public context of his interactions. It is not accidental that Franklin, immediately after addressing his son, thus seemingly confining his observations to private matters of familial nature, stresses the measure of his success and the unapologetical nature of his present state. Right from the beginning, Franklin combines the private and familial lineage and audience with the publicness of his position and eminence, attesting to ulterior reasons for writing about his life:

To which I have besides some other Inducements. Having emerg'd from the Poverty and Obscurity in which I was born and bred, to a state of Affluence and

Foundation of the Post Office to Richardson's Clarissa (Aldershot, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003); Gary Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity. Vernacular Letters and Letter Writing in Early Modern England, 1500-1700* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005); Clare Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2006).

¹¹ See especially Janet Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (1982); Mary A. Favret, *Romantic Correspondence. Women, Politics and the Fiction of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook, *Epistolary Bodies: Gender and Genre in the Eighteenth-Century Republic of Letters* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Amanda Gilroy and W.M. Verhoeven, eds., *Epistolary Histories: Letters, Fiction, Culture* (2000).

some Degree of Reputation in the World. And having gone so far thro' Life with a considerable share of Felicity, the conducting Means I made use of, which, with the Blessing of God, so well succeeded, my Posterity may like to know, as they may find some of them suitable to their own Situation, and therefore fit to be imitated.¹²

By sketching a trajectory from the private obscurity and poverty to the publicness of affluence and reputation, in typical Franklin fashion, and consistently with his cultural tradition, the author here suggests that his public success and the personal attainment of “felicity,” although being individual goals, are in fact socially relevant, and publicly visible, so much so that they can serve as models “fit to be imitated.”¹³ Although the rest of the *Autobiography* will oscillate between some private glimpses into Franklin’s life and his most visible accomplishments, it is precisely the gesture proper to epistolary writing at the opening of his life story that allows Franklin to combine the private expression with his social achievements, while at the same time infusing his style and language with a certain degree of dialogical communication.¹⁴

¹² Franklin, *Autobiography, Poor Richard, and Later Writings*, 567.

¹³ Eve Tavor Bannet, in her *Empire of Letters, Letter Manuals and Transatlantic Correspondence, 1688-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), suggests that the first part of his *Autobiography* “intimated to his son over sea that in 1771, for the reasons he was giving and despite the risks, Franklin had chosen sides in the conflict between Britain and America. Should the threads of correspondence between Britain and America eventually be severed by independence and war, Franklin was signaling his son that he would choose to advance along the American path that was still open to him, and advising his son to “imitate” him in that regard” (312). Although it might seem a little far-fetched to treat the first part of the *Autobiography* as a “secret letter to his son” (302), it is certainly interesting to ponder on the creation of an American model “fit to be imitated,” and to think of the correspondence as a medium to expand that type of subjectivity.

¹⁴ As every distinguished person of the eighteenth century American-European world, Franklin was an assiduous letter writer. But unlike the majority of his contemporaries, he was also for many years the appointed postmaster general, before and after the revolution. He earned the postmastership of Philadelphia in 1737, became joint deputy postmaster general for North America in 1753, held the post until 1774, and was re-appointed in 1775 as first postmaster general of what was to become the United States. In his book *Spreading the News. The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) Richard R. John explains that “Franklin’s tenure in the postal system remained controversial long after his death in 1790” (136), especially for his apparent nepotism in choosing his collaborators. Only through the publication of his memoirs (later to become the *Autobiography*), “by highlighting his early years as a printer-postmaster and downplaying his long tenure as a placeman in the royal postal system, Franklin encouraged Americans to begin the reevaluation of his public persona that would eventually transform the consummate would-be English gentleman of leisure into the archetypal American self-made man” (137).

This sense of a conversation being carried on between the writer and his audience, between the personal world and the public is furthermore intensified by the fact that also the second part of the *Autobiography* begins with letters. In this case it is not Franklin's writing itself that takes the shape of a letter, but two letters, addressed to him, are incorporated at the very beginning of the section. These two letters, written by Abel James and Benjamin Vaughan,¹⁵ function as subsequent –external and extradiegetic— inducements to continue writing. While they might be deemed as conventional prefatory material, in the tradition of the old patronage system, in the present context they signal, within the text of the *Autobiography*, the constant tension between the public and the private that is typical of epistolary writing. The two letters, in fact, although written as private missives between friends, indicate the public frame, the reaction of an audience peripheral to the writer's family, but central to his social and public world.

The two epistolary presences, then – the letter to his son, and the letters from the two gentlemen –exemplify the double status of the letter and they influence the shape the entire text of the *Autobiography* will take: if on the one hand the intimate exchange of letters becomes the private space of familiarity and security, on the other hand, the nature of the exchange itself contains the intrinsic possibility of an intervention of the public inside the privateness of the flow of communication. In other words, the public is always hovering at the edges of an epistolary exchange, and more often than not, it enters and overlaps with the privateness of the conversation. In the case of Franklin, the two letters that precede the second part signify the pressure of a qualified public (both in the sense of people residing in the public world, and in the sense of an audience) that can intervene in a private communication, moving it towards a more open, social and political realm.

¹⁵ Both Abel James and Benjamin Vaughan would be later involved in the edition and publication of

The two letters, although similar in intent, are very different as regards content and style. They both contribute to the general project of the autobiography, that is the construction of a unique and representative selfhood, but whereas the first letter, written by Abel James, engages directly with the form of the letter and with reflections about its potentials and its dangers, the second letter offers a hint on ideas about the constitution of selfhood, and how personal virtues have a public resonance that could reach an international dimension. This letter, written by Benjamin Vaughan, deals with a precise aspect of the construction of selfhood, namely the immediate relevance of the private character to the social context. Resuming the plea to Franklin to continue writing his memoirs, Vaughan stresses how the writer's life will serve as a model that by improving "the features of private character," will contribute to the public happiness: "But these sir, are small reasons in my opinion, compared with the chance which your life will give for the forming of future great men; and in conjunction with your Art of Virtue, (which you design to publish) of improving the features of private character, and consequently of aiding all happiness both public and domestic."¹⁶ Vaughan's letter, as a piece of writing that is already on the brink of public and private, is the apt medium to express the conviction that the representation of an exemplary self, such as Franklin's, will not only benefit the development of private virtues, but will immediately promote the public good. In his belief in the infinite multiplication of good influence, Vaughan doesn't stop to advocate Franklin's writing for a generic "happiness both public and domestic," but he expressly mentions some relevant national and international benefits, which would be welcome in the aftermath of the American war of independence against the British rule.

Franklin's *Autobiography*.

¹⁶ Franklin, *Autobiography, Poor Richard, and Later Writings*, 634.

In this sense, a cosmopolitan selfhood, here portrayed in Franklin's *Autobiography*, is important not only for nation formation, but also for transnational relations:

Let Englishmen be made not only to respect, but even to love you. When they think well of individuals in your native country, they will go nearer to thinking well of your country; and when your countrymen see themselves well thought of by Englishmen, they will go nearer to thinking well of England. Extend your views even further; do not stop at those who speak the English tongue, but after having settled so many points in nature and politics, think of bettering the whole race of men.¹⁷

Apart from the hyperbolic supposition that Franklin's published memoirs could better "the whole race of men," which was probably perfectly attuned to Franklin's own perception of his work, Vaughan's paragraph is interesting in his portrayal of national and international relations. In fact, through the language of epistolary writing, he tries to put into motion a diplomatic communication between England and the U.S. by using Franklin's life as the engine that will start a virtuous circle.

If in the letter written by Vaughan the selfhood of the addressee (Franklin's) is a composite entity made of private, public and international facets, which could also function as a political tool for the improvement of international relations, in the letter by Abel James the selfhood of a letter writer is even less a self-contained unit, because it is not protected from external circumstances, but is linked to the circle of his correspondents. Abel James, in fact, by immediately drawing attention to the current historical and political events, and by connecting them closely to epistolary writing, shows how a letter writer who is also a public figure, and who engages in epistolary exchanges with other public personalities, is never secure and safe in a private and protected setting. The first paragraph of the missive illustrates how epistolary exchanges are deeply embedded in the texture of the time: the conflicts of the American revolution might procure unwanted audience for those private letters that, being vulnerable pieces of

writing, might fall prey to some unexpected reader and publisher, thus endangering not only the two writers interested in the conversation, but also their immediate circle of friends: “My dear and honored Friend. I have often been desirous of writing to thee, but could not be reconciled to the Thought that the Letter might fall into the Hands of the British, lest some Printer or busy Body should publish some Part of the Contents and give our Friends Pain and myself Censure.”¹⁸ Abel James’s preoccupations clearly imply that letters, being highly mobile objects, are intrinsically a transnational vehicle for communication, and they can cross borders often precluded to persons, thus carrying with them, along with the potentials of the mode of communication, also its dangers and insecurities. If the remarks made by Abel James insist on the limitations and dangers of epistolary communication, they also demonstrate how letter-writing is a crucial vehicle for a social construction of the self: once the writer and the addressee are part of the exchange, they will suffer from possible interventions within the epistolary exchange; besides, the action of one correspondent will reflect and influence the actions of the other.

The different examples of epistolary mode in Franklin’s *Autobiography* are helpful in order to consider different aspects and degrees of the interaction of public and private in the construction of a selfhood that is represented as emerging from epistolary correspondences. The dialogic quality of letter writing emphasizes also the political space created by the exchange itself; in Franklin’s *Autobiography* it is interesting to note, in fact, that the political and the historical dimensions, and to be more precise, the American Revolution, are explicitly mentioned in connection with a defining moment of explanation about how the epistolary impulses are crucial for the *Autobiography* itself.

¹⁷ Ibid., 638.

At the end of the first section, and before the two letters, Franklin addresses the readers and clarifies the differences between the first section and the section that will follow, measuring the distance between the first two parts, one being destined to his son, and the other intended for the public: “Thus far was written with the Intention express’d in the Beginning and therefore contains several little family Anecdotes of no Importance to others. What follows was written many Years after in compliance with the Advice contain’d in these Letters, and accordingly intended for the Publick. The Affairs of the Revolution occasion’d the Interruption.”¹⁹ This short paragraph, operating as a transition from one part to the other, is noteworthy because it exemplifies the two directions the writing is taking, as put into motion by the epistolary presence: the first part, being addressed to his son, takes a more private trajectory, while the second part, encouraged by the request contained in the letters, is “intended for the Publick.” Interestingly enough, the political is in between, as Franklin’s perfectly timed sentence remarks: “The Affairs of the Revolution occasion’d the Interruption.” In the transition paragraph, between the two epistolary narratives, the American Revolution makes a brief and almost perfunctory appearance, while hiding, with its weighty presence, not only the complexities of the political struggle, but even glossing over a more private matter, that is the breach that during the years of the conflict had occurred between Franklin and his son William, breach caused by their different political allegiances.

As we have seen, the presence of an epistolary gesture in Franklin’s *Autobiography* enacts a tension between private and public, but the range of privateness and publicness remains within a certain limited arena. As far as his relationship with his son is concerned, for example, the readers – that is the public that will read the

¹⁸ Ibid., 633.

Autobiography in the form of a published text – will only receive Benjamin Franklin’s viewpoint, his desires, and his expectations. Similarly, as regards the political and national undercurrents and implications of the American struggle, we only obtain Franklin’s public statement.

Very different is what happens in the epistolary exchanges that actually occur between Benjamin Franklin and his son William. Only through an epistolary exchange, a real correspondence, will the deeper levels of the private, and simultaneously the farther reaches of publicness, be engaged in the conversation and become visible. By looking at a specific exchange between Franklin and his son, and precisely at the first letters sent after the American revolution, when the political and personal choices made by the two men had been played out, it will become apparent that there is an exclusive communication that can be established only through the medium of letter writing. In the epistolary communication, in fact, the emotional ground created by the two writers in the intermediary space of the exchange, and the contingent circumstances enveloping the exchange, are important factors in the momentum carried on in the flow of epistolarity. While the *Autobiography* does not allow for any mention of the personal rupture between the author and his son, the epistolary writing itself grants enough space and flexibility that even an attempt at reconciliation –after years of silence and resentment – is imaginable. Not only that: the dialogic quality of the writing requires that, even when the correspondents express a firm conviction, they have to explain it or at least justify it, and by the same token, when they wish for silence, they have to explicitly request it. In this sense, matters of national allegiance have to be expressively taken to the fore, even when

¹⁹ Ibid., 632.

the two correspondents want to agree on being silent about problematic choices, as the specific case of Franklin and his son demonstrates.

After what in the *Autobiography* has been defined as the “Affairs of the Revolution,” in the summer of 1784, and presumably in the same period when Franklin is intent in composing the second part of his *Autobiography* in France, William Franklin, from London, sends the following letter to his father, with the clear purpose of re-establishing the communication, and hopefully, of reaching some form of agreement:

London July 22d. 1784

Dear and Honoured Father,

Ever since the Termination of the unhappy Contest between Great Britain and America, I have been anxious to write to you, and to endeavour to revive that affectionate Intercourse and Connexion which till the Commencement of the late Troubles had been the Pride and Happiness of my Life. Uncertain, however, whether the decided and active Part I took in Opposition to the Measures you thought proper to adopt, might not have left some unfavourable Impressions on your Mind; or, if that should not be the Case, whether you might not have some political Reasons for avoiding such Correspondence while you retained your present Employ under the Congress, I was induced to postpone my Intention of writing till I could by some Means or other learn whether your Inclinations were likely to meet my Wishes in that respect. I was, besides, led to expect an Opportunity of a personal Interview from the Accounts I frequently heard from some of your Friends in London, and particularly from a Letter which Temple wrote to Mr. Whitefoord about a Twelvemonth ago, intimating that you had Thoughts of soon returning to America, and would probably visit England in your Way. In that Letter he likewise mentioned that he should have wrote to me, but that he was apprehensive it might, if known, excite Suspensions among some jealous People for whom you acted. This was an additional Motive for my delaying to write, as the Reason he gave why it was improper for him to write to me, operated equally against my writing to you or him, while in your present Situation. There are narrow illiberal Minds in all Parties. In that which I took, and on whose Account I have so much suffered, there have not been wanting some who have insinuated that my Conduct has been founded on Collusion with you, that one of us might succeed whichever Party should prevail. Similar Collusions, they say, were known to have existed between Father and Son during the civil Wars in England and Scotland. The Falsity of such Insinuations in our Case you well know, and I am happy that I can with Confidence appeal not only to you but to my God, that I have uniformly acted from a strong Sense of what I conceived my Duty to my King, and Regard to my Country, required. If I have been mistaken, I cannot help it. It is an Error of Judgment that the maturest Reflection I am capable of cannot rectify; and I verily believe were the same Circumstances to

occur again Tomorrow, my Conduct would be exactly similar to what it was heretofore, notwithstanding the cruel Sufferings, scandalous Neglects, and Ill-treatment which we poor unfortunate Loyalists have in general experienced. On a Subject so disagreeable I have no Desire to say more, and I hope everything which has happened relative to it may be mutually forgotten. Encouraged by what passed lately between you and that good-hearted Man Colonel Wadsworth, I flatter myself that you are actuated by the same Disposition, and that my Advances towards a Renewal of our former affectionate Intercourse will be as acceptable to you as they are agreeable to myself.

It gave me great Pleasure to hear from the Colonel, Mrs. Montgomery, and others, that my Son, who owes so much to you for his Education and other Advantages, has conducted himself to your Satisfaction. The Character given of him by a Variety of Persons who have known him at Paris does him great Credit, and cannot fail to heighten that natural Affection which always interests me in whatever concerns his Welfare. Please to give my Love to him, and let him know that I wish he would write to me soon, and inform me whether he received a Letter from Mrs. Galloway some months ago inclosing a Paper belonging to you, as Mr. G. is uneasy lest it has miscarried.

Now that I have broken the Ice, many Things occur which I much want an Opportunity to mention; too many, indeed, for the Limits of a Letter, and some of them respecting private Family Affairs, of a very important Nature, that cannot well be adjusted without a personal Interview. I shall therefore, if you are not likely to be soon in England, be happy to have your Approbation to wait on you at Paris. In the mean Time I beg you to be assured of my constant Prayers for your Health and Happiness, and that I am, as ever, Your very dutiful and affectionate Son

Wm. Franklin

p.s. Augst. 6. As I knew not whether the Post was a safe Mode of Conveyance of Letters to you, I have postponed sending the above, in hopes of finding a private Hand, but as no one has occurred I have at length determined to send it by this Night's Mail. If you know of a better Channel of Correspondence you will please to mention it. Please to direct to me at No. 28 Norton Street Marylebone, and, if you think it best to put your Letter under Cover to another Person, it may be directed to Thos. Odwin, Esq. Hylord's Court, Crutched Friars, London.²⁰

The beginning of the letter is an intricate fabric of tentative explanations about William's desire to reconnect with his father, since the first claim he makes is about that "Affectionate Intercourse and Connexion," in order to ground all his subsequent statements on a basis of feelings and affection. But very soon after having declared his wish to revive the affectionate relationship with his father, William moves into the

political realm, populated by a number of other people, and where interpersonal relationships –even those with the family –are fraught with uncertainty. William explains that the reason behind his silence has not only been the uncertainty about his father’s inclinations towards him (“I was induced to postpone my Intention of writing till I could by some Means or other learn whether your Inclinations were likely to meet my Wishes in that respect”), but also, and in fact, more, his doubt about the possible political motives that Benjamin Franklin might have or might have had in avoiding the correspondence: “whether you might not have some political Reasons for avoiding such Correspondence while you retained your present Employ under the Congress.” In the world inhabited by Benjamin and William Franklin the political, and as we shall see, the national, are the foremost dimensions, and even a private exchange –based on a very personal family relationship –is regulated by political choices and circumstances.

Because both writers are public and political figures, William is well aware that between his father and himself there is an expanse of epistolary space, where other figures function as intermediaries. Therefore, even the most personal communications have to acknowledge the presence of a public that is observing and interfering. The next point William makes, in fact, regards the political context Benjamin Franklin was part of, and how the prospect of “an Opportunity of a personal Interview” with his father was offered by “Accounts [he] frequently heard from some of [Benjamin Franklin’s] Friends in London,” and more specifically by a letter exchanged by two other people, and that discussed Benjamin Franklin’s future travel plans. In this very letter, the writer expressed some reservations about writing directly to William, because that would, “if known,

²⁰ Benjamin Franklin, *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*. Sponsored by the American Philosophical Society and Yale University. Digital Edition by the Packard Humanities Institute, <http://franklinpapers.org/franklin/> (accessed April 17, 2010)

excite Suspicions among some jealous People for whom [Benjamin Franklin] acted.”

According to William Franklin, once within the political dimension, even personal correspondence is never secure and the letter he composes for his father is mostly about the difficulty of writing a personal letter that would not incur in censorship or misinterpretation, generated not necessarily by the addressee of the letter, but by the circle of public enfolding the two correspondents. For William Franklin, at this juncture, an epistolary exchange with his father is a very delicate matter, not quite free and private as one would imagine.

Immediately after stating “There are narrow illiberal Minds in all Parties,” William Franklin seems to shift his purpose and his audience, and instead of speaking to his father, he appears to be addressing a larger audience. What comes next sounds more like a public rebuttal against some accusation laid upon both William and Benjamin Franklin, than a private confidence or a personal reflection: “there have not been wanting some who have insinuated that my Conduct has been founded on Collusion with you, that one of us might succeed whichever Party should prevail. Similar Collusions, they say, were known to have existed between Father and Son during the civil Wars in England and Scotland.” This part serves the double purpose of uniting the front with his father – these allegations are as against Benjamin as they are against William –and expanding his audience in case this letter falls into some untrustworthy hands. Even more interestingly, this passage clarifies how the political choices, which in this case are national choices, William and Benjamin Franklin having situated themselves as champions and promoters of two different nations, could be imagined as founded on personal relations. Furthermore, the tone of this section of the letter belongs to an official political explanation, since William Franklin is vesting his statement with a nationalist language

of honor and loyalty: “I am happy that I can with Confidence appeal not only to you but to my God, that I have uniformly acted from a strong Sense of what I conceived my Duty to my King, and Regard to my Country, required. If I have been mistaken, I cannot help it.”

After having provided a political statement, and having presented his virtues of consistency and loyalty, William Franklin uses the epistolary space as the locus where there could be an agreement on silence: if letter-writing is the mode through which certain aspects of privateness can be discussed, by the same token it is also the medium that allows for silence to be chosen, declared, and mutually agreed upon. Therefore silence, in an epistolary exchange is not only the choice of glossing over something disagreeable, or controversial, but it has to be suggested, negotiated and finally agreed upon, as the writer’s entreat demonstrates: “On a Subject so disagreeable I have no Desire to say more, and I hope everything which has happened relative to it may be mutually forgotten. Encouraged by what passed lately between you and that good-hearted Man Colonel Wadsworth, I flatter myself that you are actuated by the same Disposition, and that my Advances towards a Renewal of our former affectionate Intercourse will be as acceptable to you as they are agreeable to myself.” Only when there is an assurance of a possible space for silence, the epistolary exchange can be initiated, and the emotional ground can sustain the communication.

From his request to remain silent about such a controversial issue, William Franklin moves to safer ground, as he starts talking about his own son, who was in the care of Benjamin Franklin, thus stressing the emotional and genealogical ties between them. Before concluding the letter, William Franklin then discusses another kind of silence, that inherent in the “Limits of a Letter,” since “private Family Affairs, of a very

important Nature, [...] cannot well be adjusted without a personal Interview.” The rest of the letter in fact centers on the insecurities still in place about conducting private affairs through epistolary communication. If letters are the best medium for private exchange, their vulnerability in the public realm renders them still accessible and insecure.

Benjamin Franklin replied to his son’s letter by accepting some of the solicitations about renewing the “affectionate Intercourse,” while at the same time emphasizing how the national and political dimensions are strictly related to the personal. In August 1784 Franklin wrote the following letter, showing how for him not only is the political personal, but that every action, albeit played out in a very public realm, is also profoundly private:

Passy, August 16, 1784.

Dear Son,

I received your letter of the 22nd past, and am glad to find that you desire to revive the affectionate Intercourse, that formerly existed between us. It will be very agreeable to me; indeed nothing has ever hurt me so much and affected me with such keen Sensations, as to find myself deserted in my old Age by my only Son; and not only deserted, but to find him taking up Arms against me, in a Cause, wherein my good Fame, Fortune, and Life were all at Stake. You conceived, you say, that your Duty to your King and Regard for your Country required this. I ought not to blame you for differing in Sentiment with me in Public Affairs. We are Men, all subject to Errors. Our Opinions are not in our own Power; they are formed and governed much by Circumstances, that are often as inexplicable as they are irresistible. Your Situation was such that few would have censured your remaining Neuter, *tho’ there are Natural Duties which precede political ones, and cannot be extinguished by them.*

This is a disagreeable Subject. I drop it. And we will endeavour, as you propose mutually to forget what has happened relating to it, as well as we can. I send your Son over to pay his Duty to you. You will find him much improv’d. He is greatly esteem’d and belov’d in this Country, and will make his Way anywhere. It is my Desire that he should Study the Law, as a necessary Part of Knowledge for a public Man, and profitable if he should have occasion to practice it. I would have you therefore put into his Hands those Law-books you have viz. Blackstone, Coke, Bacon, Viner, etc. He will inform you, that he received the Letter sent him by Mr. Galloway, and the *Paper* it enclos’d, safe. On my leaving America I deposited with that Friend for you a Chest of Papers, among which was a Manuscript of 9 or 10 Volumes relating to Manufactures, Agriculture, Commerce, Finance, etc. which cost me in England about 70 Guineas; and Eight Quire Books

containing the Rough Drafts of all my Letters while I liv'd in London. These are missing. I hope you have got them. If not, they are lost. Mr. Vaughan has publish'd in London a Volume of what he calls my Political Works. He proposes a second Edition. But as the first was very incompleat, and you had many Things that are omitted, for I used to send you sometimes the Rough Drafts, and sometimes the printed Pieces I wrote in London, I have directed him to apply to you for what may be in your Power to furnish him with, or to delay his Publication till I can be at home again—if that may ever happen. I did intend returning this Year, but the Congress, instead of giving me Leave to do so, have sent me another Commission, which will keep me here at least a Year longer; and perhaps I may then be too old and feeble to bear the Voyage. I am here among a People that love and respect me, a most amiable Nation to live with, and perhaps I may conclude to die among them; for my Friends in America are dying off one after another, and I have been so long abroad that I should now be almost a Stranger in my own Country. I shall be glad to see you when convenient, but would not have you come here at present. You may confide to your Son the Family Affairs you wished to confer upon with me, for he is discreet. And I trust that you will prudently avoid introducing him to Company that it may be improper for him to be seen with. I shall hear from you by him, and any Letters to me afterwards, will come safe, under Cover directed to Mr Ferdinand Grand, Banker at Paris.

Wishing you Health, and more Happiness than it seems you have lately experienced, I remain, Your affectionate Father.²¹

Franklin's missive is interesting for a number of reasons, one of which is the interconnection of many levels: personal, public, political and national. After replying almost word by word to William Franklin's invitation to re-establishing an interpersonal relationship ("am glad to find that you desire to revive the affectionate Intercourse, that formerly existed between us") Benjamin Franklin considers the various aspects of the "affectionate Intercourse," by switching from *affection* to *affect*. With a stern tone he reminds his son that the existing affectionate relationship between them implies that one person's behavior would always bear on the other person's life: because of their "affectionate intercourse" Benjamin Franklin was affected by his son's political choices. Obviously in this passage Benjamin Franklin is venting his anger and disappointment, and he chooses to bring the exchange on a very personal level. He dismisses, by not

²¹ Franklin, *Autobiography, Poor Richard, and Later Writings*, 356-358 (italics in original).

addressing them, all the speculations suggested by William, leaving the public realm outside the borders of the first part of the letter, focusing instead only on the personal and familial. From the lofty statements made by William Franklin in his letter, where he declared his national loyalty, Benjamin Franklin moves immediately to a very personal level: “indeed nothing has ever hurt me so much and affected me with such keen Sensations, as to find myself deserted in my old Age by my only Son; and not only deserted, but to find him taking up Arms against me, in a Cause, wherein my good Fame, Fortune, and Life were all at Stake.” Apart from the predictable severe tone, Franklin grounds his comments on the idea that he was the subject most affected by his son’s political choices. Benjamin Franklin in fact personalizes the struggle, declaring that his son has taken up arms against him, thus conflating the political and national struggle into an interpersonal conflict. At this point the two men stand for the two nations involved in the American revolution: the rhythmic insistence of the pronouns does not only distinguish the two sides, but it also emphasizes the personal and the national, where Benjamin Franklin embodies the personal and familial relation, and William Franklin typifies the national dimension: “myself deserted,” “my old Age,” “my only Son,” “Arms against Me,” “my good Fame,” as opposed to “you conceived,” “you say,” “your Duty,” “your King,” “your Country.” Benjamin Franklin insists on prioritizing his son’s duties, and although he tries to concede that his son would have duties towards England, he stresses how those towards him should have been uppermost because “Natural Duties [...] precede political ones.”

Similarly to the letter written by William Franklin, Benjamin Franklin’s reply illustrates an immediate and close investment in questions of national character, where the tension towards nation building is always expressed through a private and personal

dimension. Moreover, the personal dimension is the only one whereby national allegiances can be discussed: even more than his son –who in his letter at least tried to expand the political landscape by including examples from other nationalist conflicts, or by mentioning other political figures – Benjamin Franklin keeps the conversation about the political choices on a strictly personal level. And when the discussion about the American revolution could have been widened into a larger context, he refuses to speak any more about it. By welcoming his son’s invitation to remain silent on the subject, and by performing the silence within the very language of the letter (“This is a disagreeable subject. I drop it”), Benjamin Franklin crystallizes on a personal level the political choices of national allegiances made by William Franklin. Benjamin Franklin’s acquiescence about forgetting the interpersonal and international conflicts with his son (“And we will endeavour, as you propose mutually to forget what has happened relating to it, as well as we can”) is a gesture that could only occur in letter writing, because in this case the letter functions as a type of contractual regulation, which at a precise point in time serves as a mutual agreement. Even when the divergences about national ideas are profound, the epistolary space affords a locus for expressing dissensus and consensus about questions of national import.

The examples provided by both Franklin’s *Autobiography* and his epistolary exchange are useful in order to show how the dimension of the national emerges from the encounter and negotiation between public and private. As regards the *Autobiography*, the presence of an epistolary foundation in the narrative of Franklin’s life demonstrates not only the importance of that mode of writing for the period, but also its contribution in creating a fruitful interaction between the private and the public. Furthermore, Franklin, by choosing to include both his son and his friends as his correspondents –both ideal and

material—within the text, reinforces the link between his model of self-representation and the question of nation building, where the nation is the sum of virtuous citizens who can follow his example. The actual letter exchange between Benjamin Franklin and his son is even more crucial for laying out the argument of my study: for Benjamin Franklin and William Franklin in fact, as for the other figures I will consider in the following chapters, the epistolary space of the mutual letter writing is the space where the personal and the national dimensions, as aspects of the private and the public, are intimately connected and dependent on one another. And it is the distinctive status of this kind of letters (written in private by public figures always aware of their visible and accessible positions) that renders them the site for intimate reflections that while being constantly public oriented, do not have to submit to the rules and restrictions of public discourse.

For all the figures involved in both Franklin's *Autobiography* and his epistolary exchanges, the nation – or better yet, national entities²² – do not remain on the background, on the contrary, they enter decidedly in the writing, and in fact they constitute the matter at stake. The epistolary mode, furthermore, clearly exemplifies that the interest towards the national dimension is simultaneous and complementary to an attention to the international dimension, since all the reflections and communications always expand in order to encompass an international horizon.

I have started with Benjamin Franklin because I would like to suggest a few points raised by his epistolary practice that could serve as signposts for what comes later. Although Franklin precedes historically the period that will be considered in the

²² A number of scholars have obviously noted the international foundation and scope of Franklin's text. See for example how William C. Spengemann, in his *A New World of Words. Redefining Early American Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994) describes Franklin's *Autobiography*: "Although begun when Franklin was still a loyal British subject; written in English, not in American; modeled avowedly on the styles of Bunyan and Defoe and on the genre of advice to apprentices; prompted initially

subsequent chapters (mostly the 1840s), he – along with two other important national personalities such as John Adams and Thomas Jefferson – is an interesting example of how, for such public figures, bent on preserving their public positions, the private and personal conversation developed through epistolary writing enables them to generate a discourse about the national dimension. By the same token, the question of the national pervades even what might be thought of as the most intimate layers of their personal conversations. I chose a moment of personal crisis and an attempt at reconciliation, when the nation looms preponderantly at the horizon, in order to highlight the interconnection between the level of intimacy built on letter writing, and the political dimension of the national, also based on the social construction of the epistolary writing. A similar example is provided by two other eminent political figures, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, when after many years of silence, due to their differing political views, they re-open the communication through the exchange of letters. Once again an act of re-acquaintance and reconciliation is established through letter writing, which ensured simultaneously a common ground of affection, and a visible fabric of common interest in the national welfare.

2. John Adams and Thomas Jefferson: Homespun and National Correspondences

Another illustration of the interconnection between the familial, personal and national in epistolary writing is provided by some letters exchanged in 1812 between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, who, after a long period of silence and distance, both

by demands from London editors; composed largely in Europe; and published first in a French translation, in Paris, the *Autobiography* belongs to American literary history “ (179).

personal and political, were able to re-establish a flow of epistolary conversation only thanks to a thread built on intimacy and a desire to establish a correct and maybe collaborative historical version of events past through an epistolary exchange that, though being formally private, was obviously destined to be published, and to become a public resource for future generations of readers.²³ Before moving to the analysis of the epistolary exchange, it might be useful to recollect the historical circumstances that brought about the reconciliation.

After the presidential election of 1796, won by John Adams, the long and steady friendship –marked by a constant flow of epistolary exchange – between Adams and Thomas Jefferson came to an abrupt halt. An effort in re-establishing a contact between Adams and Jefferson was conducted by Abigail Adams, who wrote to Jefferson in 1804 expressing her condolences for the death of his daughter Mary Jefferson Eppes. In the exchange that resulted, the two correspondents tried to clarify past contentious political episodes, but they did not manage to agree on a common understanding, and, after six months of communication, the exchange was once again interrupted. Other attempts were made by Benjamin Rush, mutual friend of Adams and Jefferson, who towards the end of 1811, in a letter to Adams, urged him to “receive the olive branch which had thus been offered to you by the hand of a man who still loves you. Fellow laborers in erecting the great fabric of American independence!”²⁴ The constant pressure and a series of fortuitous circumstances contributed to bring the two statesmen closer. The actual interpersonal communication was resumed with a letter written in January 1812 by John

²³ John Adams in a letter to Thomas Jefferson: “You and I ought not to die, before We have explained ourselves to each other,” (15 July 1813) in Lester J. Cappon, ed., *The Adams- Jefferson Letters. The Complete Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 358.

²⁴ Benjamin Rush to John Adams, 16 December 1811. L.H. Butterfield ed., *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, Vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 1110.

Adams to Thomas Jefferson; the ensuing correspondence would last until their deaths in 1826.

Following more than a decade of silence, a few misunderstandings, some open conflicts, and an increasing difference in their political views, Adams's letter to Jefferson is a piece of literary finesse. Adams chose a slanted approach, without directly addressing any political controversy, or offering any explanation about past events. The letter is quite an original piece in the correspondence:

Dear Sir,

As you are a Friend to American Manufactures under proper restrictions, especially Manufactures of the domestic kind, I take the Liberty of sending you by the Post a Packett containing two Pieces of Homespun lately produced in this quarter by One who was honoured in his youth with some of your Attention and much of your kindness.

All of my Family whom you formerly knew are well. My Daughter Smith is here and has successfully gone through a perilous and painful Operation, which detains her here this Winter, from her Husband and her Family at Chenango: where one of the most gallant and skilful Officers of our Revolution is probably destined to spend the rest of his days, not in the Field of Glory, but in the hard Labors of Husbandry²⁵.

I wish you Sir many happy New Years and that you may enter the next and many succeeding Years with as animating Prospects for the Public as those at present before US. I am Sir with a long and sincere Esteem your Friend and Servant,

John Adams.²⁶

As a re-acquaintance letter, this piece of writing seems a bit unusual, especially in its first section. First of all, the form of salute is undoubtedly original: Adams opens his letter not by calling attention to his friendship with Jefferson, on the contrary he addresses Jefferson on a more formal level, where the word "Friend" does not evoke the

²⁵ Adams refers to Colonel William Stephens Smith, whose farm was in Madison County, New York, in the Chenango Valley. In 1812 he was elected to Congress as a Federalist and served from 1813 until his death in 1816. See Cappon, *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 290.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 290. For studies on the Adams-Jefferson correspondence, see Merrill D. Peterson, *Adams and Jefferson. A Revolutionary Dialogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); David Haven, Jr. Blake, " 'Posterity Must Judge': Public and Private Discourse in the Adams-Jefferson Letters, " *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory*, 1994 Winter; 50 (4): 1-30; Joanne B. Freeman,

private province of interpersonal relations, but rather the public arena of economic interests. By saluting Jefferson as a “Friend of American Manufactures under proper restrictions, especially Manufactures of the domestic kind,” Adams summons Jefferson, in this shared epistolary space, in his character of economic theorist, insisting on his specific concern about economic independence. The mode of address could actually prelude to the request of a commercial transaction, or it could perhaps lead to some further considerations on the current state of American manufactures. However, the whole tone of the writing, along with the specification of the kind of manufactures favored – “American Manufactures under proper restrictions, especially Manufactures of the domestic kind” –provide an ironic tinge to the whole address.

Before examining Adams’s letter more in depth, it would be useful to know that, as a matter of fact, Adams wrote his note to present Jefferson with a gift he was sending along with the letter. In wishing to rekindle their friendship, Adams chose to send a present to Jefferson, but even though the note and the “Packett” (“a Packett containing two Pieces of Homespun lately produced in this quarter”) were sent together by Adams, they got accidentally separated, and the letter arrived first, unaccompanied by the other part of the parcel. Therefore Jefferson received only the letter, without knowing what the content of the packet was. As it turned out when the packet eventually arrived, the “two Pieces of Homespun” were not the cloth one may infer from Adams’s language, but they were the *Lectures on Rhetoric and Oratory*, two volumes written by John Quincy Adams.

As in the case with the letters exchanged by Benjamin Franklin and his son, the letter written by Adams is noteworthy for two sets of reasons: on the one hand it allows to reflect on some exemplary aspects typical of epistolary correspondences; on the other

“Jefferson and Adams: Friendship and the Power of the Letter,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas*

hand it provides elements more specific to my analysis. As far as general considerations about epistolarity go, one could notice that, like other numberless cases, the mishap suffered by the packet sent by Adams is common for the epistolary communication of the time. The fact that the initial parcel sent by John Adams suffered some accident in the distance traveled between the writer and the reader is an extremely frequent occurrence, so much so that the form of epistolary writing itself developed a sense of insecurity about its own safe deliverance.²⁷ Unlike other kinds of writing, in correspondences the material circumstances of letter writing and the modes of delivery are not accessory and irrelevant to the writing itself, but they actively participate into the shaping of the form.

But what is even more interesting in this context, is the double character of this letter, and its peculiar status as a private missive embedded in a public and national discourse. It is apparent that the letter has a familiar tone, as it depicts a familiar atmosphere with constant references to Adams's family and his domestic setting. Therefore it would seem that this piece of writing belongs in a private sphere of interpersonal communication. Even more relevant in the perspective of my study, and something I would like to investigate, is the ways in which the familiar dimension is strictly related to the national dimension. This double aspect is expressed clearly by the use of "domestic" ("manufactures of the domestic kind") that can indicate the familiar as well as the national origin and character of the product. After having identified Jefferson as a favorable recipient of his communication and his gift, Adams insists on the local and familiar nature of the specimen of manufactures he is sending. As part of those American manufactures of domestic kind, here Adams is presenting an artifact that, though "lately

Jefferson, ed. Frank Shuffelton (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 168-178.

²⁷ This is such a common case that novelists have often used the trope of a delayed letter as a narrative device to keep characters and readers in a state of suspense.

produced in this quarter” (that is on a local scale), is nonetheless one sample of those “American Manufactures under proper restrictions, especially Manufactures of the domestic kind.” By joining together the family and the nation, Adams keeps the national formation and its articulations as an obvious backdrop of the horizon encompassed by the letter, positioning both Jefferson and himself as inhabitants of a national landscape, within which the local centers of production (Adams’s quarter and Jefferson’s residence) are kept together by the trajectory of the letter.

In this particular case one component that keeps together the national dimension and the personal aspect is the use of irony, which tinges the whole piece of writing. Irony is the flexible medium through which the political distance between the two men is simultaneously recognized and collapsed. Because of their shared history on the national stage and thanks to an epistolary past, Adams can employ irony –something he has been often using in his letters – to address Jefferson. The “liberty” taken by Adams is not so much his sending a gift, as his exercising irony with his old friend: irony in fact can only be practiced in a state of intimacy, when the parties involved are aware of the complex fabric of meaning and references, as well as of their shared knowledge. Furthermore, the practice of irony is also a communicative tool that constructs and advances a sense of complicity. In his letter Adams employed a metaphorical level that succeeds in expressing irony and friendliness at the same time. By using the expression “pieces of homespun,” Adams was addressing the achievement of his son, while at the same time stating something about Jefferson, relying on his capacity to understand the metaphor, and to put it in the right context. Adams tried to construct a level of understanding and participation with his reader –Thomas Jefferson – that only the metaphorical cooperation would permit: he was not only using a conventionally kind approach to restore friendship

and correspondence, but he was also requiring Jefferson to read him correctly, to be his ideal reader. The fact that the gift – the packet of homespun – did not arrive with the letter, compelled this letter to stand by itself, to speak for itself, without the reference that would have rendered the meaning and the link transparent. The allusion to the homespun, without the actual piece of homespun, left a range of possibilities open, and allowed Jefferson to fill in with his own interpretation.

In his network of references Adams is echoing another common subtext, the importance of national welfare for both men. By describing Jefferson as a “Friend of American Manufactures” Adams is referring to Jefferson’s ideas about the development of the national economy, but also to Jefferson as a personal friend of his family, a friend of what is being produced in the Adams household. That production is, in fact, both an expression of those cherished American manufactures, and something more intimate, the symbol of the attention and kindness previously bestowed by Jefferson on that very household. The letter is the anticipation of a present, a gift in itself; it is a material object that will allow the recipient to already feel as part of an exchange, an exchange that links together Jefferson’s past acts of kindness and affection, and his current and future interests in the national welfare. As we will see in other cases, the vast temporal trajectory encompassed by epistolary writing is a crucial aspect of its capacity to engage with historical events in a unique way: Adams’s letter, in its few lines, while addressing questions of a family nature (his daughter’s operation, for example), includes past and expected acts of kindness on Jefferson’s part. Furthermore, the references to the American revolution depict it as an event occurred in the past but that becomes personalized through Adams’s son in law, Colonel Stephens Smith. By mentioning the revolution through the person of the Colonel, the historical event acquires the generative

power of a future of settlement in the national territory: “one of the most gallant and skilful Officers of our Revolution is probably destined to spend the rest of his days, not in the Field of Glory, but in the hard Labors of Husbandry.”

All these elements, entwined together in Adams’s writing, contribute to show how epistolary writing can be a valid tool to build and reinforce an intimate public, while simultaneously maintaining a larger vision, where the American revolution is both “our” revolution, the personal accomplishment of the two men, and “our” revolution as the wide, larger, national enterprise of American citizens.

Naturally, because the packet was not delivered in its entirety, some of the irony and the metaphorical references are lost on Jefferson, who, on his part, reacted to the two levels of communication that are clear in the letter: the national welfare, and the affection for Adams and his family. The complex structure of the letter written by Adams enabled Jefferson to recognize the presence of a strong national subtext, and in his reply, Jefferson conformed completely to the title granted him by Adams. His letter is an exhaustive treatise on the need for U.S. economic independence from foreign manufactures, exactly what a true “Friend of American Manufactures of the Domestic kind” would have written.

Jefferson’s response to John Adams starts by picking up the tone used by Adams, but with a higher degree of seriousness, and therefore, literalness:

Monticello Jan. 21, 1812

Dear Sir, I thank you before hand (for they are not yet arrived) for the specimens of homespun you have been so kind as to forward me by post. I doubt not their excellence, knowing how far you are advanced in these things in your quarter. Here we do little in the fine way, but in coarse and midling goods a great deal. Every family in the country is a manufactory within itself, and is very generally able to make within itself all the stouter and midling stuffs for it's own cloathing and household use. We consider a sheep for every person in the family as sufficient to clothe it, in addition to the cotton, hemp and flax which we raise

ourselves. For fine stuff we shall depend on your Northern manufactures. Of these, that is to say, of company establishments, we have none. We use little machinery. The Spinning Jenny and loom with the flying shuttle can be managed in a family; but nothing more complicated. The economy and thriftiness resulting from our household manufactures are such that they will never again be laid aside; and nothing more salutary for us has ever happened than the British obstructions to our demands for their manufactures. Restore free intercourse when they will, their commerce with us will have totally changed its form, and the articles we shall in future want from them will not exceed their own consumption of our produce.

A letter from you calls up recollections very dear to my mind. It carries me back to the times when, beset with difficulties and dangers, we were fellow laborers in the same cause, struggling for what is most valuable to man, his right of self-government. Laboring always at the same oar, with some wave ever ahead threatening to overwhelm us and yet passing harmless under our bark, we knew not how, we rode through the storm with heart and hand, and made a happy port. Still we did not expect to be without rubs and difficulties; and we had them. First the detention of the Western posts: then the coalition of Pilnitz, outlawing our commerce with France, and the British enforcement of the outlawry. In your French days depredations: in mine English, and the Berlin and Milan decrees: now the English orders of council, and the piracies they authorise: when they shall be over, it will be the impressment of our seamen, or something else: and so we have gone on, and so we shall go on, puzzled and prospering beyond example in the history of man. And I do believe we shall continue to grow, to multiply and prosper until we exhibit an association, powerful, wise and happy, beyond what has yet been seen by men. As for France and England, with all their pre-eminence in science, the one is a den of robbers, and the other of pirates. And if science produces no better fruits than tyranny, murder, rapine and destitution of national morality, I would rather wish our country to be ignorant, honest and estimable as our neighboring savages are.

But whither is senile garrulity leading me? Into politics, of which I have taken final leave. I think little of them, and say less. I have given up newspapers in exchange for Tacitus and Thucydides, for Newton and Euclid; and I find myself much the happier. Sometimes indeed I look back to former occurrences, in remembrance of our old friends and fellow laborers, who have fallen before us. Of the signers of the Declaration of Independence I see now living not more than half a dozen on your side of the Potomak, and, on this side, myself alone. You and I have been wonderfully spared, and myself with remarkable health, and a considerable activity of body and mind. I am on horseback 3. or 4. hours of every day; visit 3. or 4. times a year a possession I have 90 miles distant, performing the winter journey on horseback. I walk little however; a single mile being too much for me; and I live in the midst of my grandchildren, one of whom has lately promoted me to be a great grandfather. I have heard with pleasure that you also retain good health, and a greater power of exercising in walking than I do. But I would rather have heard this from yourself, and that, writing a letter, like mine, full of egotisms, and of details of your health, your habits, occupations and enjoyments, I should have the pleasure of knowing that, in the race of life, you do not keep, in its physical decline, the same distance ahead of me which you have

done in political honors and achievements. No circumstances have lessened the interest I feel in these particulars respecting yourself; none have suspended for one moment my sincere esteem for you; and I now salute you with unchanged affections and respect.

Th: Jefferson²⁸

When he wrote this letter, Jefferson was still in the position of not knowing exactly what Adams had sent him, therefore he resorted to a discourse safe and common to both statesmen, and fell easily for the economic interests that he had at heart. He accepted to engage in the national landscape as Adams sketched it in his letter, a landscape that evolved from the specific local sites inhabited by the two writers. Jefferson started his response by mapping out a geography of economic production, dwelling at length on the specific strengths and weaknesses of Virginia manufactures. By shifting immediately to the “here” of his own residence and state (“Here we do little in the fine way”), Jefferson used the letter to bridge the distance between himself and his reader, comparing what occurred in “your quarters” with what was produced “here.” If Jefferson was not quite sure where to stand at the beginning of this second phase of his correspondence with Adams, he could securely anchor his writing to the title Adams gave him, and so he developed his subsequent observations as revolving around the state of household manufactures in Virginia, stressing the autonomous nature of the production.²⁹

Apart from commenting on the economic production, more significantly Jefferson started to recognize and shape a common ground with Adams, by gradually expanding the range of the pronoun “we.” At the beginning of the letter Jefferson identified himself with the other Virginians, in opposition to the population in New England, where Adams

²⁸ Cappon, *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 292.

²⁹ This passage is a development of Query XIX on Manufactures in Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*, where he had argued that “We never had an interior trade of any importance. Our exterior commerce has suffered very much from the beginning of this contest. During this time we have manufactured within our families the most necessary articles of cloathing,” insisting also that “dependance

resided, sketching the differences in skills and goods produced: “knowing how far you are advanced in these things in your quarter,” “for fine stuff we shall depend on your Northern manufactures”, whereas “here we do little in the fine way,” “of these ... we have none,” “we use little machinery.” But the definition of the groups interested in his analysis and in his letter did not stop here, and it became a definition whose contours were shifting. At one point the letter starts to describe a more inclusive “we” than the population of Virginia. As soon as Great Britain appears in the writing, it becomes harder to confine the “we” and the “us” exclusively to the people of Virginia: “and nothing more salutary for us has ever happened than the British obstructions to our demands for their manufactures.” The presence of a common antagonist, which in the case of Jefferson and Adams is not only an historical adversary, but a political opponent with whom in the past they had to fight, negotiate and come to terms, triggered the epistolary language to create a common subject, a “we” that unifies both writer and reader of the missive.³⁰

As the text illustrates, the most important aspect of this letter is the formation of the pronoun “we,” and especially its gradual movement towards a national subject that in this case is at the same time the public outside the letter, and simultaneously the private people within the epistolary exchange. What I take to be a crucial generic aspect of letter writing is, in fact, the construction of a community whose cohesiveness is reinforced by the shared authorship of a letter exchange and by its sense of an audience. From the limited horizon of Virginia at the beginning of the letter, Jefferson moves to a larger sphere that enfolds the whole territory of the nation, its historical origins and its future. The epistolary gaze employed by Jefferson is gradually inclusive in the construction of

begets subservience and venality, suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition.” Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 1785 (Penguin: New York, 1999), 170-171.

the “we:” from the “we” Virginians of the economic production, Jefferson proceeds to the “we [...] fellow laborers in the same cause,” where the epic description is an official version, rather than a personal recollection, of the historical and political events faced by the writer and his correspondent. After his personal pronoun brings Jefferson closer to his own reader and correspondent, he continues his analysis encompassing the whole nation, and, in addition to the territorial expansion, he embraces the temporal dimension: the “we” he referred to at this point of the letter is the whole nation, but the nation not as an entity historically grounded, but rather as a future creation: “and so we have gone on, and so we shall go on, puzzled and prospering beyond example in the history of man. And I do believe we shall continue to grow, to multiply and prosper until we exhibit an association, powerful, wise and happy, beyond what has yet been seen by men.” The success of the U.S. will be, according to Jefferson, beyond what has been the history so far, and beyond comparison with other nation such as France and England. The epic tone transports the U.S. to a mythical time and place, to the golden age of progress that will surpass other nations’ accomplishments.

* * *

Reading the epistolary presence in Franklin’s *Autobiography* and in his epistolary exchanges with his son William, and then looking at the exchange between Adams and Jefferson, helps to view the discussion or reflections about the formation of the nation in a different perspective, as something more dialogic and open-ended than studies

³⁰ During the period Adams and Jefferson were exchanging these letters, tension between the United States and Great Britain culminated with the United States declaring war against Great Britain on June 18, 1812.

centering on other genres have so far suggested.³¹ The double status of the letters examined, as private missives written by public men and concerning public and national affairs, allows for discourses about the nation to emerge, as intimate matters that are constantly public oriented. All the writers considered so far have somewhat used the epistolary medium to negotiate their individual status as private and public men with a nation, oftentimes identifying with the national enterprise, be it Great Britain for William Franklin or the American Republic for Thomas Jefferson. In the space of the epistolary correspondence they built a subjecthood that envisioned the national dimension in a private-public sphere.

As the last text to be considered in this chapter, I will move closer both chronologically and thematically to the period I will consider in the following chapters, the 1840s. I would like, in fact, to discuss Ralph Waldo Emerson's letter to President Van Buren, a text that brings about the question of the separation and distinction of the nation, viewed as the sum of the group of citizens, and the state, defined as a distant public entity that has lost the moral mandate of the people. This letter shares some common characteristics with the epistolary texts previously observed. Like them, this is a letter that articulates a crisis about the national project, but differently from the other texts, where it was still possible to recognize clearly the various parts interested in the crisis, in his text, Emerson expresses his doubts about questions of representation.

This letter is a good stepping stone to enter the cluster of texts that will constitute the object of study in the subsequent chapters, since in his address to Van Buren Emerson stages the crisis of identification with the State, and shows how difficult it is to recognize

³¹ According to Benedict Anderson, for example, "the novel and the newspaper [...] provided the technical means for 're-presenting' the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation" (italics in original). Benedict

a “we” identifiable with the nation. Whereas in the previous examples the identification of the correspondents with the nation was never uncertain, during this period the national expansion calls into questions the problem of representativeness: who is inside, and what constitutes a nation? Who is allowed to speak on behalf of the nation?

In his public letter³² to the President of the United States Martin Van Buren, Ralph Waldo Emerson, in 1838, uses the occasion of the removal of the Cherokee nation to Oklahoma, in order to question the current validity of the moral mandate to the Government: in his letter Emerson, as the actual writer, by embodying the voice of a number of concerned citizens, and by addressing the President as a “fellow-citizen,” uses the intermediate status of a public letter that poses as a missive fictitiously private, in order to call attention to the separation between the nation (“People”) and the executive power. Once again the letter is worth quoting at length:

To Martin Van Buren, President of the United States
Concord, Massachusetts, April 23, 1838
Sir:

The seat you fill places you in a relation of credit and dearness to every citizen. By right and natural position, every citizen is your friend. Before any acts contrary to his own judgment or interest have repelled the affections of any man, each may look with trust and loving anticipation to your government. Each has the highest right to call your attention to such subjects as are of a public nature, and properly belong to the Chief Magistrate; and the good Magistrate will feel a joy in meeting such confidence. In this belief, and at the instance of a few of my friends and neighbors, I crave of your patience, through the medium of the press, a short hearing for their sentiments and my own; and the circumstances that my name will be utterly unknown to you will only give the fairer chance to your equitable construction of what I have to say.

Sir, my communication respects the sinister rumors that fill this part of the country concerning the Cherokee people. The interest always felt in the aboriginal population – an interest naturally growing as that decays – has been heightened in

Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 25.

³² The letter was published under the heading “Communication” in the 14 May 1838 issue of the *National Daily Intelligencer*, one of the major newspapers of the District of Columbia.

regard to this tribe. Even to our distant State, some good rumor of their worth and civility has arrived. We have learned with joy their improvement in social arts. We have read their newspapers. We have seen some of them in our schools and colleges. In common with the great body of the American People, we have witnessed with sympathy the painful endeavors of these red men to redeem their own race from the doom of eternal inferiority, and to borrow and domesticate in the tribe the arts and customs of the Caucasian race. And notwithstanding the unaccountable apathy with which, of late years, the Indians have been sometimes abandoned to their enemies, it is not to be doubted that it is the good pleasure and the understanding of all humane persons in the Republic, of the men and the matrons sitting in thriving independent families all over the land, that they shall be duly cared for; that they shall taste justice and love from all to whom we have delegated the office of dealing with them.

The newspapers now inform us that in December, 1835, a treaty, contracting for the exchange of all the Cherokee territory, was pretended to be made by an agent on the part of the United States with some persons appearing on the part of the Cherokees; that the fact afterwards transpired that these individual Indians did by no means represent the will of the nation; and that, out of eighteen thousand souls composing the nation, fifteen thousand six hundred and sixty-eight have protested against the so-called treaty. It now appears that the Government of the United States choose to hold the Cherokees to this sham treaty, and the proceeding to execute the same. Almost the entire Cherokee Nation stand up and say, "This is not our act. Behold us! Here are we. Do not mistake that handful of deserters for us." And the President and his Cabinet, the Senate and the House of Representatives, neither hear these men nor see them, and are contracting to put this nation into carts and boats, and to drag them over mountains and rivers to a wilderness at a vast distance beyond the Mississippi. As a paper, purporting to be an army order, fixes a month from this day as the hour for this doleful removal.

In the name of God, sir, we ask you if this be so? Do the newspapers rightly inform us? Men and women, with pale and perplexed faces, meet one another in streets and churches here, and ask if this be so? We have inquired if this be a gross misrepresentation from the party opposed to the Government, and anxious to blacken it with the People. We have looked into newspapers of different parties, and find a horrid confirmation of the tale. We are slow to believe it. We hoped the Indians were misinformed, and that their remonstrance was premature, and will turn out to be a needless act of terror. The piety, the principle, that is left in the United States – if only its coarsest form, a regard to the speech of men – forbid us to entertain it as a fact. Such a dereliction of all faith and virtue, such a denial of justice, and such deafness to screams for mercy, were never heard of in times of peace, and in the dealing of a nation with its own allies and wards, since the earth was made. Sir, does this Government think that the People of the United States are become savage and mad? From their mind are the sentiments of love and a good nature wiped clean out? The soul of man, the justice, the mercy, that is the heart's heart in all men, from Maine to Georgia, does abhor this business.

In speaking thus the sentiments of my neighbors and my own, perhaps I overstep the bounds of decorum. But would it not be a higher indecorum coldly to argue a matter like this? We only state the fact, that a crime is projected that

confounds our understanding by its magnitude – a crime that really deprives us as well as the Cherokees of a country; for how could we call the conspiracy that should crush these poor Indians our Government, or the land that was cursed by their parting and dying imprecations our country, any more? You, sir, will bring down that renowned chair in which you sit into infamy if your seal is set to this instrument of perfidy; and the name of this nation, hitherto the sweet omen of religion and liberty, will stink to the world.

You will not do us the injustice of connecting this remonstrance with any sectional and party feeling. It is in our hearts the simplest commandment of brotherly love. We will not have this great and solemn claim upon national and human justice huddled aside under the flimsy plea of its being a party act. Sir, to us the questions upon which the Government and the People have been agitated during the past year, touching the prostration of the currency and of trade, seem motes in the comparison. The hard times, it is true, have brought this discussion home to every farmhouse and poor man's house in this town, but it is the chirping of grasshoppers beside the immortal question whether justice shall be done by the race of civilized to the race of savage man; whether all the attributes of reason, of civility, of justice, and even of mercy, shall be put off by the American People, and so vast an outrage upon the Cherokee nation and upon human nature, shall be consummated.

One circumstance lessens the reluctance with which I intrude on your attention: my conviction that the Government ought to be admonished of a new historical fact, which the discussion of this question has disclosed, namely, that there exists in a great part of the Northern People a gloomy diffidence in the moral character of the Government. On the broaching of this question, a general expression of despondency, of disbelief that any good will accrue from a remonstrance on an act of fraud and robbery, appeared in those men to whom we naturally turn for aid and counsel. Will the American Government steal? Will it lie? Will it kill? – We asked triumphantly. Our wise men shake their heads dubiously. Our counselors and old statesmen here say that, ten years ago, they would have staked their lives on the affirmation that the proposed Indian measures could not be executed; that the unanimous country would put them down. And now the steps of this crime follow each other so fast, at such fatally quick time, that the millions of virtuous citizens, whose agents the Government are, have no place to interpose, and must shut their eyes until the last howl and wailing of these tormented villages and tribes shall afflict the ear of the world.

I will not hide from you as an indication of the alarming distrust, that a letter addressed as mine is, and suggesting to the mind of the Executive the plain obligations of man, has a burlesque character in the apprehensions of some of my friends. I, sir, will not beforehand treat you with the contumely of this distrust. I will at least state to you this fact, and show you how plain and humane people, whose love would be honor regard the policy of the Government and what injurious inferences they draw as to the minds of the governors. A man with your experience in affairs must have seen cause to appreciate the futility of opposition to the moral sentiment. However feeble the sufferer, and however great the oppressor, it is in the nature of things that the blow should recoil on the aggressor. For, God is in the sentiment, and it cannot be withstood. The potentate and the People perish before it; but with it, and as its executors, they are omnipotent.

I write thus, sir, to inform you of the state of mind these Indian tidings have awakened here, and to pray with one voice more, that you, whose hands are strong with the delegated power of fifteen millions of men, will avert, with that might, the terrific injury which threatens the Cherokee tribe.
 With great respect, sir, I am your fellow-citizen,
 Ralph Waldo Emerson.³³

Emerson's first step is to create a common ground with the recipient of his letter. Similarly to the other documents examined so far, the writer here intends to take advantage of the implicit characteristic of epistolary writing of creating a common and shared space of intimacy, in order to infuse his communication with a sense of common interest. For this reason, Emerson's first move is to remind the President of his vicinity to each single citizen: "The seat you fill places you in a relation of credit and dearness to every citizen. By right and natural position, every citizen is your friend." Naturally the word "friend" here has less intimate connotations than the ones attributed to it by John Adams in his letter to Jefferson, but it still maintains a middle ground between a private relationship based on affection ("credit and dearness") and one that is open and visible to all.

Next, Emerson tries to personify the functions, while at the same time keeping himself in a state of near anonymity. In 1838 Emerson was not yet the public figure he will become in later years, and so he could write from the standpoint of a private citizen interested in questions of civil society, without resorting to literary fame. He therefore writes to the President as a fellow-citizen, "at the instance of a few of my friends and neighbors" believing that the public interest is constructed upon private, personal

³³ David M. Robinson, ed. *The Political Emerson. Essential Writings on Politics and Social Reform* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 29-32. The issue of Emerson's political involvement is constantly open for debate in the recent Emerson scholarship. Lawrence Buell in his biography *Emerson* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003) states that Emerson was more interested in civil engagement rather than social and political activism, and that "throughout his life, Emerson had trouble deciding which was worse: to keep silent about practicalities while the world burned, or to intervene at the risk of falling into programmatic myopia to the detriment of a scholar's proper work" (244).

interventions. Right after this, Emerson approaches the heart of the matter, which is the question of delegating power to representatives of the people. In order to voice his concern about the distance between nation and state, Emerson insists on the untenability of the treaty between “an agent on the part of the United States with some persons appearing on the part of the Cherokees.” As the Cherokee nation does not recognize those people as its representatives, so Emerson questions the authority of his government (to whom “we have delegated the office of dealing with them”) to represent the desire of the people of the United States. In a crescendo of questions and with emphatic tones, Emerson perseveres on a “we” that is gradually warier and more suspicious of the government (“we have inquired,” “we have looked into newspapers,” “we are slow to believe,” “we hoped the Indians were misinformed”) culminating with the question: “Sir, does a Government think that the People of the United States are become savage and mad?” By maintaining a “we” identifiable with a group of individuals (“friends and neighbors”), Emerson transfers the concept of the nation, the “People” into the “we” of his epistolary address. Interestingly, it is the nation of the Cherokees that provides the impulse to start reflecting on the condition of the U.S. nation, and on how much it still embodies the mandate of the “People,” or if, instead, it has moved further away in a public realm disconnected with the private thoughts and communication of individual citizens.

Before, or maybe while considering the United States in an international context of nations to be formed, or established more firmly, Emerson attends to questions of nation formation by dealing with an alien nation within the territory of the state.

According to his analysis, the dealings with the Cherokees are so crucial because they are at the heart of what constitutes the identification of territory, State (“Government”) and

nation (“People”). When he asserts that the crime perpetrated against the Indians is “a crime that really deprives us as well as the Cherokees of a country; for how could we call the conspiracy that should crush these poor Indians our Government, or the land that was cursed by their parting and dying imprecations our country, any more?” he obviously doubts the cohesiveness of the authority of the State, distancing the people even from the territory itself. Emerson ends his reprimand with again a personalization that the epistolary mode allows and reinforces: “You, sir, will bring down that renowned chair in which you sit into infamy if your seal is set to this instrument of perfidy; and the name of this nation, hitherto the sweet omen of religion and liberty, will stink to the world.” The president, as the embodiment of the state, is held responsible, and he should represent the nation, which, for Emerson, is not only a fragmented entity, but is at risk of international censure.

In this letter, Emerson explicitly articulates the movement of nation-building, where he, along with the micro-community of his neighbors and friends, is representative of a nation that is highly critical of its Government. He uses a public letter, written following some of the conventions of private interactions, in order to encourage a discussion about how nations are formed through delegating power and voice. Emerson demonstrates that the U.S. faces an inter-national problem even when dealing with such ‘domestic nations’ such as the Cherokees, and that its conduct and role are always visible in the international arena. Similarly to the works examined in the following chapters, Emerson’s text shows that reflections about the nation – its formation and role – occur not only in the intermediate space between personal and public. Instead, the wide spatial range that letters can cover grants an international breadth to reflections about the nation.

The correspondences investigated in the following chapters constitute interesting examples of how ideas about the American nation (but also the ideas of nation in general) were generated in a transnational atmosphere. The group of writers that will be the focus of the following chapters, Margaret Fuller, Costanza Arconati, Giuseppe Mazzini, R.W. Emerson, Thomas Carlyle, were chosen for various reasons. They were all interconnected, and they kept alive their relations through a rich epistolary exchange; furthermore they showed a personal and public interest towards matters regarding civil society, and they all thought of themselves as public figures. The period of time will also be limited to the 1840s, so that it will be possible to note the evolution from the formation of the United States to a moment when the American nation was observed from the perspective of European nations *in fieri*.

The next chapter will bring my analysis to Europe and precisely to Italy, a nation that in the 1840s did not exist yet, if not in the minds of the aspiring patriots or in the classical tomes studied by foreigners. By reading Margaret Fuller's letters, and more specifically her epistolary exchange with Costanza Arconati, I will attend to the interrelation between the private level and the constant attention to national and international projects. In Fuller's writings in Italy, she combined nationalistic objectives with a cosmopolitan practice, thus demonstrating that, for her, not only the personal and private are contiguous and they participate in the same sphere as the public and the political, but also that national projects can be achieved when elaborated within a cosmopolitan and international arena.

Chapter 2
“I Shall Return Possessed of a Great History”:
the Permeable Boundaries of Self and History in Margaret Fuller’s Letters

In the summer of 1847 Margaret Fuller, after having toured Europe at length with Marcus and Rebecca Spring, her Quaker friends who, in exchange for her tutoring of their son Eddie, were paying for part of her travel and lodging expenses, found herself finally parting ways with them. While passing through the north of Italy, in fact, the Springs announced that they were going to continue their travels north, visit Germany, and then return to the U.S. This new itinerary did not sit well with Fuller, as she did not want to leave Italy, and did not feel like returning home. After some deliberations, Fuller chose independence over the security of traveling with her more affluent friends, who could guarantee her a chaperon as well as material and financial assistance. This decision marked the beginning of her solitary stay in Italy, and her long sojourn in Rome, both significant for a number of reasons. The motivating forces for choosing Italy and solitude had to do as much with geographical preferences, as with her perception of herself, and her involvement with history and with future national possibilities.

One might find further explanations about her interest in prolonging her stay in Europe in some passages from her dispatches, the articles she wrote for the *New York Tribune*, where she echoed some of the concerns voiced by R.W. Emerson a decade earlier. In her article published on January 1, 1848, she wrote:

I do, indeed, say what I believe, that voluntary association for improvement in these particulars [lust of gain, weakest vanity, the evils grown out of the commercial system] will be the grand means for my nation to grow and give a nobler harmony to the coming age. But it is only of a small minority that I can say they as yet seriously take to heart these things; that they earnestly meditate on

what is wanted for their country, –for mankind, –for our cause is, indeed, the cause of all mankind at present.³⁴

Fuller, as did Emerson, believed that her country was undergoing a crisis, and that only voluntary association could move the nation toward progress. Unfortunately, according to Fuller, the crisis invested also questions of representation, since only a minority was interested in thinking about improving the nation, a minority that, nonetheless, for Fuller’s cosmopolitan sensibility, was contributing to a universalistic vision of advancement. The specific juncture she attributed to the United States did not seem to interest Europe, or, at least, the old world appeared to be in a different political stage, as Fuller explained to her American readers in another of her dispatches:

Hoping this era, I remain at present here. –Should my hopes be dashed to the ground, it will not change my faith, but the struggle for its manifestation is to me of vital interest. 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 than in America. My country is at present spoiled by prosperity, stupid with the lust of gain, soiled by crime in its willing perpetuation of Slavery, shamed by an unjust war, noble sentiment much forgotten even by individuals, the aims of politicians selfish or petty, the literature frivolous and venal. In Europe, amid the teachings of adversity a nobler spirit is struggling –a spirit which cheers and animates mine. I hear earnest words of pure faith and love. I see deeds of brotherhood. This is what makes my America. I do not deeply distrust my country [...] But it is not the making a President out of the Mexican War that would make me wish to come back. Here things are before my eyes worth recording, and, if I cannot help this work, I would gladly be its historian.³⁵

In Italy, unlike what would occur in the United States, Fuller felt that there was an interconnection between the “nobler spirit” struggling to come to the fore and her own

³⁴ Margaret Fuller, “Things and Thoughts in Europe. No. XVIII” in *New York Daily Tribune*, 1 January 1848, p. 1:1-3. Reprinted in Larry J. Reynolds and Susan Belasco Smith, eds., *Margaret Fuller. “These Sad but Glorious Days.” Dispatches from Europe, 1846-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 165.

³⁵ Margaret Fuller, “Things and Thoughts in Europe. No. XXIV” in *New York Daily Tribune*, 15 June 1848, p. 1:1-5. Reprinted in Reynolds and Belasco Smith, *Margaret Fuller. “These Sad but Glorious Days.” Dispatches from Europe, 1846-1850*, 230.

spirit. It is precisely this relationship between her self and the public spirit that will be the focus of this chapter.

In what follows, by reading Margaret Fuller's letters written from Italy, I will examine how, for Fuller, the private dimension of the self is always connected with and dependent on a keen perception of history, considered as the public arena within which national enterprises could be conceived. Because Fuller's politics were intensely personal, history and the public for Fuller are never distant and foreign categories, but rather public expressions of the self.

In order to examine Fuller's private and public dimensions of her self, it could be helpful to start with her relationship with the Springs. In some ways Fuller seemed preoccupied with the same matters discussed by H. D. Thoreau in the passage in *Walden*, where he expresses the necessity of maintaining room for one's thoughts, even when in the company of other people.³⁶ An interesting comment made by Margaret Fuller in one of her letters clarifies some aspects of her relationship with friends, as well as some of the feelings she started to have towards herself in relation to the Springs. In a letter to a close American friend, Caroline Sturgis –somebody Fuller was confiding to –Fuller reveals how, during the time spent with the Springs, she was lacking a personal space: “At Venice the Springs left me, and it was high time, for I had become qu[ite] insupportable I was always out of the body, and they, good friends, were *in*. I felt at times a wicked irritation against them for being the persons who took me away from France, which was no fault of theirs. Since I have been alone I ha[ve] grown reasonable again;

³⁶ See Introduction.

indee[d] in [the] first week floating about in [a] go[nd]ola, I seemed to find myself again.”³⁷

In this passage Fuller holds her friends the Springs responsible for a split between the outside and inside of her self and her body. Especially in the light of what Fuller writes in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, where she insists on a balance between body and mind,³⁸ the perceived disconnection between her body and her self is indicative of a certain displacement of appointed spheres.³⁹ Although Fuller never explicitly identifies the body as the site of a private space of the self, it seems plausible that her claim to be “always out of the body, and they, good friends, [being] in,” could be prompted by her perceiving that the status of mutual friendship between Fuller and the Springs was hindering the privacy of her self as well as the control of her body.⁴⁰ Fuller found that her friends could enter her most private domain, thus not only endangering the desirable harmony between body and soul, but also illustrating how, for Fuller, the domains of the private self and the public relations were not separated, and in fact, there was no discrete space for the private self, since it was accessible to “good friends.” By describing this process of exchanging places, and by mentioning to another friend, in a personal letter,

³⁷ Margaret Fuller to Caroline Sturgis (22 August 1847) in Robert N. Hudspeth, ed., *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, Vol. 4 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 291.

³⁸ “Give the soul free course, let the organization, both of body and mind, be freely developed, and the being will be fit for any and every relation to which it may be called.” Margaret Fuller, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1844) reprinted in Jeffrey Steele, ed., *The Essential Margaret Fuller* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 298. See also “we must have units before we can have union,” in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, 301. On different transcendentalist approaches to the body, see Cynthia Davis, “Margaret Fuller, Body and Soul,” *American Literature*, 71, 1 (1999): 31-56.

³⁹ Michael McKeon in his *The Secret History of Domesticity. Public, Private and the Division of Knowledge*, explains that “As much as any other categorical abstractions, the public and the private have been fruitfully susceptible to representation through spatial metaphors and its cardinal differentials outside/inside and high/low.” Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity. Public, Private and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), xxi.

⁴⁰ For a recent study on the notion of privacy in nineteenth century American Literature, see Milette Shamir, *Inexpressible Privacy. The Interior Life of Antebellum American Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006). See also Gillian Brown, *Domestic Individualism. Imagining Self in Nineteenth Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

how she felt dispossessed of her own body, Fuller demonstrates that she is aware of interferences in the communication and exchange of feelings, especially when they deal with the personal domain. This interfering is so strong, in fact, that she characterizes it as an extra-corporeal experience. It is particularly apt, therefore, that Fuller would use the description of herself floating in a gondola in Venice, as the moment when she finds herself again: the solitude, the estrangement of a new place, and the movement of the water, apart from being readily available clichés of tourists in Europe, hence easily recognizable by her friend Sturgis, are all signals of a return to a private and personal unity.

In another letter to Caroline Sturgis, her next, written in June 1848, after almost a year elapsed, when Fuller was established in Rome and after only having received one single letter from Sturgis in that time, Fuller once again addresses the issue of the interference of the Springs, this time stressing how “they never knew what I was feeling:” “I was very weary of the good friends who were with me, because they never knew what I was feeling, and always brought forward what I wanted to leave behind. I wanted to forget myself in Italy, and while with them, it was impossible.”⁴¹ From what Fuller writes about the Springs, it seems that, although “they, good friends, were in,” they were not necessarily able to know her feelings, and in fact they seemed to misread Fuller, bringing “forward what [she] wanted to leave behind.” After using words denoting spatial positioning (“in” and “outside”) Fuller in this letter continues to engage a spatial semantic field (“forward” and “behind”) in order to metaphorically describe and picture the space allotted to herself and to her friends.

⁴¹ Margaret Fuller to Caroline Sturgis (Rome, 11 June 1848) in Hudspeth, *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, Vol. 5, 42.

Moreover, one cannot fail to notice how the desire to “forget [herself] in Italy,” parallels her claim of finding herself again while on a gondola in Venice. In both letters Fuller lays out a vocabulary about her self (losing and finding her self) that defines her personal and relational geography in a fluid contour. While in Italy, her American friends hamper Fuller’s control over her self, both in her erasure of her self (forgetting herself), or in her gaining space for her self (finding herself). In this sense, in Italy Fuller seems intent on voicing dissatisfaction about the space occupied by her self, by her friends, and by her relations to them.

It is no accident that Fuller writes about these misplacements and misperceptions of her self and her intimate relations with friends in private letters to a correspondent (Caroline Sturgis), with whom in the past she had already shared thoughts about their mutual friends in Concord, and R.W. Emerson among them. Epistolary writing is the most appropriate mode for this kind of communication: private letters have the great advantage of keeping a conversation going over time, and of showing the motion of the mind of the writer, the shape that thoughts take before they are arranged for formal presentation. For this reason this specific form of epistolary writing can be defined as the first degree of reflection about one’s own subjectivity that, unlike journal and diary writing, maintains the open-ended possibility of a dialogue with another person (the addressee/reader). In this sense letters make an ideal form for discussing relationships, friendships, and subjectivity since the relational nature of the form and the constant presence of a trusted reader allow for an intimate utterance, on the brink between private and public.

Naturally the above-mentioned passages were not the only ones in which Fuller reflected on the measures and negotiations of friendships. In other occasions Fuller,

during her past career, had contemplated and elaborated on her relations with her closest associations, her family and friends. For instance, in the section that the editors of the *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli* titled “Autobiographical Romance,” Fuller discusses her relation with her father, and in the same text she has a section dedicated to “The First Friend,” the Englishwoman Ellen Kilshaw. More notably during the year 1840, while serving as the editor of the *Dial*, Fuller engaged in a lengthy discussion with Emerson about the nature and the aspects of their friendship. The letters between the two authors are the privileged vehicles for this conversation, although some of those reflections would later be included in Emerson’s essay “Friendship,” published in *Essays First Series* in 1841.⁴² During this phase of their relationship Fuller clearly aspired to some form of deeper understanding between them, which Emerson resisted because he probably perceived it as a strong invasion and violation. In her letter dated September 1840 Fuller defends her point of view: “Dear friend on one point misunderstand me less. I do not love power other than every vigorous nature delights to feel itself living. To violate the sanctity of relations, I am as far from it as you can be. I make no claim. [...] I am no usurper, I ask only mine own inheritance. If it be found that I have mistaken its boundaries, I will give up the choicest vineyard, the fairest flower-garden, to its lawful owner.”⁴³ Emerson, probably expecting to be the only lawful owner of his flower-garden,

⁴² In a letter to Fuller dated 21 June 1840 Emerson writes: “I am just finishing my chapter on Friendship and find a note in my old journal which points at a letter written to you a long time since which I shall beg again for the sake of a sentence as soon as I find the date.” Joel Myerson, ed., *The Selected Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 218.

⁴³ Margaret Fuller to Ralph Waldo Emerson (29 September 1840) in Hudspeth, *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, Vol. 2, 159. Fuller ponders about Emerson’s reserve in her journal, when she complains, “In friendship with RWE, I cannot hope to feel that I am his or he mine. He has nothing peculiar, nothing sacred for his friend. He is not to his friend a climate, an atmosphere, neither is his friend a being organized especially for him, born for his star. He speaks of a deed, of a thought to any commoner as much as to his peer.” Quoted in Hudspeth, *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, Vol. 2, 161.

replied to Fuller with a letter dated October 1840, expressing his wish that this exchange could have never happened:

I have your frank and noble and affecting letter, and yet I think I could wish it unwritten. I ought never to have suffered you to lead me into any conversation or writing on our relation. [...] Touch it not – speak not of it – and this most welcome natural alliance becomes from month to month, – and the slower and with the more intervals the better, –our air and diet. A robust and total understanding grows up resembling nothing so much as the relation of brothers who are intimate and perfect friends without having ever spoken of the fact. But tell me that I am cold or unkind, and in my most flowing state I become a cake of ice. I can feel the crystals shoot and the drops solidify. It may do for others but it is not for me to bring the relation to speech. Instantly I find myself a solitary unrelated person, destitute not only of all social faculty but of all private substance.⁴⁴

This exchange between Fuller and Emerson prefigures and foreshadows in many ways the one that occurs between Fuller and the Springs in Italy some years later, but in this case Fuller plays the role of the supposed usurper, and Emerson the person “destitute not only of all social faculty, but of all private substance.” It is remarkable that in both cases the interference of friends is considered as a deprivation of a private substance, so closely connected to the individual self and to his social functions. What is even more interesting is that Emerson relegates intimate relationships (with friends, with brothers) to a pre-verbal, pre-literary space, a pre-writing area, where, according to Emerson, there is no need to speak, no need to crystallize in form what exists between individuals. Apparently, only in this area he could be able to retain his private substance, along with his social faculty. Indeed he feels so strongly about it as to utter a frustrated prohibition of talking about friendships: “Touch it not – speak not of it – and this most welcome natural alliance becomes from month to month [...]—our air and diet.” For Fuller, on the contrary, the area where the relationships can exist and take form is the epistolary space,

⁴⁴ Myerson, *The Selected Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 236.

where she dares to discuss what she considers her “inheritance,” and where obviously the boundaries are more fluid and less restrictive. After this kind of emotional impasse between Emerson and Fuller, their relationship and their epistolary exchange obviously continued, even if it never directly addressed this emotional and intimate topic again.

These different instances of debating the confines of one’s self within the form of a private letter demonstrate the interconnections of two domains: the space of one’s subjectivity and the form of epistolary writing. In the cases described above, to the fluid motions of the self correspond the fluidity of the epistolary writing. From reading Fuller’s letters it becomes apparent how within the form of epistolary writing the flowing movements of the self find room and modes of expression. For Fuller and her friends the personal self is always liable of becoming permeable to outside interferences and interventions, and for this very reason there is the constant need of negotiating the boundaries of the self, and the level of involvement in affections and relations.

In the letters examined so far Fuller reflected on the private dimension of the self, even when she was negotiating that self’s involvement with or freedom from somebody else. In Italy, away from the social, cultural context familiar to her, where she had assumed a public role, she starts to reconsider the boundaries –porous or rigid – of her self. One example is her description of losing herself to the liquid flux of such a place as Venice, where she “seemed to find [herself] again.”⁴⁵ From what she writes in her letters to Sturgis, and from other passages that will be considered further on in this chapter, Fuller indicates how her stay in Italy meant coming to an idealized personal habitation,

⁴⁵ Hudspeth, *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, Vol. 4, 291.

almost the ancestral home, as she describes it in a letter to Elizabeth Hoar: “Italy receives me as a long lost child and I feel myself at home here.”⁴⁶

But Italy does not only represent the place where Fuller begins to reconsider the confines of the self in its most private sphere. Unlike many travelers who saw Italy exclusively in terms of its glorious past and artistic relics, Fuller is able to focus on Italy in its contemporary actuality of political turmoil. Italy, therefore, is the geographical as well as the historical and symbolic space where Fuller positions herself, since Italy allows Fuller to be at the center not only of an intimate circle of family and friends, but also in the midst of a network of international and cosmopolitan relations. Furthermore, and for the first time, answering her call to heroic aspiration,⁴⁷ she finds herself very close to the locus where important historical events are unravelling. Thus, it is precisely in Italy, with its combination of artistic and cultural past and engaging political present, that Fuller is able to focus on the relations between the private and the public dimensions of the self. Italy is therefore the place where her private/personal life and her public interest and involvement are not separated, but where they become interconnected with one another, not only through a constant communication, but with a certain degree of intrusion.

This process, as I will be arguing in this chapter, finds in the epistolary form the aptest vehicle not just for its expression, but for its very creation. When residing in Italy, Fuller—both for her private relations, but also when writing in her professional capacity—explored the different possibilities offered by the various kinds of epistolary writing. Fuller used letters as a way of simultaneously fostering and analyzing the

⁴⁶ Ibid., 293.

interpersonal relations and the involvements with the social, political and cultural context in which she was interested, immersing herself in a new public and political sphere where she observed how the public dimension of the self could participate in a larger discussion about the present and future of a nation in formation. While in the past her social and public observations took the form of journalistic writing (when she moved to New York in order to contribute to the *New York Tribune* she engaged in social commentary and social critique), in Italy the intellectual exploration of her contemporary landscape took the shape of public letters addressed to her readers in the United States. By electing as a preferred mode of writing the epistolary form, Fuller reinforced her personal involvement with the social landscape, while at the same time maintaining a strong sense of her audience and her own close relation to the addressee/reader of her writing.⁴⁸

Simultaneously, as I will try to show, her personal correspondence became a place for political elaboration and even political intervention, in a constant exchange between the personal and the political where each dimension participated in the construction of the other.

By looking at both her personal correspondence, and at her public letters written for the *New York Tribune*, this chapter seeks to illustrate those interconnections between unfolding history as the public realm where national possibilities are debated, and the private sphere, or the making of the self.

⁴⁷ See Robert N. Hudspeth, "Margaret Fuller and the Ideal of Heroism," in Charles Capper and Cristina Giorelli, eds., *Margaret Fuller: Transatlantic Crossings in a Revolutionary Age* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), 45-65.

⁴⁸ Scholars have speculated, on the basis of some of Fuller's comments on her own work in Italy, that Fuller wrote a history of the Roman Republic, which she intended to publish in the United States. The manuscript or parts of it have never been found, and Emerson was convinced that it was lost during the wreckage of the *Elizabeth*, the ship that was bringing Fuller and her family back to the United States, and that sank near Fire Island, NY, on July 19, 1850.

1. Fuller's Reflections on Epistolarity

Before moving to an analysis of Fuller's correspondence, it could be useful to pause and consider Fuller's own thoughts about epistolary writing, with its distinctive status as a combination of private and public.

During her career, Fuller oftentimes had strived to create in her writing an intimate space for debate, especially in her search for eloquent modes and genres that would have an immediate relevance to and raise the interest of her readers, reproducing conditions of a personal dialogue through the rhetorical stance adopted for her public communication. In the case of the "conversations" in Boston that she organized from 1839 to 1844, for example, Fuller clearly attempted to create an atmosphere of exchange and debate suitable to the group of people present at the time.⁴⁹ However, for the reasons mentioned before, and for others that will be considered later, epistolary writing, and correspondence in particular, with its decisively dialogical nature, are privileged sites not only for Fuller's kind of intellectual project, but also for a reflection on the form itself. It is in fact in some of Fuller's writing about letters and correspondences that we witness the emergence of an awareness about the potentials inherent in this form of writing, where the distance between herself as a writer and her readers would be reduced, and a space in between public and private would be created, as a possibility for practicing another version of the self-culture so warmly favored by Transcendentalists.

In the years preceding her travels in Europe Fuller not only envisioned intellectual practices that were half-way between the realms of private and public (once

⁴⁹ "She invited questions of criticism: if these lagged, she put questions herself, using persuasion for the timid, kindly raillery for the indifferent. There was always a theme and a thread." Thomas Wentworth

again her “conversations” in Boston, where the sociability of the salon tradition crossed and implemented the didacticism of the schoolroom, are a pertinent example), but she addressed the issue of negotiating private and public in her own writing as well, and most specifically in her essay on the correspondence between Bettine Brentano and G nderode. In 1842 Fuller, at the time editor of the transcendentalist magazine *The Dial*, published in the January issue of the magazine the essay “Bettine Brentano and Her Friend G nderode,” a long essay review of *Die G nderode*, a semifictionalized correspondence of Bettine Brentano von Arnim with the canoness and poet Karoline von G nderode, which had been published the previous year in Germany. During the same period of time, Fuller was translating the first volume of this correspondence, which Elizabeth Peabody would publish the following year.⁵⁰ The figure of Bettine Brentano had acquired some relevance in the transcendental circle, so much so that on November 2, 1840, Fuller took upon herself to write a collective letter to Bettine Brentano asking her, “in the name of many men and many women of my country for whom you have wrought wonders,”⁵¹ to continue writing and to provide them with more information about herself. Apart from a personal interest and curiosity, expressed in the peculiar collective letter, Fuller chose the relationship between Brentano and G nderode as exemplary of an ideal friendship, and in her “Translator’s Preface” to *G nderode* she described the epistolary exchange between the two women as “a simple product of private relations.” In the preface she reasoned on the nature of the work she translated, stressing the immediacy and informal quality of that kind of writing: “This translation is

Higginson, *Margaret Fuller Ossoli* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, American Men of Letters Series, 1884), 115-116.

⁵⁰ Fuller published the translation with the title *G nderode*. See Charles Capper, *Margaret Fuller. An American Romantic Life. The Public Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 73.

offered to the public with diffidence, for the task is one of great difficulty. The original is not a work subject to the canons of literary criticism, but a simple product of private relations. Its negligent familiarity is one of its charms, but one difficult to reproduce without in some degree offending established rules of taste. The letters are published, to judge from appearances, as they were thrown off at the moment in haste and girlish freedom.”⁵²

Apart from the difficulties and challenges encountered as a translator, Fuller noticed the “negligent familiarity” of this work, probably stemming from being the product of “private relations,” hence not carefully crafted and formally arranged for publication. For Fuller what is even more remarkable is the transition from the writing of these letters to their publication. Not only, in fact, did the correspondence elude the accepted canons of literary criticism because composed in private circumstances, but it was organized disregarding any external rules, but “in haste and girlish freedom.” The fact that the work itself was semi-fictional, hence not containing only the original letters, but also a somewhat fictional re-elaboration of the correspondence by Bettina von Arnim, reinforces the notion that private letters should convey a sense of immediacy and careless familiarity. Obviously the familiarity and the immediacy are not exclusive to this work, since they are some of the most prevalent characteristics of epistolary writing.

Whereas in the “Translator’s Preface” Fuller grants some passing comments on the specific aspects of this correspondence, it is in her essay that she discusses at length the interesting connections of public and private in this specific correspondence, and – presumably—in the genre as a whole. While pondering on some translating solutions,

⁵¹ Previously unpublished letter, in Kostanze Bäumer, “Margaret Fuller (1810-1850) and Bettina von Arnim, an Encounter between American Transcendentalism and German Romanticism,” *Internationales Jahrbuch der Bettina von Arnim Gesellschaft*, Band 4 (1990): 61.

Fuller emphasized how “public and private literature are on a par,” in the sense that the private is elevated to an inspired, accomplished dimension, such as the sphere of public literature should be. Here is the passage in its entirety:

The talisman of this friendship may be found in Gunderode’s postscript to one of her letters, “If thou findest Muse, write soon again,” I have hesitated whether this might not be, “if thou findest Musse (leisure) write soon again;” then had the letters wound up like one of our epistles here in America. But, in fine, I think there can be no mistake. They waited for the Muse. Here the pure products of public and private literature are on a par. That inspiration which the poet finds in the image of the ideal man, the man of the ages, of whom nations are but features, and Messiahs the voice, the friend finds in the thought of his friend, a nature in whose positive existence and illimitable tendencies he finds the mirror of his desire, and the spring of his conscious growth. For those who write in the spirit of sincerity, write neither to the public nor the individual, but to the soul made manifest in the flesh, and publication or correspondence only furnish them with the occasion for bringing their thoughts to a focus.⁵³

According to Fuller the extraordinary aspect of this specific correspondence between Bettine Brentano and Gunderode was the fact that even in the practice of such a private, volatile kind of writing as a familiar letter can be, the two writers were looking for inspiration, for a sort of higher level of awareness that usually belongs with writings prepared for publication. Therefore, not only do public and private writing share the same nature, the same point of origin, but the correspondence, the dialogue between friends is in the same sphere as the “ideal man, the man of the ages, of whom nations are but features.” What is important is the “spirit of sincerity,” because in that case the real audience is not “the public nor the individual,” but the ideal essence of a person, the “soul made manifest in the flesh.”

Because “the spirit of sincerity,” according to Fuller, should be the perspective from which to write, the form of the letter, with its immediate, unmediated revelation of

⁵² “Translator’s Preface,” in *Gunderode* (Boston, published by E. P. Peabody, 1842), v.

⁵³ “Bettine Brentano and Her Friend Gunderode,” *The Dial*, 1842. Reprinted in Steele, *The Essential Margaret Fuller*, 66.

one's own subjectivity, is the ideal mode of expression. Letters offer a glimpse into the writer's self while maintaining the communication open and in motion. For this reason, letters and correspondences were such a constant and favored literary mode among transcendentalists. In many ways letters are the transcendentalist mode of expression *par excellence*: the circular movement, the intimate expression, the shared thoughts, the fluidity and immediacy of the style, but especially the constant reaching out inside one's own consciousness and mental horizon, are all intrinsic traits of epistolary writing that are attuned to the transcendentalists' sensibilities. The very practice of sharing letters and personal journals among the transcendentalist circle strengthens the notion of epistolarity as a typical transcendentalist literary inclination, since one can argue that they transformed other genres into letters. Even Emerson's wish that the letter sent to Fuller was unwritten ("I have your frank and noble and affecting letter, and yet I think I could wish it unwritten"⁵⁴) is a way to engage with the possibilities of communication and silence inherent in letter-writing. The letter written by Fuller to Brentano on behalf of the transcendentalist group is a clear example not only of how epistolary writing is such a transcendentalist mode, but also of how the personal and the collective and the semi-public overlap at times. When Fuller writes: "I do not believe you will refuse to gratify our desire. Though expressed by an obscure individual it is the desire of many hearts, I would say of a new world, –but all worlds are new to ardent natures like yours. Write to me or print it in a book,"⁵⁵ she explicitly states that there are no formal distinctions between the content of a personal letter and what could be worthy or chosen for publication. Not only that: the use of a sort of spokesperson or collective writer is another

⁵⁴ Myerson, *The Selected Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 236.

⁵⁵ Bäumer, "Margaret Fuller (1810-1850) and Bettina von Arnim, an Encounter between American Transcendentalism and German Romanticism," 61.

way of undermining what is usually considered the exclusive personal expression of the writer of a private letter. Here what is presented is not the writing of an individual, but the “desire of many hearts, [...] of a new world.”

For Fuller then, all publications are a version of a correspondence, a way of deeply engaging with an exchange, and probably the only epistemological practice valid in order to be entirely involved with one’s historical context, with those “new worlds” she mentions in her letter to Brentano. If, in fact, letters are exchanges of unmediated subjectivities, they also become exchanges and mediations between the private spheres and the public sphere.

So far I have considered private letters and semi-private letters, but Fuller also intervened more directly in the realm of the public through a series of public letters written for her New York newspaper. In those missives, Fuller addressed the multiple audiences that constituted her American readership, and, as is the case with her most private missives, she infused them with a profound engagement with the historical context, and its ever-changing landscape.

2. Fuller and Italy: Public, Private and Political in her Letters

As it is widely known, while in Italy Fuller was engaged in writing a series of articles for Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune*. Those articles or dispatches—on the newspapers they appeared under the heading “Things and Thoughts in Europe” —were not simply a way to earn a salary that made the trip to Europe possible in the first place, but they were also a way for Fuller to participate in the current affairs of the countries she was travelling to, not as one of the many American travellers, or intellectuals visiting

Europe in those eventful years, but as a direct witness and participant in the political and social processes that were unfolding.

In different stages of her writing career Fuller claimed to have a precise project as regards travel writing, or more precisely, she had a clear opinion about what the attitude of the author should be when writing about the places visited. In 1844 she herself had published an account of her travels to the frontier in her *Summer on the Lakes*, and in 1845, in an article for the *New York Tribune*, she stressed that whoever writes about travels should possess “poetic sensibilities to what is special and individual both in nations and men.” In the same piece she insists: “you can see nothing of the institutions and manners of a nation, unless you can look into the heart from which they grew.”⁵⁶ If in *Summer on the Lakes* Fuller tried to bring together into her descriptions the different peoples inhabiting the frontier (New Englanders, Norwegians, Welsh, for example) and the natural beauty she was depicting, when she speaks in more abstract terms about what good travel writing should accomplish, she links together the nation and individual persons. Her interest, in fact, lies in the people she meets, as well as in the nations as historical entities that deserve to be observed with the same “poetic sensibilities” and insight necessary to observe an interesting person. Looking at her essay on travel writing helps to understand how Fuller partakes of the romantic topos according to which nations are formed by peoples intimately connected with the country they inhabit: Fuller explains that populations, institutions and nations are all connected and in order to study the “institutions and manners of a nation” one has to look deeply into the individuals from

⁵⁶ “Books of Travel”, *New York Daily Tribune*, 18 December 1845, 1. Reprinted in Judith Mattson Bean and Joel Myerson, eds., *Margaret Fuller Critic. Writings from the New York Tribune, 1844-1846* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 299, 300.

whom they are generated.⁵⁷ This kind of attitude and approach explains her general interest towards both single individuals, and nations as historical, social and cultural products.

Fuller enters a different level of elaboration of the connections between nations, people and institutions once she starts writing about Italy in both her private letters and in her public dispatches. She does not limit herself to reporting about the places visited, but she is fully immersed in the flow of the events. From the travel and essayistic writing of *Summer on the Lakes* and “Books of Travel,” Fuller moves to the ever-encompassing space of epistolary writing in Italy and about Italy. The object of her observations, therefore, is not only the nation under study, a fragmented and struggling entity, variously aspiring to unity and independence, but also herself in relation to this experience, an experience that was simultaneously private, historical and political. For this very reason, her public letters, the dispatches, although written for the multitude of a distant audience of American readers, were still very intimately intertwined with Fuller’s first hand experience, and with her personal point of view, and only dissimilar in degrees from her personal letters written to her family and friends. For example, when in one of her dispatches (dated October 18, 1847 written from Rome) she conveys her opinions about the path to Italian independence, she insists on her own perspective about the current situation: “For myself I believe they will attain [salvation from foreign intrusion]. I see more reason for hope, as I know more of the people. Their rash and baffled struggles have taught them prudence; they are wanted in the civilized world as a peculiar

⁵⁷ “Who can ever be alone for a moment in Italy? Every stone has a voice, every grain of dust seems instinct with Spirit from the Past, every step recalls some line, some legend of long-neglected lore.” Margaret Fuller, “Things and Thoughts in Europe. No. XV” in *New York Daily Tribune*, 11 September 1847, p. 1:1-3. Reprinted in Reynolds and Belasco Smith, eds., *Margaret Fuller. “These Sad but Glorious Days,”* 140.

influence; their leaders are thinking men, their cause is righteous. I believe that Italy will revive to new life, and probably a greater, a more truly rich and glorious, than at either epoch of her former greatness.”⁵⁸ Every statement is introduced by a strong assertion of her beliefs and vision, indicating how important her appraisal of the situation is. In this sense, Fuller’s public letters, not differently from her private missives, are all parts of a continuum that stems from the individual self, perceived as steeped in a crucial and momentous historical context. It is the self’s authenticity and passionate investment in the surrounding context, rather than its alleged stance of objectivity or detachment, that vouches for the veracity and reliability of the impressions being recorded.

Although Fuller was not writing about her own country, she speaks of Italy as a familiar and domestic place, and she positions her writing self within the confines of the familiar. The sense of familiarity with Italy appears quite soon in Fuller’s letters to her friends. In a letter to Elizabeth Hoar, written from Florence in September 1847, Fuller describes Italy –a place where she has never been before—as a domestic space. Once again Fuller’s writing displays a kind of invasion, or at least an overlapping from one sphere of her existence into another, but in this case she conducts the interferences herself, between intimate and foreign, domestic and unfamiliar: “I cannot even begin to speak of the magnificent scenes of nature nor the works of art that have raised and filled my mind since I wrote from Naples. Now I begin to be in Italy. But I wish to drink deep of this cup before I speak my enamored words. Enough, to say Italy receives me as a long lost child and I feel myself at home here, and if I ever tell [] anything about it you will

⁵⁸ Margaret Fuller, “Things and Thoughts in Europe. No. XVII” in *New York Daily Tribune*, 27 November 1847, p. 1:1-3. Reprinted in Reynolds and Belasco Smith, eds., *Margaret Fuller. “These Sad but Glorious Days,”* 157.

hear something real and domestic.”⁵⁹ All the images she uses in her letter (“filled my mind;” “drink deep of this cup;” “Italy receives me as a long lost child”) bespeak a fulfillment of her desire and aspiration to belong, they seem to indicate that Italy is filling in a space: Italy embodies the space where nature, art, and the domestic are combined with future possibilities, where the lost child will tell “something real and domestic.” Far from being a mere romantic topos of the self’s yielding to its timeless transcendental home, this domestication becomes in Fuller’s case the enabling condition for an active and thoroughly contemporary investment in her “home” as a national entity in the making.

3. Dispatches and Familiar Letters: Circle of Correspondences

In a letter written to her friend Maria Rotch during her first stay in Rome in May 1847, Fuller clarifies the difference between what appeared in her *Tribune* letters, and what she was reserving to her intimate circle of family and friends, difference not so much in content, as in depth and latitude: “You so late returned may easily see how difficult it is to write, a difficulty heightened in my case, by the miserly feeling which I have about my time, desiring to spend every moment of it on the objects before me. I feel, too, that as to the mere outside of my experience, those who are interested in me find it in the *Tribune* letters; further experiences I shall probably write out in another form, and my friends will have their full share yet in what belongs to me.”⁶⁰ By using the expressions “outside” and “further,” Fuller makes a distinction between degrees of personal experience: the public letters, those for the *Tribune*, are the ones that carry “the mere outside of [her] experience,” while in order to get the “full share of what belongs to

⁵⁹ Hudspeth, *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, Vol. 4, 293.

[her]”, her friends will have to read other forms of writing – maybe familiar letters, or maybe historical accounts – that will convey “further experience.” Once again Fuller uses spatial terms in order to visualize the spaces and degrees of her interrelations with her readers, who in some cases, are “[her] friends.” Similarly to the letters referring to the Springs, friends here are concerned with a different space not available to the general public, but differently from what Fuller writes about the Springs, this time friends are invited to look “further,” beyond the outside boundaries of the self. In describing her relations to her writings and to readers in terms of space, Fuller positions herself at the center of different forms of writing, which could gradually cover interests that are only different according to the personal relation established with the writer: her *Tribune* readers would be satisfied to gather the outside of her experience, while her “friends” will have to be able to look further, i.e. in more private forms of self-expression, further into the self.

In a similar vein, Fuller specifies the metaphorical spaces she attributes to what she is experiencing in Italy. Clearly interested in the present state of affairs, in the historical import of what she is witnessing, Fuller distances herself not only from what she considers the typical American traveler, but also from a former self, from a former writer, somebody whom her American friends would expect and recognize. In a letter to her friend William H. Channing, written during her first stay in Rome in May 1847, Fuller elaborates on where her interests now lie:

I write not to you about these countries, of the famous people I see, of magnificent shows and places. All these things are only to me an illuminated margin on the text of my inward life. Earlier they would have been more. Art is not important to me now. I like only what little I find that is transcendently good, and even with that feel very familiar and calm. I take interest in the state of the people, their manners, the state of the race in them. I see the future dawning; it

⁶⁰ Ibid., 275.

is in important aspects Fourier's future. But I like no Fourierites; they are terribly wearisome here in Europe; the tide of things does not wash through them as violently as with us, and they have time to run in the tread-mill of system. Still, they serve this great future which I shall not live to see. I must be born again.⁶¹

Fuller identifies Channing as a specific addressee: to him she is not writing what constitutes some of the common topics of her *Tribune* dispatches.⁶² Once again using a spatial metaphor, and in this case drawing it from the realms of literature and art (“an illuminated margin on the text”) she makes a distinction between what used to be important for her in the past, and what is at stake for her now. She reveals that she takes “interest in the state of the people, their manners, the state of the race in them.” She is keen on concentrating on the present possibilities and on the future accomplishments of Italy (“I see the future dawning”), rather than on its past. Fuller perceives history in the making not just as futurity unfolding, but also in terms of personal rebirth: history is immediately relevant to her self.

Fuller uses the same tone and makes similar claims when writing to her brother Richard a few months later from Florence (September 1847). She insists on distancing her writing from other types of report, what she defines “coffee-house intelligence,” provided by common travelers. She contends that she is not interested in promoting a general opinion, gathered in public places, but she would rather “[skim] on the surface of things” until she feels she has a solid grasp: “It is a matter of conscience with me not to make use of crude impressions and what they call “coffee-house intelligence,” as travelers in general do. I prefer skimming on the surface of things till I feel solidly ready to write. [...] I have now seen what Italy contains most important of the great past. I

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 271.

⁶² In fact exactly around the same period (May 1847), she pens an article from Rome dealing mostly with Italian art. See Margaret Fuller, “Things and Thoughts in Europe. No. XIV” in *New York Daily Tribune*, 31

begin to hope for her also a great future. The signs have improved so much since I came. I am most fortunate to be here at this time. I feel most deeply interested, but of these things I shall write in a Tribune letter.”⁶³

While hinting at her vision for the political aspirations of Italy, Fuller refers to her “Tribune letter,” where the public and political events are discussed, especially with regards to her trying to raise interest in the Italian cause: in other words, she continues to uphold the distinction between public writing and private writing, but the respective domains of these forms are no longer so clearly distinct as in the letter written to Maria Rotch, and a seamless continuity between history unfolding and self in the making begins to emerge, with the “T” operating as the ubiquitous mediator of everything she has to say about Italy’s current political situation. The authorial persona Fuller embodies in Italy is the same for both her familiar letters and her public letters, since it is rooted in the perception that she is a witness to historical events that pertain to a place that she feels familiar and attuned to her. Her refusal to be part of the current and circulation of “coffee-house intelligence” indicates that she is conceiving an alternative version of the public sphere and the formation of the public opinion. What the general public will get to know or believe should not be relegated, according to Fuller, to the “crude impression” or to hearsay gathered in public places such as coffee-houses. On the contrary, Fuller is advancing the formation of a public opinion generated on something more solid and grounded. In a sense, she is providing to her readers, both familiar and unfamiliar to her, a personal perception of Italy. From now on, the knowledge of Italy she will convey to her readers in her dispatches will be nourished by her intimate investment in its current

July 1847, p. 1:1-3. Reprinted in Reynolds and Belasco Smith, eds., *Margaret Fuller. “These Sad but Glorious Days,”* 131-139.

⁶³ Hudspeth, *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, Vol. 4, 296.

affairs, while her private correspondence will disclose to her family and friends a self nourished by deep involvement with history.

In attempting to form an educated public opinion, both in the U.S. and in Italy, Fuller did not limit herself to writing, but she originated a larger circulation of those publications she considered valuable and meaningful, by arranging an exchange of Italian and U.S. periodicals that could contribute to advance a transnational debate about the events occurring in Europe. She initiated the material exchange and placed herself at the center of the debate that would ensue from these dealings. In this sense, along with advancing works (through translations, reviews, and personal epistolary exchange) that she believed were the epitome of that union of public and private that she favored, Fuller in Italy tried another experiment in exchange, engaging in yet another option offered by the many correspondence practices.

4. Letters and Newspapers: International Exchanges

In the time she spent in Italy Fuller did not limit herself to writing public dispatches for an American newspaper, or private letters for a single friendly reader, but she became so grounded on the vicissitudes and hopes of Italy, and knowledgeable about the political nuances of different parties and groups, that she attempted an exchange between national publications, and precisely between newspapers. Differently from a number of other foreigners fleeing through the Italian peninsula, or other American intellectuals mostly fascinated by the Italian past artistic glories, Fuller was very well versed in European politics, and more specifically, she was aware of all the complicated aspects of the current Italian situation. Living in Rome also provided the added advantage of witnessing first-hand the dealings of the Vatican and the Pope, discerning the different

attitudes and political choices not only made by the leaders, but also by the public opinion and the populace. From this point of view, Fuller became the fulcrum of an exchange between American and Italian periodical publications, since she wanted to expose the two publics (the Italian and the American) to similar but distant publications, in order to advance a dialogue between reading publics, thus creating a space for political reflection that was not only transnational but super-national.

In one of the dispatches that Margaret Fuller wrote for the *New York Tribune* in May 1847 she mentioned some Italian newspapers that were contributing to the formation of a more generalized –and wider – public opinion in the Italian territory, a territory that was still divided in many states and under different governments. When she was in Rome in May 1847, Fuller translated the program of one of the newly born publications, *Il Contemporaneo*, which, according to Fuller, “represents the hope of Rome at this moment.”⁶⁴ In her article for the *New York Tribune* she lets the publication speak for itself. *Il Contemporaneo* defined itself “a journal of progress, but tempered,” that invited especially the youth to feel involved and to participate in it: “to those who constitute the greater part of our youth the *Contemporaneo* especially addresses its affection and its thoughts. [...] Through discussion it desires to prepare minds to receive reforms so soon and far as they are favored by the law of opportunity. Every attempt which is made contrary to this social law must fail. It is vain to hope fruits from a tree out of season, and equally in vain to introduce the best measures into a country not prepared to receive them.”⁶⁵ Even though Fuller was critical of the moderate political views of its editorial board–“the opportunity that the Martyrs found here in the Colosseum, from

⁶⁴ Margaret Fuller, “Things and Thoughts in Europe. No. XIV” in *New York Daily Tribune*, 31 July 1847, p. 1:1-3. Reprinted in Reynolds and Belasco Smith, eds., *Margaret Fuller. “These Sad but Glorious Days,”* 138.

whose blood grew up this great tree of Papacy, was not of the kind waited for by these moderate Progressists”— she pragmatically believed that “nevertheless, they may be good schoolmasters for Italy, and are not to be disdained in these piping times of peace.”⁶⁶ *Il Contemporaneo* began its publication on December 1846, and interrupted it during the last phase of the Roman Republic, in June 1849. Even though it always maintained a controlled attitude towards the early attacks against papal rule – unlike clandestine publications such as *Amica Veritas* and the *Sentinella di Roma* which urged the people not to fall for the inducements of the moderates⁶⁷—*Il Contemporaneo* was always very alert to the events in Europe and it provided excerpts from foreign publications, translations and public speeches of figures such as Giuseppe Mazzini, Carlo Armellini, and Lajos Kossuth. After Pius IX fled from Rome, abandoning the city to take refuge in Gaeta under the protection of the King of Naples, *Il Contemporaneo* took a more liberal and revolutionary turn, supporting the proclamation of the Republic in February 1849.

Fuller, practicing that involvement and analysis of the state of things that she articulated in her letters (“skimming on the surface of things,” “you will hear something real and domestic”), did not restrict herself to reprinting and circulating opinions and publications in different contexts and for another audience. While sending her dispatch to her newspaper, where she described the Italian periodical publication, she wrote a private missive to William Cullen Bryant, asking for an even deeper and more engaged level of

⁶⁵ Ibid., 139.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 139.

⁶⁷ See Giuseppe Beghelli. *La Repubblica romana del 1849 per Giuseppe Beghelli. Con documenti inediti e illustrazioni* (Lodi: Società Cooperativa Tipografica, 1874), 36. For information about the Italian periodical publications in the late 1840s, see Bertoni Jovine, Dina, eds. *I periodici popolari del risorgimento*, vol. I. *Il periodo risorgimentale, 1818-1847; la Rivoluzione, 1847-1849* (Milano: Feltrinelli Editore, 1959).

exchange. In the same month when Fuller prepared her dispatch for Greeley's newspaper, May 1847, she wrote to William Cullen Bryant:

Dear Sir, One of the editors of the *Contemporaneo*, which may be esteemed the organ of the present liberal movement in the Papal States, has consulted me as to an exchange with some American journals. I told him I thought yours, with the Natl Intelligencer and Tribune, would give a fair representation such as they wish to see of the state of things in the U.S. and I thought that you from your knowledge of foreign languages and foreign affairs would take pleasure in receiving their paper. Some numbers have, accordingly, been forwarded to you through Wiley and Putnam. If you are, as I hope, disposed to an exchange, will [you] forward the N[ew York] Evening Post to their agent in London, whose name you will find on their paper.⁶⁸

Always very active in the circulation of ideas, Fuller engaged in a transnational and transcultural operation both in terms of informing the American readership of the state of things in Italy and Europe, and also in constructing a direct exchange of the most progressive publications in the two countries. Despite their very different national backgrounds, the two interlocutors, moved by that same “spirit of sincerity” she advocated for familiar epistolary writing, would be interested in establishing a common ground for communication, not only between individuals, but also between nations as well. It is no accident that she wrote to Bryant, stressing his “knowledge of foreign languages and foreign affairs,” since in Italy Fuller began to envision the creation of an international community functioning mostly through epistolary exchanges. By undertaking both the more intimate operation of addressing individuals in her private correspondence, while also addressing the nation of readers – “America rather than Americans”⁶⁹—in her *New York Tribune* dispatches, Fuller developed a number of contiguous discourses for different audiences. By encouraging multiple perspectives,

⁶⁸ Hudspeth, *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, Vol. VI, 371. William Cullen Bryant was editor in chief of the *New York Evening Post* from 1828 to 1878.

⁶⁹ Margaret Fuller, “American Literature; Its Position in the Present Time, and Prospects for the Future,” in *Papers on Literature and Art*, Vol. 2 (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1848), 140.

Fuller was engaged in constructing an epistemological space both for Americans and for Italians, where they could all learn and exchange information and experiences, and where the epistolary endeavor was paired with an epistemological quest. It is clear that the impulse of discussing nation, nation formations, and political possibilities, not only in a philosophical and abstract mode, but also through political praxis and, at one point for Fuller, even militancy, was a major incentive for choosing the multiple levels of letters and publications exchange. At a time when the idea of what “Italy” should be was debated and considered in different venues, Fuller searched for a unifying ideal, viable for the current situation, and that could interest and involve not only American expatriates in Italy, or Italian exiles in Europe, but also Americans in the U.S.

5. Transnational Epistolary Republicanism

In Italy, then, Margaret Fuller put into motion a system of concentric circles of correspondences, where the letter represents and enacts the constant vibration between public interests and aspirations, and private subjectivity. The epistolary mode becomes, therefore, the process and the model of communication that enables different areas to interact with one another: the private self, the historical dimension, the public and transnational expressions of a nation. The insistence that Italy was a familiar locus (“I feel myself at home here”) enriched the expression “domestic” with a more complex meaning, where domestic stands for both the private space of the home, as well as the national space of a country. In Italy Fuller found— especially, as will be seen, in her correspondence with Costanza Arconati –a mode of writing where the political interest (with the political defined as the space where a number of people interact in the name of the public good, and in search of an agreed and shared regulation of society) towards a

nation is interconnected with the private involvement and the development of the self. More so than with other correspondents, in her letters to Arconati a number of multiple levels come into play: from the private self engaged in private and familiar dealings, to the debate about political solutions viable for Italy, to further transnational considerations about republicanism. To all this, the epistolary exchange between Fuller and Arconati adds another dimension: the letters are written in more than one language (in English, French and Italian). Private, public, domestic, political, national and international domains all coexist and interact in the space of a single correspondence, while allowing Fuller to participate in the kind of elite expatriate cosmopolitanism of which, as will be illustrated later, such multilingualism was a token.

As we have seen in previous instances, Fuller understands epistolary correspondences as profound exchanges in the “spirit of sincerity,” where the same inspiration that guides the personal writings of two correspondents in communication with one another, could appeal to a larger number of people, all sharing a common interest in the national dimension. Although Fuller’s writings have always been attuned to social questions, in Italy her letter writing acquires a sort of urgency, militancy and international breadth that was well matched with the cultural context of the Italian “Risorgimento,” with its universalistic and transnational characteristics.

The period Fuller spent in Italy was one of great turmoil but also of intense hope and projects. As mentioned before, the many political entities present on the Italian peninsula had different motives and they responded to political exigencies dictated by the spheres of influence established by the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Even though desires for independence and unity were expressed by various exiles and cultural figures, the means to accomplish these goals, and the political systems to be chosen to govern the

future Italy, were varied and not necessarily compatible with one another. In this context there was a rhetorical effort in recollecting the glorious Italian past in order to create an assurance of success for the current struggles. According to Alberto Banti's analysis,⁷⁰ in nineteenth century Italy national aspirations and ideas were focused on geographical boundaries, historical memories, and especially on the heritage of Rome and the republican Middle Ages and Renaissance, along with other cultural and ethnic factors. Because of this context, the idea and project of an Italian nation was first conceived in literary circles. For these intellectuals, civil servants and army officers, Italy was the *nation*, and Italy meant the literary tradition of Dante and Petrarch, and the political tradition of ancient republicanism. Fuller joined in this current of beliefs, and became part of a cosmopolitan group of patriots who exchanged thoughts and projects about Italy, and especially ideas about national and political possibilities viable for a country such as Italy, that was also part of a larger group of European nations in search of recognition and independence. The experience of the French revolution and the Napoleonic Empire was critical for the democratically inclined of Italy, as Beales and Biagini explain:

the expectation was that the status quo could only be changed by a French-style popular uprising. The latter [...] would be justified by a new 'covenant' among the 'true patriots', who were bound together by the discovery of their common heritage, consisting of ethnicity and culture. Such a covenant had a quasi-religious dimension, though the relationship between the patriots and the Roman Catholic Church was generally difficult. Eventually, Mazzini produced his own version of republican nationalism, one rooted in a heterodox form of vaguely Christian religiosity and mysticism. To him nations were eternal, and the purpose of the Risorgimento – in Italy and elsewhere in the world – was to set them free. Thus Risorgimento nationalism was usually cosmopolitan, in the sense that love of one's country did not exclude – but indeed required – support for similar sentiments among other oppressed nationalities.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Quoted in Derek Beales and Eugenio F. Biagini, *The Risorgimento and the Unification of Italy* (London: Longman, 2002), 8.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 10. See also Alberto Mario Banti, *Il Risorgimento italiano* (Bari: Laterza, 2004).

An awareness of this political and intellectual context helps us realize the extent to which Fuller was attuned to these sentiments, and the deep significance of her activity in favoring the exchanges and communications not only among individuals, but also between two countries, such as Italy and the US, which she thought could share a past and a future, and therefore could influence each other in the present.

While in Italy, Fuller met some of the most preeminent participants in the revolutionary movement, and with some of them she established a steady exchange of letters. One of the most rewarding and inclusive friendships was with Costanza Arconati Visconti, a Milanese noblewoman who had been spending time in France and Switzerland in exile for political reasons. Through some letters of introduction, Margaret Fuller met Costanza Arconati in April 1847 in Rome, and established with her a strong connection and friendship, fueled not only by the regular exchange of letters and visits, but also by the historical context that the two women experienced in Italy, and by their constant interplay of political opinions, along with more personal and private thoughts and confidences.

In a letter to her brother Richard, written from Florence in July 1847, where Fuller first announced that she wanted to remain in Italy, while the Springs were traveling to Germany and continuing their tour of Europe, she mentioned Arconati using familiar and affectionate words: “The Marchioness Arconati Visconti, to whom I brought a letter from a friend of hers in France has been good to me as a sister and introduced me to many interesting acquaintance. But this Me. Arconati is herself the most interesting.”⁷² From the beginning the relation between Fuller and Arconati thrives in a cosmopolitan context, since the letter of introduction for Fuller comes from France, where Arconati had

resided for a long time, and where she had been at the center of a large community of exiles and patriots.⁷³ These shared a dedication to the independence of Italy, but were also members of a larger community of cosmopolitan patriots, each devoted to his/her nation's destiny, and aware that in the Europe of the time all those political destinies were connected with one another. All these premises certainly contributed in making Costanza Arconati an interesting acquaintance for Fuller, as she explained in another of her private letters, addressed to Elizabeth Hoar, and written from Florence in September 1847: "I want most to speak to you of a friend I have made in Italy, the Marchioness Arconati Visconti; she is Milanese, but I knew her first at Rome, she is now here. She is a specimen of the really highbred lady, such as I have not known, without any physical beauty, the grace and harmony of her manners produce all the impression of beauty. She has also, a mind strong clear, precise and much cultivated by intercourse both with books and men. She has a modest nobleness that you would dearly love. She is intimate with many of the first men; she seems to love me much and to wish I should have whatever is hers. I take great pleasure in her friendship."⁷⁴ Costanza Arconati must have appeared to Fuller as somebody embodying the elitist nature of a limited circle of intellectuals, and with the right connections necessary in order to enjoy close friendships "with many of the first men." She would have embodied the mixture of exclusivity and intimacy that Fuller had been looking for in her acquaintances and that –as we have seen –she failed to achieve

⁷² Hudspeth, *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, Vol. 4, 278.

⁷³ Arconati lived in exile in France and Belgium for twenty years, and she belonged to one of the leading politically liberal families in Italy. See Capper, *Margaret Fuller, An American Romantic Life. The Public Years*, 340. Some of Arconati's letters to her correspondents are collected in different volumes: Robert van Nuffel, ed., *L'esilio di Giovanni Arrivabene e il carteggio di Costanza Arconati, 1829-36* (Mantova: Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento Italiano, 1966); Costanza Arconati, *Lettere a Giovita Scalvini durante l'esilio*, ed. Robert van Nuffel (Brescia: Stamperia F.lli Geroldi, 1965); Giovanni Berchet, *Lettere alla Marchesa Costanza Arconati*, ed. Robert van Nuffel (Roma: Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento italiano, 1956).

⁷⁴ Hudspeth, *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, Vol. 4, 294.

with Emerson. On a more political level Arconati would also ensure Fuller with a privileged access to a wider and more varied series of political discourses and projects generated among the aristocrats of the north of Italy. Arconati, in fact, with her many connections, and her numerous residences, was part of a group that was cosmopolitan in origin and nature, and that had nationalistic projects. Like some of the other correspondents of Fuller in Italy, Arconati was a cosmopolitan individual who could claim her nationality only idealistically: these “patrioti” were calling themselves “Italians” when Italy did not exist as a state, but only as a desired nation. They lived in different countries, or were very often traveling, in order to escape imprisonment; they were exiled both within and without the “desired” national borders.⁷⁵ Because of their status and their cosmopolitan education they spoke and wrote in more than one language, truly participating in a larger debate that was not limited to one nation or one cultural tradition.

There are naturally obvious reasons for their using different languages, the first and most obvious one is the elitist status of all these correspondents. Among this group of people French was the privileged means of expression, because, at that time, it was the *lingua franca* –literally—of the aristocracy and the cultural elites in Europe, so it was the immediate language of choice for anybody claiming an erudite cultural status, and a socially privileged class status, and – moreover – for those who wanted to assert their active participation in the circulation of this specific elitist status. French was often used even when both the correspondents were living in an English-speaking country, or when one of the writer’s native languages was English.

⁷⁵ For an analysis of the European influences on the Italian exiles, and the difficulty of maintaining the traditional historiographical distinction between democrats and moderates when describing this complex

Margaret Fuller, with her aspirations, her literary cosmopolitanism, her political interests, along with her choice of epistolary writing as the prevailing mode of communication, found herself in a very conducive and attuned context. In Europe, once she became a participant in this circle of cosmopolitan intellectuals, she added a new level of complexity to her writing, since she started to write her letters in different languages, sharing, in her daily routine of communication, the same cosmopolitan and international atmosphere (made of a circulation of publications in different languages, arriving from different countries) some of her friends were contributing to. In Europe Fuller started to use French, English and –once established in Italy in 1847 –also Italian in her private correspondence. She was, like her European counterparts, well-versed in languages (German, French, and Italian) that she would mostly utilize to appreciate the national literatures. Before leaving the United States she had already translated a number of German works, and, in the words of Colleen Boggs, Fuller was “[United States’s] premier theorist of literary cosmopolitanism, who practiced translation as a viable social ethics.”⁷⁶ So in this sense, Fuller was in an ideal position, once in Europe, to make use of her literary literacy, and in fact she actively participated in creating a transnational system of epistolary exchange that was nationalistic in its objectives and convictions, but cosmopolitan in its practice, since it was not rooted in the geo-political space of a nation, but it was generated in an abstract, idealistic, cultural national project and ideal. The steadfast belief of witnessing and being part of a struggle that would eventually result in the independence of Italy, often expressed in a multilingual exchange, could be conveyed and mobilized only in this transnational network of texts, and – specifically— in the

group, see Maurizio Isabella, *Risorgimento in Exile. Italian Émigrés and the Liberal International in the Post-Napoleonic Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁷⁶ Colleen Boggs, “Margaret Fuller’s American Translation,” *American Literature*, 76, 1(2004): 32.

movement, in the space, between one letter and another. For this reason epistolary exchange was not only one of the viable options accessible to this group of people, but it was also the ideal mode for allowing communication and negotiations of ideas and opinions, when distance, lapses of time and national borders were regulating and conditioning the exchanges, as it will be examined in the next chapter, as regards G. Mazzini and his international circle of correspondence.

Looking more closely at the epistolary exchange between Fuller and Arconati, it is evident that the exchange of letters was constantly fueling and keeping in motion the debate about the national project for Italy, and that the pace and the rhythm of the correspondence was attuned to the fast-changing political landscape. Moreover, since the two correspondents did not share the exact same political visions for Italy, writing and expounding one's point of view was a constant requisite. It is in fact thanks to the non agreement and non alignment in terms of political allegiances (Fuller was an ardent republican, supporter of Mazzini, while Arconati was a moderate, skeptical of the republican form, and in favor of Vincenzo Gioberti and his support of the Catholic Church as the only unifying force in Italy) that the two women could maintain an open and dialectic conversation in their reciprocal writing to each other.

But the epistolary exchange between Fuller and Arconati is a germane object of study in this context also because, as a correspondence, it reflects clearly how the private lives and interests expressed by the two writers in their letters were infused by the political atmosphere and their involvement in the national projects. Furthermore, it shows that a single correspondence could both sustain an internal debate within and about Italy, and simultaneously generate a transnational discussion about republicanism.

The following exchanges between Fuller and Arconati about Giuseppe Mazzini and the role of the Pope in the Italian struggle for independence are clear examples of the possibilities offered by epistolary communication. They reveal how the form of the letter, *flexible* and open, allows for a certain degree of indeterminacy and change, thus creating the intellectual space for debating political issues and also for changing one's own mind, by recognizing the other correspondent's point of view. In a letter written from Rome in January 1848 Fuller defends Mazzini and the public letter he addressed to the Pope: "What black and foolish calumnies are these on Mazzini! It is as much for his interest as his honor to let things take their course, at present. [...] I do not wonder that you were annoyed at his manner of addressing the Pope; but to me it seems that he speaks as he should, –near God and beyond the tomb; not from power to power, but from soul to soul, without regard to temporal dignities."⁷⁷ Reflecting her conviction that even in the most political and public of the spheres, individuals should speak to one another on the level of their subjectivity, and in fact mirroring her own epistolary stance, Fuller insists that Mazzini addressed the Pope not as a political figure, but as a fellow human being, on the intimate and shared common ground, "from soul to soul."

In a letter written in April 1848, Costanza Arconati voices her doubts about Mazzini, trusting, simultaneously, Fuller's opinion about him, and then explaining how her "entourage" would not quite agree with Mazzini:

Ma chère amie, j'estime Mazzini d'après ce que vous m'avez dit de lui comme un honnête homme et un homme de bonne foi, mais il est le chef d'un parti et tout le reste disparaît devant ce caractère. Il ya a quelque mois j'aurai pu le connaître même *en étant* d'une opinion opposée à la sienne, en ce moment-ci où les parties agissent où ce n'est pas une simple théorie il y a une muraille infranchissable entre Mazzini et mon entourage. Il est trop convaincu pour modifier son opinion,

⁷⁷ Hudspeth, *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, Vol. 5, 49. This letter is a fragment first published in R. W. Emerson, W. H. Channing, and J. F. Clarke, eds., *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, 1852).

at nous croyons que Mazzini et son parti sont la ruine de l'Italie. Au reste il se tient à l'écart, je crois parce qu'il juge le moment actuel pue favorable â se faire des partisans.⁷⁸

In the space of a few lines Arconati is able to both recognize Fuller's viewpoint – expressed clearly in previous letters—, to articulate her own, and then to expand it by including her own circle of political allies. Since there is a conversation going on, Arconati could continue to discuss and negotiate political perspectives with Fuller exactly because there was always the possibility of another reply and another revision.

In her next letter (written from Rome on 27 May 1848) Fuller continues to propose her personal political interpretation of the current state of affairs in Italy:

This is my last day at Rome [...] These scenes of natural beauty have filled my heart, and increased, if possible, my desire that the people who have this rich inheritance may no longer be deprived of its benefit by bad institutions. [...] I sit in my obscure corner, and watch the progress of events. It is the position that pleased me best, and, I believe, the most favorable one. Everything confirms me in my radicalism; and without any desire to hasten matters, indeed to surprise to see them rush so like a torrent, I seem to see them all tending to realize my own hopes.⁷⁹

By including comments about the “natural beauty” and the worthiness of the people in Rome, Fuller grounds her radicalism on the romantic idea of the spirit of the nation, according to which Italy can only fulfill its inevitable destiny.

To Fuller's radicalism Arconati replies by bringing forth a less idealistic and more articulate point of view and an altogether different feeling about the current events, which also demonstrates the rate at which incidents and changes were happening. To Fuller's hope Arconati juxtaposes affliction and disquiet (Milan, 3 June 1848):

Ma vie se passe dans l'agitation, la crainte ou plutôt l'inquiétude et l'affliction pour la morte de quelqu'un de mes amis. [...] Si Gioberti est porté en triomphe il n'a que ce qu'il mérite, c'est un grande intelligence unie à la simplicité d'un

⁷⁸ Emma Detti, *Margaret Fuller Ossoli e i suoi corrispondenti* (Firenze: Felice Le Monnier, 1942), 298.

⁷⁹ Hudspeth, *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, Vol. 5, 69. Manuscript copy of a fragment of a Fuller's letter in a hand other than Fuller's. First published in *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*.

enfant, il est tellement au dessus de toute ambition que c'est un des plus grands sacrifices pour lui de s'exposer au triumphe. C'est notre étoile polaire à nous qui ne sommes pas républicains. [...] J'ai besoin de vous dire tout de suite que si je suis opposée à une république italienne ce n'est pour aucun privilège aristocratique, loin de moi une pareille mesquinerie. Je suis convaincue que la république désunirait encore davantage et d'une façon irrémédiable les éléments divers qui en Italie ont tant de peine à tenir ensemble. Une république n'est pas possible, on en ferait au moins dix tout de suite et les vœux de tant de patriots, les sacrifices, les efforts pour fonder une Italie forte et unie seraient trompés.⁸⁰

The open protestations about being and not being republican instead of hindering the conversation force the two writers to explain themselves and to reaffirm their feelings of friendship. In her next letter (dated 22 June 1848) Fuller expresses her preference towards Arconati, and her strong belief in the republican fate:

I write such a great number of letters, having not less than a hundred correspondents, that it seems, every day as if I had just written to each. There is no one, surely, this side of the salt sea, with whom I wish more to keep up the interchange of thought than with you. I believe, if you could know my heart as God knows it, and see the causes that regulate my conduct, you would always love me. But already, in absence, I have lost, for the present, some of those who were dear to me, by failure of letters, or false report. After sorrowing much about a falsehood told me of a dearest friend, I found his letter's at Torlonia's, which had been there ten months, and, duly received, would have made all right. There is something fatal in my destiny about correspondence. [...] I see by the journals that you have not lost Montanelli. That noble mind is still spared to Italy. The Pope's heart is incapable of treason; but he has fallen short of the office fate assigned him.

I am no bigoted Republican, yet I think that form of government will eventually pervade the civilized world. Italy may not be ripe for it yet, but I doubt if she finds peace earlier; and this hasty annexation of Lombardy to the crown of Sardinia seems, to me, as well as I can judge, an act unworthy and unwise. Base, indeed, the monarch, if it was needed, and weak no less than base; for he was already too far engaged in the Italian cause to retire with honor or wisdom.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Detti, *Margaret Fuller Ossoli e i suoi corrispondenti*, 299.

⁸¹ Hudspeth, *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, Vol. 5, 73. Fragment first published in *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*.

To the complicated political maneuvers in Italy, Fuller reacts by proclaiming once again her universalistic vision and her faith in the all-encompassing transnational republican destiny.

Fuller's perspective did not change after the unsuccessful republican interlude of the Roman Republic (February-July 1849) that saw Mazzini as the head of a triumvirate of what was a direct inspiration of the form of government proper of the Roman Republic of ancient times. In a letter written in August 1849, right after the demise of the republican experiment, Fuller employs sentiments both towards Arconati and towards Mazzini in order to reintroduce the political discourse:

Reading a book called "The Last Days of the Republic in Rome," I see that my letter, giving my impressions of that period, may well have seemed to you strangely partial. If we can meet as once we did, and compare notes in the same spirit of candor, while making mutual allowance for our different points of view, your testimony and opinions would be invaluable to me. But will you have patience with my democracy, –my revolutionary spirit? Believe that in thought I am more radical than ever. The heart of Margaret you know, –it is always the same. Mazzini is immortally dear to me, –a thousand times dearer for all the trial I saw made of him in Rome; –dearer for all he suffered. Many of his brave friends perished there. We who, less worthy, survive, would fain make up for the loss, by our increased devotion to him, the purest, the most disinterested of patriots, the most affectionate of brothers. You will not love me less that I am true to him.⁸²

Through the insistence on a sort of republican brotherhood that claims a transitive affection and support from those who participate in the circulation of sentiments, Fuller perpetuates a debate about political ideas: if Arconati loves Fuller, then she will also come to understand Mazzini's choices.

While the letters then allowed for a constant explanation and acknowledgement of their personal political ideas, the transnational character of the epistolary exchange encourages a mutual recognition between Italy and the U.S., with Fuller operating as the mediator in this exchange. Fuller's specific characteristics, her being an American, and a

proponent of republicanism, enabled the surfacing of a national discourse revolving around the United States and its form of republicanism. In other words, Fuller functioned as a metonymy for republican United States, and as such, she became the catalyst of a discourse about possible republican futures for Italy. This is clearly shown when Arconati, describing the situation in northern Italy in early 1848, mentioned a patriotic initiative to Fuller, the abstinence of smoking tobacco, as inspired by the Boston tea party of December 1773: “la ligue contre le tabac a été imitée de celle des Américains, je vous envoie le texte de cette ligue. [...] On est fidèle à cette abstinence comme on ne *l’est* à aucune loi écrite; dites qu’ils sont dignes de suivre l’exemple de vos héroïques compatriotes, et qu’ils méritent le même succès.”⁸³ Not only does an event that had acquired a mythical aura in the American national imagination get translated in this context in a similar – although arguably the similarity is far-fetched— initiative, but it also becomes the germ for producing a comparison between the two countries.

The aspiring Italian republicans were attentive of how their nationalistic aspirations were considered in the US, but their conversations also marked the distance between their restricted communication and the public opinion: not everybody shared Fuller’s investment in creating a stable political connection between the two countries, and the opinions published by newspapers did not always mirror those offered in the private exchange of letters. For example Arconati, in the same letter where she mentions the riots in Milan in January 1848, and the open letter written by Mazzini to the Pope, also comments on the demonstration in support of Italian independency organized in New York by Horace Greeley and others, on 29 November 1847, declaring that patriotism renders people less involved and concerned about what happens in other

⁸² Ibid., 250.

countries. These are some excerpts from Arconati's letter from Florence (12 January 1848):

Ma chère amie –oui, j'ai tout reçu: la lettre volumineuse dont je vous remercie, l'imprimé et la lettre du 8. –Mais ces jours passés ont été si agités que je n'ai presque rien pu faire que m'alarmer chercher des nouvelles et m'en affliger. Vous savez sans doute qu'il y a eu des scènes sanglantes à Milan le 2, 3, 4 Janvier. Dieu sait si c'est fini. En même temps il éclatait des troubles sérieux à Livourne et on avait tout lieu de craindre qu'ils n'eussent pour résultat l'intervention des Autrichiens en Toscane. Faites-vous d'après cela une idée de l'état dans lequel étaient nos âmes. La tranquillité est rétablie pour le présent. [...] J'ai la lettre de Mazzini, elle a été publiée je ne sais pas dans quel journal. Les paroles que vous me transcrivez sont belles et ont l'accent de la vérité, je n'aime pas la manière d'interpeller le Pape, elle est présomptueuse.

Mazzini a l'air de traiter de puissance à puissance ce qui est un langage choquant non seulement de mon point de vue, mais de celui Mazzini lui-même. [...] Les journaux français ont rapporté le "meeting" de New York et plusieurs journaux italiens l'ont mis dans leurs colonnes. En ce moment on est trop absorbé par les intérêts et les mouvements italiens pour y faire beaucoup d'attention; si je le puis je demanderai qu'on fasse un article et je vous l'enverrai.⁸⁴

In the space of a single letter multiple storylines could be considered, as well as contemporary historical events, all connected through the common discourse established by the constant communication of the epistolary exchange. The view pictured in the letter encompasses different places in Italy (Milan, Livorno), and it includes the U.S. as well, mentioning how the New York meeting was reported by French newspapers. All the stories alluded to are held together by the form of the letter, since they originate in the subjectivity of the two writers and readers of the exchange; but these stories find in an international political context the impulses for discussion and reflection.⁸⁵

⁸³ Detti, *Margaret Fuller Ossoli e i suoi corrispondenti*, 295.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 293.

⁸⁵ In addition to all this, in some of the letters, after Fuller revealed her union to Ossoli and the birth of her child, the two writers start talking about child rearing, along with the usual comments about the political developments. See C. Arconati to M. Fuller, Turin, 5 October 1849, Detti, *Margaret Fuller Ossoli e i suoi corrispondenti*, 302.

In the next letter, written from Florence on 24 January 1848, Arconati insists again on the sense of concentration and selfishness that a nationalist fight forces upon people, providing her own reading of the public opinion in Europe and Italy:

Ma chère Amie, Vous avez raison d'être blessé de l'indifférence avec laquelle on a accueilli ce noble témoignage de sympathie de votre Patrie. Je sens ce que vous devez éprouver et je le sens comme une reproche involontaire mais juste. Oui, ma chère amie, on n'a pas encore tout à fait rendu justice à l'Amérique dans la vieille Europe, on la regarde encore toujours un peu de haut en bas. Et pour ne parler que de l'Italie et du moment présent, vous savez que le patriotisme rend égoïste et il ya plus: les craintes, les soucis de cet instant suprême où nous vivons dans ce *very moment*, absorbent toutes les facultés, il n'y a place ni pour la reconnaissance ni pour la curiosité.⁸⁶

The multilayered aspect of this correspondence makes it an exemplary locus where the sentimental circulation of private feelings favors an exchange of ideas about the public sphere, an exchange that overcomes the political-ideological limits among individuals, as well as the national boundaries. In this historical context and within the epistolary space they share, these two women conceive of a kind of political militancy where interpersonal qualities such as recognition and curiosity could find room. In other words, they are capable of recognizing somebody else's point of view. The deep involvement in the current affairs, the attention to the historical present did not prevent Arconati and Fuller from building and maintaining the epistolary space where that "curiosité," absent from the general, public version of patriotism, could find a proper and nurturing dimension, and it could further develop into an interest for the future and for the future national possibilities of a republican Italy. It is precisely the cosmopolitan and international character of the two interlocutors that allows the political debate to acquire a transnational dimension, where national particularities can be transcended.

⁸⁶ Detti, *Margaret Fuller Ossoli e i suoi corrispondenti*, 294.

Both questions of international exchanges among an intellectual and political elite, and semi-public forms of address will receive greater attention in the next chapter, which will discuss Mazzini's relations with Fuller and other eminent writers such as Thomas Carlyle. But differently from the cases examined below, in the Fuller-Arconati exchange it is their personal involvement in claiming recognition of the other's point of view that makes possible within the "very moment", to create room for a clear and steady debate that looks well into the future project of nation building.

Chapter 3 Epistolary Exchanges in a Transnational Context

After having focused in the previous chapter on how, for a specific figure, letters were means for expanding the self in order to engage with history, this section will take into consideration both a larger group of writers and a triangulation of epistolary exchanges. In what follows I will address the ways in which some specific kinds of letters (private letters, letters of introduction and public letters) could build a political space, in the middle ground between public and private. In these exchanges the civil and the political interests are conveyed through sociability and social introductions, where the intimate space and the political motives cohabit and are sometimes dependable on one another.

Before leaving for her long tour of Europe in 1846, Margaret Fuller prepared herself in different ways. She tried to secure funds for her travels, while at the same time reflecting on the significance of such a trip for her *bildung* and for her career. She believed that her visit to Europe would be different from the usual cultured trip taken by numerous Americans in the same period. Fuller explained her vision and her intent in a letter written to her friends Samuel and Anna Ward on March 3, 1846, detailing how the delay of this long-sought travel had changed the meaning of it: “At every step I have missed the culture I sought in going, for with me it [was] no scheme of pleasure but the means of needed development. It was what I wanted after my painful youth, and what I was ready to use and be nourished by. It would have given my genius wings and I should have been, not in idea indeed, but in achievement far superior to what I can be now.”⁸⁷ If

⁸⁷ Hudspeth, *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, vol. 4, 192.

the hyperbolic prose and the narcissistic stance can be considered as rhetorical means in order to convince her friends to help her financially (in her letter she was also asking for a loan in order to travel in a way that was “not too laborious for [her] strength”), it is nonetheless useful to pay attention to the self-portrait drawn by Fuller, because it provides an insight into a self-evaluation of her educational growth. “I do not look forward to seeing Europe now as so very important to me,” she continued to explain to the Wards, “My mind and character are too much formed. I shall not modify them much but only add to my stores of knowledge. Still, even in this sense, I wish much to go. It is important to me, almost needful in the career I am now engaged in. I feel that, if I persevere, there is nothing to hinder my having an important career even now but it must be in the capacity of a journalist, and for that I need this new field of observation.”⁸⁸

In her letter to her friends Fuller presented herself as somebody who, after having worked steadily as a journalist within the American cultural context, envisioned herself as a professional intent on advancing her career, and eager to embrace a new field of observation: Europe. More than formative for her personal education and learning, a trip to Europe in that moment seemed instrumental to her professional function, both in terms of advantages and connections, and in terms of witnessing and reporting. Obviously the political, social, and cultural situation of Europe at the time warranted that attention. In her *New York Tribune* article of January 1, 1846, which served as a survey of the current situation, both in the United States and abroad, Fuller engaged with a brief analysis of the state of European nations:

But how is it with those larger individuals, the Nation, and that Congress of such, the Worlds? –We must take a broad and superficial view of these, as we

⁸⁸ Ibid., 193.

have of private life, and in neither case can more be done. The secrets of the confessional, or rather of the shrine, do not come on paper, unless in poetic form.

So we will not try to search and mine, but only to look over the world from an ideal point of view.

Here we find the same phenomena repeated; the good nation is yet somehow so sick at heart that you are not sure its goodness will ever produce a harmony of life; over the young nation, (our own,) rich in energy and full of glee, brood terrible omens; others, as Poland and Italy, seem irrevocably lost. –They may revive, but we feel as if it must be under new forms.

Forms come and go, but principles are developed and displayed more and more. The cauldron simmers, and so great is the fire that we expect it soon to boil over, and new Fates appear for Europe.

Spain is dying by inches; England shows symptoms of having passed her meridian; Austria has taken opium, but she must awake ere long; France is in an uneasy dream –she knows she has been very sick, has had terrible remedies administered, and ought to be getting thoroughly well, which she is not. Louis Philippe watches by her pillow, doses and bleeds her, so that she cannot fairly try her strength and find whether something or nothing has been done. But Louis Philippe and Metternich must soon, in the course of Nature, leave this scene, and then there will be none to keep out air and light from the chamber, and the patients will be roused and ascertain their true condition.⁸⁹

Fuller personifies the nations calling them “larger individuals,” and when taking their pulse, she finds them ailing. But, more importantly, she believes that all Europe is a simmering cauldron, full of those “principles” that will soon overflow, looking for adequate political forms. Her political analysis starts with an observation about the state of her own “young nation,” immediately followed by remarks on the condition of Poland and Italy, with hints at what might happen in their future. When discussing nation, as an abstract concept as well as a historical reality, Fuller includes and in fact starts with a perspective on the United States, thus using a comparative approach and an international framework, keeping always in her horizon a complex global system, rather than a limited and exclusive American viewpoint.

⁸⁹ Margaret Fuller, “1st January, 1846,” *New York Daily Tribune*, 1 January 1846, 1. Reprinted in Judith Mattson Bean and Joel Myerson, eds., *Margaret Fuller Critic. Writings from the New York Tribune, 1844-1846* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 327.

While she had always been an attentive analyst of various expressions of German, Italian, French, British culture –in her *Dial* essays, and in her *New York Tribune*⁹⁰ articles she had often introduced foreign authors to her American readership –in this article she turned her attention more pointedly to the various political circumstances, in the different European areas, being interested in how the individual peoples would pursue their national projects. After having written of those cultures, and after having commented on their politics from afar, a trip to Europe and the opportunity to visit those same countries allowed her to use her professional status of journalist in order to observe first-hand, but also to approach some important personalities and to establish interpersonal relations, observing the public life, while building on private relations.

As we have already seen in the previous chapter, Fuller did not limit herself to observing and reporting for her American audience, but she situated herself in the most active circles of political intellectuals that were animating Europe. The first leg of her trip took her to England, where she immediately noticed of the working class, which she described in her first article for the *New York Tribune* as a foreign correspondent.⁹¹ Along with an attention to the social conditions, or a tribute to the literary giants, such as William Wordsworth and Thomas De Quincey, Fuller seemed to experience in England a heightening in perception; not only was she observing her new environments, but also herself in them: she started to appreciate her international literary fame, and evaluating

⁹⁰ Apart from the numerous translations, and some articles such as “Modern British Poets” published in two parts in the *American Monthly Magazine*, n.s. 2 (September 1836): 235- 250 and *American Monthly Magazine*, n.s. 2 (October 1836): 320-333, in the *Dial* she published, among others, “Goethe,” *Dial* 2 (July 1841): 1-41; “Review of Thomas Carlyle, *On Hero, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*,” *Dial* 2 (July 1841): 131-33; “Lives of the Great Composers, Haydn, Mozart, Handel, Bach, Beethoven,” *Dial* 2 (October 1841): 148-203. Some of her articles in the *New York Tribune* that dealt with European culture are: “Miss Barrett’s Poems,” *New York Daily Tribune*, 4 January 1845, 1-4; “French Novelists of the Day,” *New York Daily Tribune*, 1 February 1845, 1-4; “Italy,” *New York Daily Tribune*, 13 November 1845, 1-3.

prospects for the future. When she arrived in England, Fuller rejoiced in discovering that her own writing was circulated and respected. The new “field of observation” that Fuller was looking for in Europe comprised her own self, her past cultural production, and her future potential presence in European culture. While in London, on September 30, 1846, she wrote a letter to Evert A. Duyckinck,⁹² describing how she was received in England:

Dear Mr. Duyckink,

The letter which I intended to write you dwindles into a note, for many as were my interruptions in N. Y. they scarcely enabled me to form a notion of those inevitable to a London life. ...

Yet I like London, like England *very* much and have already formed so many interesting connections that I do not feel that I could be content to return to the U.S. without passing some time here again. Indeed I may come and pass some time here for the purpose of writing. Several fine openings have been made for me where I might have taken up important subjects and published my view in excellent places, but I cannot now possibly get time to write without sacrificing many valuable opportunities of learning. A year hence will not be too late.

I have been recd here with a warmth that surprized me; it is chiefly to Women [sic] in the 19th &c that I am indebted for this; that little volume has been read and prized by many. It is a real misfortune to me that Mr. Wiley took the course he did about my miscellanies; the vols have been kindly recd but every one mentions their being *thin*; the arrangement, too, that obliged me to leave out all I had written on Continental liter[ature] was very unfortunate for me. I have reason to feel daily how much use it would have been to me if these essays and others of radical stamp were now before the readers and that a false impression has been given here of the range and scope of my efforts. However it is of some use to have those that are printed with me now, though I have constantly to regret the absence of some I intended to insert as now is just the time for them to make their mark here.⁹³

Fuller is clearly intent on wanting to promote the specific public image of a radical thinker, as she deems that London would be the right context for her political views to find interlocutors. Despite her misgivings, she was well armed to participate, at

⁹¹ See “Letters from England,” *New York Daily Tribune*, 24 September 1846, p. 2: 1-3. Reprinted in Larry J. Reynolds and Susan Belasco Smith, eds., *Margaret Fuller. “These Sad but Glorious Days.” Dispatches from Europe, 1846-1850*, 39-49.

⁹² At the time Evert A. Duyckinck was the literary editor of *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, and in 1847 he became the editor of *The Literary World*.

⁹³ Hudspeth, *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, vol. 4, 234-5 (italics in original).

various levels, both more publicly and more privately, in the conversations and debates that were animating the British metropolis.

Even before Karl Marx established his permanent residence in London in 1849, the city had been housing a great number of expatriates and political thinkers. One of them, Giuseppe Mazzini, an exile from Italy, who will be discussed in greater details in the second part of this chapter, in January 1847, wrote his assessment of the political situation in Europe, demonstrating how for a good number of these intellectuals, Europe indeed constituted a complex area, where the fate of one people and one geographical and political unit was inextricably linked to the fate of the others. This is the inception of Mazzini's "The European Question," from the pages of *The People's Journal*:

I am not aware if many Englishmen in the present day occupy themselves with the conditions of the people of Europe, and their probable future; and what I see of the opinions on foreign affairs uttered by the press, inclines me to think the contrary. But one thing I know, and all serious men on the Continent know it with me; it is that *Europe rapidly approaches a tremendous crisis; a supreme contest between peoples and their despots, which no human power can henceforth hinder, but which the active concurrence of all the brave and good would render shorter and less severe, and whose final result will be a new map of Europe.* If, at the epoch when those miserable treaties, which they have just destroyed at Cracow, were concocted, there had been in Europe an assembly of statesmen, wise, foreseeing, and especially convinced that there is below a Humanity living, through God, its own life, of which all statesmen ought to be interpreters and the servants, this violent crisis might have been avoided. But at Vienna there were none but short-sighted politicians, knowing nothing of Right, believing only in actual (*de facto*) governments, and who coming out of a long war, and almost frightened at their own success, only had it at heart to organize the balance of the then existing powers, and mutually to pay themselves for the services which they had rendered to one another in time of danger; they regulated this on the map of Europe, throwing out of consideration the men who inhabited it, and their tendencies. It was a partition of *matter*, without a single thought of *spirit*. And since then the struggle has not ceased for an instant. Dull at first, the thunder has growled menacingly for the last seventeen years: to-morrow or the next day there will be an explosion: every endeavour at conciliation will be useless. Between the two champions, Force will soon judge: this is why they themselves have torn

these powerless treaties, and boldly taken a step in advance, as if to choose their ground.⁹⁴

Mazzini's analysis addresses the question of the configuration of Europe established by the Congress of Vienna in 1815, thus showing that the project of the "new map of Europe" could not be conceived if not somehow in concert among the many peoples on the Continent that were seeking independence. Mazzini maintained a general gaze over Europe, since the continent had been redesigned by the powers present at the Congress of Vienna (Austria, Great Britain, France, Prussia, Russia). At the same time he was also aware of the peoples differently populating this redrawn map.

Because most of the political thinkers and propounders of national independence understood that in the Europe of the 1840s one nationalist project could not be completely separated from another nationalist project, Fuller found herself among a community of cosmopolitan writers who, as in the case of Mazzini, refused the monarchic and imperial projects laid out and enforced by the Congress of Vienna, in favor of the formation of individual nations. As we will see, Fuller found that Mazzini's attention to "Humanity" and to the spiritual dimension of politics was in tune with her transcendental vision of the universal potential in all persons, and this common understanding fostered not only the communication between the two, but also the formation of an international circle of people who believed in universal principles and advanced similar political projects. In this cosmopolitan and politically minded circle Fuller entered bearing not only her cultural heritage and her literary contributions, but also a series of letters of introduction, missives meant to smooth her way into the discourses she was interested in contributing to.

⁹⁴ Giuseppe Mazzini, "The European Question," *The People's Journal*, 55, 16 January 1847, 17-18 (Italics in the original).

1. Letters of introduction

If the cultural and political climate of London was certainly favorable to Margaret Fuller, probably adding to a sense of enjoyment of the city was also the great number of public occasions it offered to the American writer, since, once arrived in the British metropolis, on October 1, 1846, Fuller became engaged in a series of social activities. As she explained in a letter to Emerson written from Paris, and dated November 16, 1846, in London, she had no time to write, either to her friends nor for the newspaper (all her articles for the *New York Tribune* about London, numbered VI, VII, VIII, and IX, were in fact written from France). All the time allotted to writing was taken by social activities:

I meant to write on my arrival in London, six weeks ago –But as it was not what is technically called “the season”, I thought I had best send all my letters of introduction at once, that I might glean what few good people I could. But more than I expected were there; these introduced others, and in three days I got engaged in such a crowd of acquaintance that I had hardly time to dress and none to sleep during all the weeks I was in London. I enjoyed this time extremely. I find myself in my element in European society. It does not indeed come up to my ideal; but so many of the encumbrances are cleared away that used to weary me in America, that I can enjoy a freer play of faculty, and feel, if not like a bird in the air, at least as easy as a fish in water.⁹⁵

Fuller found herself in congenial waters, and she describes the social atmosphere as perfectly attuned to her. Thanks to the letters of introduction that she collected before leaving the U.S., she was able to meet “what few good people [she] could.” As expected, the letters of introductions that she was carrying with her started a chain of invitations, and Fuller immediately found herself pleasantly occupied in expanding her circles, and taking roots.

When about to leave the U.S., Fuller had been aware that in Europe she would need means to access the most interesting circles there. If presenting herself as a

journalist for the *New York Tribune*, or a past editor of the *Dial* could guarantee the possibility of conversations with some personalities, the level of intimacy and deeper knowledge that she was actively pursuing in Europe could only be granted by more personal, more pointed, more material and authoritative objects: letters of introduction. In order to gain admittance to the literary circles of Europe, in fact, Fuller needed the conventional presentations and recommendations which were authoritative and personal enough to establish her as a desirable acquaintance, a worthy contributor and participant of the European intellectual elites. As it is the case with every letter of introduction, these letters had to attest to her past, to her pleasant and enriching presence, and to future possibilities.

For this reason, while still in New York, she turned to a number of people who could be influential in her gaining new acquaintances. Among them, she procured letters from Cornelius Mathews to Elizabeth Barrett, from William Cullen Bryant to James Ombrosi, the American consul in Florence, and from N. P. Willis to the consul's attorney in London.⁹⁶

Of the friends she turned to for her letters of introduction, it was to Emerson that Fuller posed explicit requests, not only because of the import of their friendship, but also because she was sure that his letters would ensure her meeting with important literary figures in Europe. In her own letter to Emerson her demands were precise and clear:

I should like to take the letter to Carlyle, and wish you would name the Springs in it. Mr S. has been one of those much helped by Mr C. I should like to see Tennyson, but doubt whether Mr C. would take any trouble about it. I take a letter to Miss Barrett and am likely to see Browning through her. It would do no

⁹⁵Hudspeth, *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, vol. 4, 245.

⁹⁶ See Charles Capper, *Margaret Fuller. An American Romantic Life. The Public Years*, 276.

harm to mention it, though. – I have done much to make him known here. Could you get me any other letters like to be of use.⁹⁷

Fuller's tone in the letter indicates how she expects her name to be already known by the people she mentions, since her relationship to Emerson somehow works as a proxy and a reinforcement. The literary and cultural work she had shared with Emerson in advancing Carlyle's and Browning's⁹⁸ texts in the United States creates in Fuller an expectancy of personal recognition: knowing their writing and having worked with their texts, is a preliminary phase of actually knowing the writers. Moreover, Emerson was a more experienced traveler than Fuller, since in 1832 he had journeyed to Europe and in the summer of 1833 had met Thomas Carlyle in his native Scotland. Emerson, therefore, had formed personal acquaintances of his own, and he was also well known among certain circles of British authors, having published his *Essays* with the help of Carlyle, who wrote the preface to the 1841 English edition of Emerson's *Essays*.⁹⁹ Emerson could function then as the perfect intermediary and mutual correspondent, somebody who would be able to reciprocally introduce British literary personalities to Margaret Fuller. Emerson could author notes that constituted both a proof of Fuller being part of a circle of literati, and a key to her being admitted to other circles and groups she was not previously familiar with. In fact, what Fuller asked Emerson to render explicit in the letters was not only a mere belonging, but an active participation in a process of presentation and diffusion of British texts that she, in her work as journalist and critic, had been engaged with. The list of writers she enumerates (Carlyle, Tennyson, Barrett and Browning) is comprised of very notable personalities and it is a highly literary

⁹⁷ Letter dated 15 July 1846. Hudspeth, *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, vol. 4, 220.

⁹⁸ See note 4.

⁹⁹ See *Essays: By R.W. Emerson, of Concord, Massachusetts*, London, 1841. The relationship between Emerson and Carlyle will be the focus of the next chapter.

selection, indicating Fuller's aspiration to meet with the best authors that England had to offer.

Through the very peculiar written object that is the letter of introduction, a number of different things can be accomplished. First of all, a letter of introduction, like all letters, can traverse different national borders, favoring the creation of groups of people on the common ground of a specific interest (sometimes carried away in distant locations), or on the basis of a mutual acquaintance, or in the hope of laying out a possible and future project together. In a time when proofs of identity were not established in a consistent way¹⁰⁰ and often maintained a level of uncertainty, the letters of introduction functioned at different levels, carrying with them the strong authority of the bond between the writer and the addressee and providing a shield for the person who was materially carrying them. They also engaged in different degrees of national belonging: letters of introduction to American officials abroad, for example, were the means through which Americans traveling abroad would be welcomed in the American community that was residing in Europe, thus instituting a stable context for them, while simultaneously reinforcing national bonds, even when outside of their country. Letters of introduction also created a historical continuity among the travelers, reminding them who visited before them, constantly fueling a sense of stability and connection.

William Cullen Bryant, for instance, in his letter of introduction to James Ombrosi in Florence, written for Margaret Fuller before she left the U. S., rendered very clear the constant support offered by Ombrosi to Americans, and, in addition to that,

¹⁰⁰ On the history and establishment of passport in the modern world, see John Torpey, *The Invention of Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship, and the State*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Mark Salter, *Rights of Passage: The Passport in International Relations*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publications, 2003); Jane Caplan and John Torpey, eds., *Documenting Individual Identity: The Development of State Practices in the Modern World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

contextualized the Springs and Fuller in the long list of the “strangers from the United States” who benefited from Ombrosi’s “kind civilities.” The letter, dated July 8, 1846 and written from New York, reads as such:

My dear Mr. Ombrosi,
 Allow me to commend to the kind civilities which you are always so ready to pay to strangers from the United States, Mr. and Mrs. Spring, two very good friends of mine, who accompanied by Miss Fuller a lady of extensive literary accomplishments, are making the tour of Europe. You will I am sure, take an additional pleasure on account of their personal merit, in extending to them the attentions with which you always welcome my countrymen.¹⁰¹

In the course of the letter, from obscure “strangers from the United States,” the Springs and Fuller become, in the words of Bryant, “two very good friends of mine” and “a lady of extensive literary accomplishments.” Furthermore, Bryant prefigures future scenarios, because when Ombrosi will finally meet these people, he will take even an “additional pleasure” thanks to their “personal merit.” The form of the letter of introduction allows for the personal traits to come to the fore, granting the space for a transformation to take place, even within the text itself: the people mentioned in the letter from virtual strangers become personal relations.

Some of the letters of introduction sought by Fuller were also a foundation, a prelude to a series of correspondences that would take shape once Fuller established herself in Europe: in that sense they helped to foster the creation of multidirectional epistolary exchanges. The high mobility and the flexibility of the epistolary genre allows for an exchange to begin even before it actually takes place. Emerson’s central role in writing some of these letters and the triangulation of Emerson, Carlyle and Fuller his letters helped to establish is a case in point.

¹⁰¹ William Cullen Bryant, *The Letters of William Cullen Bryant*, ed. William Cullen Bryant II and Thomas G. Voss, Vol. 2 (New York: Fordham University Press, 1975), 436.

After Fuller asked Emerson to write for her a letter of introduction to Carlyle, two weeks before she had to leave for Europe, Emerson proceeded to write directly to his Scottish correspondent, without having Fuller carrying the letter with her. In the letter written by Emerson on August 1, 1846, Emerson played with the notion of his interchangeability with Carlyle:

My dear Sir,
My friend Miss Fuller in company with Mr. & Mrs Marcus Spring of New York, are leaving Boston, this day, for England. I hope they may find you returned from your rustication, before they leave London for the Continent. I shall not think Miss Fuller has been in England, until she has seen you & Mrs Carlyle; and, since I cannot go to London myself, you must tell her every thing for me. Farewell!
R.W. Emerson.¹⁰²

Differently from Bryant's more formal stance, Emerson's tone is almost playful, showing that, if Fuller is his friend, so is Carlyle, and in fact, he is investing Carlyle with playing his role, having Carlyle "tell her every thing for me." In writing directly to Carlyle, Emerson is not only facilitating Fuller's exchange with Carlyle (in praesentia or through letters), but he is reaffirming also his own role in that exchange, thus becoming the source of the exchange and the intermediate and intermediary figure.

The brief notes written by Bryant and Emerson reveal how, despite being private writing, they maintain a quality of close and limited publicness: they are written, in fact, always within and for a limited circle of people who are, in this case, public figures involved in public affairs. Like letters of references, the letters of introduction are meant to be private, but only as far as their content is concerned, because all the people involved in the exchange (writer, addressee, and the person recommended) know and acknowledge the exchange, and are invested in it.

¹⁰² Joseph Slater, ed., *The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 408.

If the letters of introduction written for Fuller in the United States are mostly regarding her personal achievements and literary respectability, once she participates in more politically oriented circles in England and in Italy, the letter writing and also the letters of introduction concerning political figures will get more charged with public affairs and crucial exchange of information. As we will see in the case of Giuseppe Mazzini, for example, letters, especially the private and familiar ones, demonstrate how the friendly and private relations get intertwined and inextricably linked to political actions. As in the case of the letters by political figures or revolutionaries, the degrees of publicness and privateness are even more linked together, since the most private letters are the ones that hold the most public interest, investing national and international questions.

According to what she wrote Emerson in her letter from Paris, Fuller's "crowd of acquaintance" in London was appealing and satisfactory to her. Carlyle, following Emerson's request, invited her to his house and Fuller, in her letter dated November 16, 1846, reported to Emerson how well the introduction worked: "Of the people I saw in London you will wish me to speak first of the Carlyles. Mr. C. came to see me at once, and appointed an evening to be passed at their house."¹⁰³ Since Emerson is directly involved in the exchange and in the construction of the relation between Fuller and the Carlyles, Fuller's letter about them has the intimate tone of a conversation about well-known subjects. She starts by describing the meeting at the Carlyle residence in London, commenting on the notorious Carlyle's idiosyncrasies:

That first time I was delighted with him. He was in a very sweet humor, full of wit and pathos, without being overbearing and oppressive. I was quite carried away by the rich flow of his discourse; and the hearty noble earnestness of his

¹⁰³ Hudspeth, *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, vol. 4, 246.

personal being brought back the charm which once was upon his writing, before I wearied of it. I admired his Scotch, his way of singing his great full sentences, so that each one was like the stanza of a narrative ballad. He let me talk a little now and then enough to free my lungs, and change my position, so that I did not get tired.¹⁰⁴

In Fuller's words, Carlyle appeared like an enormous literary monument, rooted in the Scotch tradition, uttering "his great full sentences" like narrative ballads. This Carlyle is a powerful and imposing figure, somebody who conquers the audience and does not leave much room to any conversation and real exchange; nonetheless, he is an interlocutor of Emerson, and hence, of Fuller: "That evening he talked of the present state of things in England, giving light witty sketches of the men of the day, fanatics and others – and some sweet homely stories he told of things he had known of the Scotch Peasantry. Of you he spoke worthily, as he seldom writes to you, and most unlikely the tone of his prefaces, so that for the moment, I was quite reconciled with him."¹⁰⁵ After having described a Carlyle that Emerson knew well, Fuller obviously reports about the important absent presence, Emerson himself, and how he is remembered by Carlyle. Preceding Fuller's meeting with Carlyle is the history of the two men's friendship and of their literary and publishing exchanges, exchanges that had not always been happily received on either part. By remarking that Carlyle "spoke worthily" of Emerson and that "she was quite reconciled with him," Fuller declares her willingness to be part of the exchange between the two men, occurring through her writing.¹⁰⁶ Given his previous relation with Carlyle, and because of their epistolary correspondence, Emerson would naturally be the absent but ever present point of reference, and Fuller's words illustrate

¹⁰⁴ Hudspeth, *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, vol. 4, 246.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ The manuscript letter, in Fuller's hand, and housed at the Houghton Library, bears the editorial intervention of R.W. Emerson, W.H. Channing, and J. F. Clarke, who, when preparing Fuller's writings for the posthumously publication of the *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, emended this part, erasing all the

her attention to the relation between the two men. She had been observing their dealings with each other for a long time, and, when meeting with him in London, she was ready to grant Carlyle some trust, after having deemed as harsh his treatment of Emerson in the past.

2. Purloined Letters: Privacy and Publicity in the Political Arena

Although from the description provided by Fuller Carlyle might not seem to be the most forthcoming host and facilitator of meetings and exchanges, it was during one of the evenings spent at the Carlyle residence that Fuller met Giuseppe Mazzini, a long time personal friend of Thomas and Jane Carlyle. Mazzini was an Italian expatriate, residing in England as a political exile since 1837; he was devoted to the unification and independence of Italy, and he soon became one of Fuller's political interlocutors during her European years. The political situation of Italy, which has been dealt briefly in the previous chapter, was problematically unstable. Like many other areas in Europe that claimed a national past and suffered from a current condition of division and dependence, the Italian peninsula was divided in numerous political entities, some of them relatively independent (like the grand Duchy of Tuscany or the Kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia), and others under the direct influence of foreign powers, like the north-east dominated by the Austrian Empire, and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in the south, which was under the Bourbon rule. While still in Italy, Mazzini had founded the association "Giovane Italia" (Young Italy) to promote a united republic, and following his persecution by the Austrian authorities, he went into exile and arrived in London in January 1837. In England he tried to support himself by writing, met John Stuart Mill,

words from "worthily" to "I was reconciled with him," substituting them with a more succinct and

and might have met Thomas Carlyle as early as November 1837.¹⁰⁷ Once the Carlyles convinced Mazzini to take residence near their London home in Chelsea (in 1840) they met more frequently and their friendship grew, particularly between Mazzini and Jane Carlyle, in spite of Thomas Carlyle's aversion to Mazzini's revolutionary politics.

Fuller was taken by this dedicated man, and she wrote about him in her private letters to friends, as well as in her articles for the *New York Tribune*, describing him in a letter to Caroline Sturgis as "by far the most beautiful person I have seen. If you ever see 'Sanders People's Journal,' you can read articles by him that will give you some notion of his mind, especially one of his friends the two Bandieras and Rufini, headed 'Italian Martyrs.' He is one in whom holiness has purified, but nowhere dwarfed the man."¹⁰⁸ In her recollection of her encounter with Mazzini, which she included in her letter to Emerson, Fuller already considered herself to side with him, through a shared belief in "progress" and "ideal subjects":

Mazzini was with us, whose society, when he was there alone, I enjoyed more than any. He is beautiful and pure music; also, he is a dear friend of Mrs. C. [Carlyle]; but his being there gave the conversation a turn to 'progress' and ideal subjects, and C. [Carlyle] was fluent in invectives on all our 'rose-water imbecilities.' We all felt distant from him, and Mazzini, after some vain efforts to remonstrate, became very sad.¹⁰⁹

In the restricted circle of a London home, and in the company of such an imposing figure as Carlyle, Fuller started to make distinctions and she described to Emerson—her most congenial correspondent in these matters—her beginning to move

benevolent "Of you he spoke in hearty kindness."

¹⁰⁷ See M.C. W. Wicks, *The Italian Exiles in London, 1816-1848* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1937), 190; see also Thomas Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, ed. James Anthony Froude (New York: C. Scribner's sons, 1881), 75.

¹⁰⁸ Letter to Caroline Sturgis, dated 16 November 1846. Hudspeth, *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, vol. 4, 240.

¹⁰⁹ Letter to R. W. Emerson, dated 16 November 1846. Hudspeth, *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, vol. 4, 248.

towards one man rather than the other. The distance from Carlyle (“we all felt distant from him”) reinforces Fuller’s ideal movement towards Mazzini, and it is her acquaintance and friendship with him that marked Fuller’s growing interest in European politics, and especially in projects of national independence in countries such as Italy. Mazzini, as one of many expatriates from different countries (Italy, Germany and Poland) who resided in London in the 1840s, and who were publishing in English periodicals sparking debates about the means to attain democracy and the opportunity of revolution, was one of those thinkers who induced Fuller to reflect on international forms of republicanism.

Mazzini, however, was not only a crucial figure for the development and deepening of Fuller’s republicanism in an international context, but he also constituted an exemplary case of letter writer whose letters represent the double and hybrid function of private and public interest in the epistolary exchanges in this specific historical and cultural period and milieu. In fact, interestingly for this study, when Fuller met Mazzini in 1846, he had just been at the center of a famous controversy about letters and the privateness of the personal mail. In 1844, in fact, Mazzini’s name was taken to the British Parliament, in what has been defined as the “opening letters affair.”¹¹⁰ While Mazzini’s opened letters have certainly not been the first case of such a violation of personal mail – Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, for example, during their years spent in Europe, lamented how their coded letters had been opened by their host nations, France and

¹¹⁰ See Salvo Mastellone, *Mazzini and Marx. Thoughts upon Democracy in Europe* (Westport: Praeger, 2003) esp. chapter 3 “The Opening Letters Affairs.” For a contemporary account, see the article (signed W.) “Mazzini and the Ethics of Politicians,” *Westminster Review* (September 1844): 244-66. The article was reprinted as a pamphlet and largely distributed (*Letter-opening at the Post-Office*, London: J. Watson, 1844). It was also reprinted in the United States in 1845.

England¹¹¹ –this specific case is important because it demonstrates how in this period the question of personal privacy acquires relevance and it becomes intertwined with questions of political import.

Before proceeding any further, let me provide some historical context and factual information. In the early months of 1844, when Mazzini was residing in England, the Austrian ambassador in London asked a British minister for information on Mazzini and another Italian revolutionary, Nicola Fabrizi (who had fled to Malta). The minister passed the request to Home Secretary James Graham, who ordered the Post Office to open letters sent to Mazzini's address in London, and copy them, so that excerpts could be read to the Austrian ambassador. When Mazzini realized that his letters were being opened, he gathered enough evidence, and on June 14, 1844 Thomas Duncombe, exponent of the opposition, presented a petition to the House of Commons on behalf of Mazzini and a few other people. The parliamentary debate lasted for quite some time, and two months after Mazzini's initial petition, the Secret Department of the Post Office was abolished. At this point the debate was already public, but it reached an even wider proportion when a number of articles started to appear in the press. The force of the parliamentary debate and the interventions in the public sphere contribute to demonstrate that letters, because of their unique status, their mobility and their political function, are the foremost private and political form of communication of the era, and as such they are simultaneously the most vulnerable and most efficient. In this specific case, letters become the symbol of a right to property and to privacy, as bases of the modern liberal state.

The legal possession of letters, and the right to their property and publication had

¹¹¹On August 17, 1785 Thomas Jefferson from Paris wrote to John Adams in London: "Dear Sir, I received yesterday your favor of the 7th. *This was four days later than Mr. Short's of the same date. It had evidently*

been debated, for example, already in 1741, when Alexander Pope filed suit against a London bookseller who had published *Dean Swift's Literary Correspondence, for Twenty-Four Years*, which included letters written by Pope. Pope claimed rights to both his own letters, and to the letters he had received from Swift, and attempted to stop the booksellers from selling the book. Lord Chancellor Hardwicke ordered the bookseller to halt sale of the book, awarding Pope control over only the letters he himself had written. If in that case it was mostly a question of the right to property and the existence of intellectual property,¹¹² the Mazzini's letters affair points to the dimension of privacy, of national and international violations, and to national identity. As the parliamentary debate established, in fact, what was at stake at the time was not only Mazzini's right and control over his property, but also the interference of the state over private persons, as well as the nature of individual states. Therefore, in the words of Duncombe, if England claimed to be a more democratic, liberal state, it ought to behave differently from other countries, considered less open and free: "It is shameful that in a free country like England a system of this kind [opening and examining letters] should be tolerated; it might be tolerated in Russia, even in France or the Austrian nations, perhaps even in

been opened. We must therefore consider both governments as possessed of it's contents." Cappon, *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 53 (italics in the original, denoting the use of a code).

¹¹² Hardwicke made a distinction between the physical letter and the content: "I am of opinion that it is only a special property in the receiver, possibly the property of the paper may belong to him; but this does not give a licence to any person whatsoever to publish them to the world, for at most the receiver has only a joint property with the writer." Quoted in Mark Rose, "The Author in Court: Pope v. Curl (1741)," *Cardozo Arts and Entertainment Law Journal* 10 (1992): 486. This case is also discussed in Irene Tucker, "Writing Home: *Evelina*, the Epistolary Novel and the Paradox of Property," *ELH* 60 (1993): 419-39. Milette Shamir traces the lineage of the cult of privacy to the middle decades of the nineteenth century, explaining that "in the course of the eighteenth century, liberalism as a political philosophy reversed the republican hierarchy of public over private, elevating the private to a position of primacy and endowing privacy with its present meaning as a moral good, a natural right, and a constitutive condition of personhood." (Milette Shamir, *Inexpressible Privacy. The Interior Life of Antebellum American Literature* (2). The first article that initiated a discussion about the right to privacy in the legal sphere is Samuel Warren and Louis D. Brandeis, "The Right to Privacy," *Harvard Law Review*, 4, 5 (15 December 1890), 193-220.

Sardinia, but it is not in conformity with the air of freedom in our free country.”¹¹³

Among the public interventions appeared in those days, the *Times*, on June 17, published an unsigned article declaring that the affair was “unconstitutional, un-English, and ungenerous.” The writer of the *Times* article, continued insisting that Mazzini’s character was not a case in point: “Mr. Mazzini’s character and habits and society are nothing to the point, unless connected with some certain or probable evidence of evil intentions or treasonable plots. We know nothing, and care nothing about him. He may be the most worthless and the most vicious creature in the world. But this is no reason of itself why his letters should be detained and opened.”¹¹⁴ If the article in the *Times*, by claiming ignorance about Mazzini as an individual, tried to move the debate to an abstract level, Thomas Carlyle decided to intervene, bringing light about the character of Mazzini. The Scottish writer sent a letter to the *Times* in order to certify his personal acquaintance of Mazzini, and to defend the integrity and independence of judgment of his country. He wrote and sent his letter on June 18, 1844, the day after the publication of the article in the *Times*:

Sir, --In your observations in yesterday’s *Times* on the late disgraceful affair of Mr. Mazzini’s letters and the Secretary of State, you mention that Mr. Mazzini is entirely unknown to you, entirely indifferent to you; and add, very justly, that if he were the most contemptible of mankind, it would not affect your argument on the subject.

It may tend to throw further light on this matter if I now certify you, which I in some sort feel called upon to do, that Mr. Mazzini is not unknown to various competent persons in this country; and that he is very far indeed from being contemptible—none farther, or very few of living men. I have had the honor to know Mr. Mazzini for a series of years; and, whatever I may think of his practical insight and skill in worldly affairs, I can with great freedom testify to all men that

¹¹³ Quoted in Salvo Mastellone, *Mazzini and Marx. Thoughts upon Democracy in Europe*, 28.

¹¹⁴ *The Times*, 17 June, 1844. For more information about the historical context of this affair, see Emilia Morelli, *L’Inghilterra di Mazzini* (Rome: Istituto Risorgimento, 1965), 47-57; David Vincent, *The Culture of Secrecy, Britain 1832-1998* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Salvo Mastellone, *Mazzini and Marx. Thoughts upon Democracy in Europe*.

he, if I have ever seen one such, is a man of genius and virtue, a man of sterling veracity, humanity, and nobleness of mind, one of those rare men, numerable unfortunately but as units in this world, who are worthy to be called martyr-souls; who, in silence, piously in their daily life, understand and practise what is meant by that. Of Italian democracies and young Italy's sorrows, of extraneous Austrian Emperors in Milan, or poor old chimerical Popes in Bologna, I know nothing, and desire to know nothing; but this other thing I do know, and can here declare publicly to be a fact, which fact that all of us that have occasion to comment on Mr. Mazzini and his affairs may do well to take along with us, as a thing leading towards new clearness, and not towards new additional darkness, regarding him and them.

Whether the extraneous Austrian Emperor and miserable old chimera of a Pope shall maintain themselves in Italy, or be obliged to decamp from Italy, is not a question in the least vital to Englishmen. But it is a question vital to us that sealed letters in an English post-office be, as we all fancied they were, respected as things sacred; that opening of men's letters, a practice near to kin to picking men's pockets, and to other still viler and far fataler forms of scoundrelism, be not resorted to in England, except in cases of the very last extremity. When some new Gunpowder Plot be in the wind, some double-dyed high treason, or imminent national wreck not avoidable otherwise, then let us open letters: not till then. To all Austrian Kaisers and such like, in their time of trouble, let us answer, as our fathers from of old have answered: --Not by such means is help here for you. Such means, allied to picking of pockets and viler forms of scoundrelism, are not permitted in this country for your behoof. The right hon. Secretary does himself detest such, and even he is afraid to employ them. He dare not: it would be dangerous for him! All British men that might chance to come in view of such a transaction, would incline to spurn it, and trample on it, and indignantly ask him, what he meant by it!

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,
 Thomas Carlyle,
 Chelsea, June 18.¹¹⁵

In a number of ways Carlyle's letter is a very public and open version of a letter of introduction, but it is also much more than this. The letter written to *The Times* is simultaneously very public—and obviously so, being published in one of the major periodicals in England—but it is also a very personal endorsement of an individual, and in this case, an exile, and a revolutionary. The first intent stated by Carlyle is “to certify,” therefore to provide, through a written document—his letter—printed on a widely read

¹¹⁵ Thomas Carlyle, *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, ed. Charles Richard Sanders, Vol. 18. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1970, 72-74.

newspaper, a certification, a guarantee not of the identity of Mazzini, but of his connections, his established relations in England. The written document functions as a certification of the personal acquaintance, reinforcing at the same time the strong authority of Carlyle, who calls himself to testify about Mazzini, as being one of the “various competent persons.” Before declaring Mazzini’s virtues, Carlyle establishes his own personal knowledge of the man: “I have had the honour to know Mr. Mazzini for a series of years.” After that, Carlyle proceeds to “testify to all men” Mazzini’s worth. In a public letter that mirrors the debate occurred in the House of Commons about Mazzini’s private letters, the English literary personality certifies and testifies about the Italian exile, lending him a public defense. But this defense is conducted almost in spite of Mazzini himself. Carlyle, in fact, is authenticating Mazzini’s human merit incorporating him into a general community of worthy and moral individuals, well beyond the restrictions and limitations of national politics, and furthermore, well beyond Carlyle’s personal partiality, sympathies, and political inclinations, since he did not share Mazzini’s political visions. Therefore, the preliminary legitimization of the Italian exile lies on the human worth of Mazzini, on his being recognized by “all men” as a “man of genius and virtue, a man of sterling veracity [and] humanity,” without necessarily having to share his political creed or his republican projects. After having declared both his authority, and Mazzini’s inclusion in a circle of moral worth that contains both men, Carlyle moves away from the personal level, engaging next with the international political scene, and more precisely dismissing – while simultaneously faulting–the chaotic political situation in Italy: “Of Italian democracies and young Italy’s sorrows, of extraneous Austrian Emperors in Milan, or poor old chimerical Popes in Bologna, I know nothing, and desire to know nothing.” From the language and the tone used, it is perfectly

clear that Carlyle knows and has very strong opinions about the “extraneous Austrian Emperors” and the “old chimerical Popes,” but he rhetorically confines them to the side, and instead he draws attention to the term “extraneous.” In his evaluation, the politics of foreign entities, such as other empires and potentates, are of no consequence for England; on the contrary, what is important for him is the question of English national integrity, which lies in certain habits and institutions, and, in this specific instance, in the Post-Office: “it is a question vital to us that sealed letters in an English post-office be, as we all fancied they were, respected as things sacred.” “We”, “us” –that is Englishmen—distinguish themselves by maintaining the sacredness of each individual’s possession and document; if they are in an English post-office, then letters are sacred, and they very well should remain so by staying unopened and private. Nothing should induce to break the seals, except, (and there is an exception) when England itself is on the verge of some “imminent national wreck, not avoidable otherwise.” Only in the case of imminent national disruption, however that could be clearly identified, it is permissible to open letters.

Carlyle’s attempt at establishing a national protection and jurisdiction for letters is a remarkable effort in both trying to contain a form that is in its nature mobile, and also in defending a content that is in its direct relation with current affairs vulnerable: letters do cross national borders, and they lend themselves to being opened and violated, especially at times when the freedom of an individual and the liberal belief of his integrity and possessions, are in direct conflict with national and international politics.

Mazzini’s “opening letters affair” and Carlyle’s defense of these fleeting objects, are a clear example of what is at stake for people like Mazzini, and for the international circles of people interested –with different levels of involvement—in carrying on

political debates and decisions through epistolary exchanges: what is crucial are not only political and theoretical debates conducted in writing through epistolary exchanges, but also the significance, the restrictions and the consequences of these exchanges, especially when carried across the national and imperial borders. As Jane Carlyle commented to Fuller, when they were observing a conversation between Thomas Carlyle and Mazzini in 1846: “These are but opinions to Carlyle; but to Mazzini, who has given his all, and helped bring his friends to the scaffold, in pursuit of such subjects, it is a matter of life and death.”¹¹⁶

Mazzini was indeed so aware of the power and resonance of public letters, that he discussed the question of his having had his private mail opened in various articles [say where], and he also included some reflections about this episode in his edition of *Life and Writings of Joseph Mazzini*, establishing a chain of consequential events between the breaking of his private letters and the execution of a group of Italian patriots, Attilio and Emilio Bandiera and others, who, in June 1844, organized a raid in the Calabrian coast in the south of Italy, trying to help the population rebel against the Bourbon rule. In his biographical recollections, Mazzini explains in detail how he resorted to various contrivances in order to gather evidence of the breaking of his letters’ seals, rendering the letters an even more complex system of signification: “letters directed to my name were posted, containing grains of sand, poppy seeds, or fine hair, and so folded that the sand, the seed, or the hairs could not fall out unless the letters were opened.”¹¹⁷ If the letters contained organic material, they were already carrying vital information, which was then stolen by the British officials. Mazzini continued: “Many of the letters addressed to me

¹¹⁶Hudspeth, *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, vol. 4, 249.

¹¹⁷G. Mazzini, *Life and Writings of Joseph Mazzini*, vol. 3, Autobiographical and Political, a New Edition (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1905), 188.

which were opened at that time were concerning the proposed expedition of the brothers Bandiera – which I reprehended and opposed – and the revelations thus made suggested to the Neapolitan government the atrocious scheme of promoting the execution of their design, and luring them on, for the purpose of destroying them. The English ministers had made themselves accomplices in that murder.”¹¹⁸ Whether the connection between the opening of Mazzini’s letters and the Bandiera brothers’ demise is historically accurate or not¹¹⁹, it is certainly profoundly significant of the private import of the information contained in letters, especially when they deal with riots and rebellions, organized transnationally. Letters then, protected or vulnerable, opened or sealed are, for the revolutionaries in 1840s Europe, not only the symbols of the mobility of ideals, but also the unwilling vehicles of matters of life and death.

¹¹⁸ G. Mazzini, *Life and Writings of Joseph Mazzini*, vol. 3, 192.

¹¹⁹ Mazzini sent a letter regarding this affair to the editors of the *Morning Chronicle*, published in the February 13, 1846 issue.

Chapter 4

“A Naturalized Yankee”: Emerson, Carlyle, and the Epistolary Construction of a Transnational Public

When reading the correspondences of some of the transcendentalists in the early 1830s, one cannot fail to notice the preponderance of German literature and philosophy, along with the frequent appearances of Thomas Carlyle. The Scottish writer, for example, is mentioned by Margaret Fuller in her letter to James F. Clarke, dated August 7, 1832, in the context of her current German readings.¹²⁰ During the 1830s Carlyle’s essays were also discussed in the American magazines, and while Timothy Walker from the pages of the *North American Review* in 1831 attacked the anonymously published “The Signs of the Times,”¹²¹ a few years later, James Freeman Clarke, in *The Western Messenger* praised the effects that Carlyle had on the New England cultural life: “For ourselves, we hardly know how to describe the feelings with which we first perused his articles in some old numbers of the Foreign Reviews which we happened upon, one day, in the Boston Athenaeum. There was a freshness and unworn life in all he said, new and profound views of familiar truths, which seemed to open a vista for endless reflection.”¹²² The direct influence that Carlyle exercised on the transcendental movement, and specifically on some of its interpreters, has often been observed.¹²³ In the current study I would like

¹²⁰ Margaret Fuller to James F. Clarke (August 7, 1832): “Perhaps I shall talk to you about Körner, but need not write. He charms me, and has become a fixed star in the heaven of my thought; but I understand all that he excites perfectly. I felt very *new* about Novalis, –‘the good Novalis,’ as you call him after Mr. Carlyle. He is, indeed, *good*, most enlightened, yet most pure: every link of his experience framed –no, *beaten* –from the tried gold.” Hudspeth, *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, vol. 1, 178 (italics in original).

¹²¹ The essay “The Signs of the Times” appeared in *The Edinburgh Review* in June 1829. Timothy Walker’s article appeared with the title “Defence of Mechanical Philosophy” in *The North American Review*, 33, 72 (July 1831): 122-126.

¹²² James Freeman Clarke, “Thomas Carlyle, the German Scholar,” *The Western Messenger Devoted to Religion, Life, and Literature*, 4, 6 (February 1838), 418.

¹²³ See, for instance, Barbara Packer’s section on “Carlyle and the Beginnings of American Transcendentalism” in “The Transcendentalists,” *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, vol. 2,

to address a specific aspect of this connection, namely how the private relationship and correspondence between Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson helped Emerson to conceive of a transnational public for the Scottish writer. While in the other chapters the concept of public indicated mostly a sphere of action where ideas about the nation could be conceived and discussed, in this chapter I will reflect mainly on the public as the projection that an author creates of an imagined audience, and how this audience is often linked to national questions. By observing some of the letters exchanged by the two authors, I will show how Emerson, in his epistolary exchange with Carlyle, engaged in the operation of building a transnational readership for the Scottish author, based on a community of elected spirits, hence challenging the idea that a writer's ideal audience consists of members of his own nation. Emerson, therefore, by expressing the idea that America is the ideal readership, collapsed the concept of national and international: America, as the audience of the future, is already the ideal public for Carlyle.

As many critics have remarked, Emerson played a peculiar part in Carlyle's American career: not only did Emerson become an expounder of Carlyle's ideas within his own transcendentalist circle, but he also took upon himself the task of finding publishing venues for the Scottish author, orchestrating a republication of his writings for the American public. The concept of republication is crucial here, as it entails both the practical work of reprinting, and the more diffused activity of rendering more public the writings of a foreign author, thus also implying an implicit or explicit search for suitable audiences.¹²⁴ Similarly to the cultural work done by translations, but without undergoing

Prose Writing, 1820-1865, Sacvan Bercovitch ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 362-375; Barbara Packer, "Forgiving the Giver: Emerson, Carlyle, Thoreau" in John T. Lysaker and William Rossi, eds., *Emerson and Thoreau: Figures of Friendship* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 33-50.

¹²⁴ See Meredith McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

the radical mediating work of shifting from one language to another, reprinting is a process through which foreign, or out-of-print texts (hence marginal to or outside of the public arena) are presented to the public. The venture of reprinting offers to a foreign text (generated in a specific cultural climate, but close enough to another, to be interesting to at least a part of a local readership) the opportunity to be introduced to a new audience that could be interested in it.

Republication, in this specific case, also evokes the process through which some things of the public (in this case texts written by a British author, and their public existence in relation to audiences), acquire a political connotation -- in a wider sense--, moving from the more private circles of personal relations to the open spheres of publicness. As Henry James observed,¹²⁵ the specifics about the reprinting of Carlyle's works in the United States are not to be overlooked. Emerson's editorial enterprise is in fact a useful focal point, because the editorial dealings between the two authors shed light on Carlyle and Emerson's constant involvement and their interest in a specific aspect of the public arena, that is the formation of an audience. By reading their letters, it becomes clear that in their writings to each other, a level of familiarity¹²⁶ and intimacy coexisted together with a keen attention toward the public, the literary world, and the political domain. It is probably this peculiar imbrication of a number of levels of public that

¹²⁵ "Many of the early [letters between Emerson and Carlyle] are occupied with the question of the republication of Carlyle's writings in America. Emerson took upon himself to present "Sartor Resartus" and some of its successors to the American public, and he constantly reports to the author upon the progress of his enterprise. He transmits a great many booksellers' accounts as well as a considerable number of bills of exchange, and among the American publishers is a most faithful and zealous representative of his friend. Some of these details, which are very numerous, are tedious; but they are interesting at the same time, and Mr. Norton has done well to print them all. In the light of the present relations of British authors to the American public, they are curious reading. There appears to have been a fortunate moment (it was not of long duration) when it was possible for the British author to reap something of harvest here." Henry James, Jr. "The Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson," *The Century Illustrated Magazine*, June 1883, 26, 2, 267. This is a review of *The Correspondence of Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson. 1834-1872*. edited by Charles Eliot Norton (Boston: J.R.Osgood and Co., 1883).

allowed them not only to transact business (organizing the publication of the other writer's works, and transmitting him the profits), but also to maintain a communication despite their divergences and their soliloquies. When, for example, Carlyle addressed Emerson in a letter written in May 1853, after periods of intermittent silences, he assured his correspondent of the privileged position he still occupied: "Dear Emerson, The sight of your handwriting was a real blessing to me, after so long an abstinence. You shall not know all the sad reflexions [sic] I have made upon your silence within the last year. I never doubted your fidelity of heart ... I have not many voices to commune with in the world. In fact I have properly no voice at all; and yours, I have often said, was the unique among my fellow creatures, from which came full response, and discourse of reason."¹²⁷ Emerson remains a voice present for Carlyle, despite the distance and the occasional silences. Only through letters could the writers indulge in a level of irregularity that guaranteed the freedom to "commune," even when lapses of times had intervened, because letters would always convey the material closeness of the correspondent, and the sight of handwriting would evoke familiarity despite the distance in space and ideas.

The shared space of their private correspondence became the ideal locus where Emerson and Carlyle could debate their ideas and interventions in the spheres of the political and the public, and where they could plan the various forms of their exposure to the public (publishing and lecturing, for example). Parallel to the constant talk about republishing, Emerson maintained a similar conversation about lecturing, trying to convince Carlyle of the feasibility of lecturing in the United States, and many times Carlyle seemed to contemplate that possibility, as he claimed in 1835: "Lecturing (or I

¹²⁶ For the use of the term "familiar," in the context of epistolary writing, see note 3 in chapter 1.

¹²⁷ Joseph Slater, ed. *The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 488.

would rather it were Speaking) is a thing I have always had some hankering after: it seems to me I could really Swim in that element, were I once thrown into it: that in fact it would develop several things in me, which struggle violently for development.”¹²⁸

Eventually Carlyle never traveled to the United States, and never lectured there, but because of the options always maintained open in their correspondence, the two writers could on the one hand, speculate about the unrealized possibility of Carlyle traveling and lecturing in the U.S.; on the other hand pragmatically plan and realize the project of reprinting his works.

Emerson was first attracted to Carlyle because he conveyed a confidence in what Emerson defined “our principles.” When he still did not know that he was referring to Thomas Carlyle, on October 1, 1832 Emerson observed in his journal: “I am cheered and instructed by this paper on Corn Law Rhymes in the Edinburgh by my Germanick new-light writer whoever he be. He gives us confidence in our principles. He assures the truthlover everywhere of sympathy. Blessed art that makes books and so joins me to that stranger by this perfect railroad.”¹²⁹ Despite the specificity of his topic, Emerson found that the writer was addressing “the truthlover everywhere.” Carlyle was addressing both a limited audience (truthlovers were not the totality of the readers) and one that was very dispersed (they could reside everywhere). Since his first reading Carlyle’s essays Emerson believed that the British author could address the only group of men (the truthlovers) worthy being addressed. Therefore, from his first reading Carlyle, Emerson imagines a chosen audience, not bounded nationally, but circumscribed by its intentions and desires.

¹²⁸ Slater, *The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle*, 117.

Once the identity of this “Germanick new light writer” was revealed, Emerson included Carlyle in the list of personalities to be visited during his European travels in 1833, and after their encounter in Scotland in the summer, Emerson initiated a long correspondence with the Scottish author.

From the very beginning of their correspondence Emerson engaged Carlyle in questions concerning literary style and the relations with possible audiences. Emerson’s first letter is a long piece where, while paying homage to Carlyle’s literary stature, he did not shy away from some explicit criticism concerning Carlyle’s unique style.

I will now present the letter in its entirety, and then I will examine its various parts:

Boston, Massachusetts 14 May, 1834

My dear Sir,

There are some purposes we delay long to execute simply because we have them more at heart than others, and such an one had been for many weeks I may say months my design in writing you an Epistle.

Some chance wind of Fame blew your name to me perhaps two years ago as the author of papers which I had already distinguished, (as indeed it was very easy to do,) from the mass of English periodical Criticism as by far the most original and profound essays of the day the works of a man of Faith as well as Intellect sportive as well as learned and who belonging to the despairing and deriding class of philosophers was not ashamed to hope and to speak sincerely. Like somebody in Wilhelm Meister, I said, this person has come under obligation to me and to all whom he has enlightened. He knows not how deeply I should grieve at his fall if in that exposed England where genius always hears the devil’s whisper ‘All these kingdoms will I give thee,’ –his virtue also should be an initial growth to put off with age. When therefore I found myself in Europe I went to your house only to say ‘Faint not –the word you utter is heard though in the ends of the earth and by humblest men; it works, prevails.’ Drawn by strong regard to one of my teachers I went to see his person and as he might say his environment at Craigenputtock. Yet, it was to fulfill my duty, to finish my mission, not with much hope of gratifying him; in the Spirit of ‘If I love you what is that to you?’ Well, it happened to me that I was delighted with my visit, justified to myself in my respect, and many a time upon the Sea in my homeward voyage I remembered

¹²⁹ Emerson here is referring to Carlyle’s “Corn Law Rhymes,” *The Edinburgh Review*, 55 (July 1832), 338-361. See R.W. Emerson, *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Vol. IV, ed. Alfred R. Ferguson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 45.

with joy the favored condition of my lonely philosopher, –his happiest wedlock, his fortunate temper, his steadfast simplicity, his all means of happiness not that I had the remotest hope he should so far depart from his theories as to expect happiness. On my arrival at home I rehearsed to several attentive ears what I had seen and heard, and they with joy received it.

In Liverpool I wrote to Mr. Fraser to send me his Magazine and I have now received four numbers of the Sartor Resartus for whose light, thanks evermore. I am glad that one living scholar is self-centred and will be true to himself though none ever were before; who, as Montaigne says, ‘puts his ear close by himself, and holds his breath, and listens.’ And none can be offended with the self subsistency of one so catholic and jocund. And ‘tis good to have a new eye inspect our mouldy social forms, our politics, and schools, and religion. I say *our*, for it cannot have escaped you that a lecture upon these topics written for England may be read to America. Evermore thanks for the brave stand you have made for Spiritualism in these writings. But has literature any parallel to the oddity of the vehicle chosen to convey this treasure. I delight in the contents, the form which my defective apprehension for a joke makes me not appreciate I leave to your merry discretion. And yet, did ever wise and philanthropic author use so defying a diction? As if society were not sufficiently shy of truth without providing it beforehand with an objection to the form. Can it be that this humour proceeds from a despair of finding a contemporary audience and so the Prophet feels at liberty to utter his message in droll sounds. Did you not tell me, Mr Thomas Carlyle, sitting upon one of your broad hills, that it was Jesus Christ built Dunscore kirk yonder. If you love such sequences, then admit, as you will, that no poet is sent into the world before his time; that all the departed thinkers and actors have paved your way; that (at least, when you surrender yourself) nations and ages do guide your pen, yes and common goose-quills as well as your diamond graver. Believe then that harp and ear are formed by one revolution of the wheel; that men are waiting to hear your Epical Song; and so be pleased to skip those excursive involved glees, and give us the simple air, without the volley of variations. At least in some of your prefaces you should give us the theory of your rhetoric. I comprehend not why you should lavish in that spendthrift style of yours Celestial truths. Bacon and Plato have something too solid to say than that they can afford to be humorists. You are dispensing that which is rarest, namely, the simplest truths –truths which lie next to Consciousness and which only the Platos and Goethes perceive. I look for the hour with impatience when the vehicle will be worthy of the spirit when the word will be as simple and so as resistless as the thought, and in short when your words will be one with things. I have no hope that you will find suddenly a large audience. Says not the sarcasm ‘Truth hath the plague in his house.’ Yet all men are *potentially* (as Coleridge would say) your audience and if you will not in very Mephistophelism repel and defy them, shall be actually and whatever the great or the small may say about the charm of diabolism a true and majestic genius can afford to despise it.

I venture to amuse you with this homiletic criticism because it is the sense of uncritical truth seekers to whom you are no more than Hecuba, whose instincts assure them that there is Wisdom in this grotesque teutonic apocalyptic strain of yours, but that tis hence hindered in its effect. And though with all my heart I would stand well with my Poet, yet if I offend, I shall quietly retreat into my

Universal relations wherefrom I affectionately espy you as a man, myself as another.

And yet before I come to the end of my letter I may repent of my temerity and unsay my charge. For are not all our circlets of will as so many little eddies rounded in by the great circle of Necessity and *could* the Truth-Speaker perhaps now the best Thinker of the Saxon race, have written otherwise? And must not we say that Drunkenness is a virtue rather than that Cato has erred.

I wish I could gratify you with any pleasing news of the regeneration, education, prospects of man in this Continent. But your philanthropy is so patient so farsighted that present evils give you less solicitude. In the last six years Government in the United States has been fast becoming a job, like great Charities. A most unfit person in the Presidency has been doing the worst things and the worse he grew the more popular. Now things seem to mend. Webster, a good man and as strong as if he were a sinner, begins to find himself the Centre of a great and enlarging party and his eloquence incarnated and enacted by them. Yet men have not hope that the Majority shall be suddenly unseated. I send herewith a volume of Websters that you may see his Speech on Foots Resolutions, a speech which the Americans have never done praising. I have great doubts whether the book reaches you, as I know not my agents. I shall put with it the little book of my Swedenborgian druggist, of whom I told you. And if, which is hardly to be hoped, any good book should be thrown out of our vortex of trade and politics, I shall not fail to give it the same direction.

I need not tell you, my dear Sir, what a pleasure a letter from you would give me when you have a few moments to spare to so remote a friend. If any word in my letter should provoke you to a reply, I shall rejoice in my sauciness. I am spending the summer in the country, but my address is 'Boston, care of Barnard, Adams, and Co.' Care of O. Rich London. Please to make my affectionate respects to Mrs. Carlyle whose kindness I shall always gratefully remember. I depend upon her intercession to insure your writing to me. May God grant you both his best blessing. Your friend,
R. Waldo Emerson.¹³⁰

Although Emerson's main objective in his letter was to address Carlyle's style and the relation between such style and possible audiences, he touched upon a series of points. First of all Emerson retraced the story of their acquaintance, reminding Carlyle of his uniqueness: from the mass of English periodical criticism that more or less regularly arrived to the American shores, Emerson (as few other Americans did), singled out some

¹³⁰ Slater, *The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle*, 97-101 (italics in original).

writings that he deemed original and profound, hence different from the rest of the publications that came his way.¹³¹

By 1834, when Emerson sent his first letter, Carlyle had published essays¹³² in the *Edinburgh Review*, *Foreign Review*, and *Fraser's Magazine*, and all his publications appeared—as it was customary at the time—anononymously. Two of his major essays, for example, “Signs of the Times” and “Characteristics,” appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* as reviews of books recently published, and they might have not been immediately perceived by the common reader as specifically written by a famous essayist: only Carlyle’s severe tone and his vivid language could render them recognizable to an attentive readership. Even the serially published *Sartor Resartus* was presented in *Fraser's Magazine* without any open indication about its author’s identity, and with intervals in the regularity of its publication.¹³³ In this volatile context, where only “some chance wind of fame” could carry an author’s name, Emerson decided to meet Carlyle on the ground of writing (after having already met him in person, when Emerson went to visit him in Scotland), resolving to establish a dialogue beyond the anonymous literary world. Emerson’s first letter is as important as was the personal visit he paid to Carlyle:

¹³¹ For a debate about Thomas Carlyle’s early popularity in the U.S., see William Silas Vance, “Carlyle in America Before ‘Sartor Resartus,’” *American Literature*, vol. 7, 4 (1936): 363-75; and George Kummer, “Anonymity and Carlyle’s Early Reputation in America,” *American Literature*, vol. 8, 3 (1936): 297-99.

¹³² Some of his publications before 1834 included *Life of Friedrich Schiller* (1825), a translation of Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* (1824), “Signs of the Times,” *Edinburgh Review*, 49 (June 1829), 439-59; “Characteristics,” *Edinburgh Review*, 54 (December 1831), 351-83. *Sartor Resartus* began to be published serially in *Fraser’s Magazine* in 1833.

¹³³ Rodger Tarr in his introduction to the authoritative edition of *Sartor Resartus*, argues that the choice of publishing a literary portrait of Thomas Carlyle—both a drawing and a literary vignette—previous to *Sartor Resartus* in *Fraser’s Magazine*, was a tribute to the widening literary fame of the author. In fact in the June 1833 issue of *Fraser’s Magazine*, it “appeared a pencil drawing of Carlyle by Daniel Maclise and a description of Carlyle by Maginn. The description is revealing, for it is a parody of the subject, style, language and *Sartor Resartus*.” Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, “Introduction,” ed. Rodger L. Tarr, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), lxxiv. The presentation of a portrait of Carlyle can be certainly regarded as a sign of his burgeoning popularity, but I am more interested in noticing that it was especially his style and his language to be considered as unmistakable signs of his writing.

in that letter Emerson did not only represent the past encounter, but he also charged it with meanings and promises.

Anybody familiar with Emerson's style and diction will notice that by declaring that Carlyle's writing is distinguishable "as by far the most original and profound ... of the day" Emerson is paying Carlyle an important compliment and he is admitting him into his own personal pantheon. In his letter, Emerson suggested that he elected Carlyle as a private correspondent exactly because he recognized his stature and originality among the anonymously published criticism in the British magazines. He distanced Carlyle from the "mass," and ascribed him to a class of philosophers that being "despairing and deriding," did not probably encounter the favor of the above mentioned "mass."

By pointing out that his interest in Carlyle's writing has a history (he first read the essays, then he learned about its author, now he writes to that author) Emerson provided a framework to the account of their first meeting. According to Emerson's reconstruction of the event, the main reason he had for visiting Carlyle at Craigenputtock was to encourage him not to be distracted by England's materialistic sirens and easy profits. Addressing Carlyle in a curious third person, Emerson writes: "He knows not how deeply I should grieve at his fall if in that exposed England where genius always hears the devil's whisper 'All these kingdoms will I give thee,--' his virtue also should be an initial growth put off with age." By evoking a possible downfall into materialistic snares, Emerson tries to convince Carlyle of the importance of keeping his integrity intact, without succumbing to what he considers a British national malaise.

In order to express his admiration, but especially with the intent of encouraging him, Emerson describes his decision to break into the monotony of Carlyle's secluded life:

When therefore I found myself in Europe I went to your house only to say 'Faint not – the word you utter is heard though in the ends of the earth and by humblest men; it works, prevails.' Drawn by strong regard to one of my teachers I went to see his person and as he might say his environment at Craigenputtock.

Emerson's description is a way to transport the meeting between him and Carlyle outside of everyday temporality, and to charge it with teleological meaning. His tone here is unironically patronizing, and while he expresses encouraging words, he tailors for himself the role of the champion, the moral supporter who reminds Carlyle not to fall under the devil's temptation. Shifting from the familiar second person ("I went to your house") to the third person ("I went to see his person"), Emerson uses the expression "drawn by strong regard to one of my teachers," as if he was not addressing that very teacher in his letter, but describing instead the event to a third person who was not present at that time. The emphatic tone, the use of the reported speech, and the distance posed by the use of the third person pronoun, all contribute to make this piece of writing something different from a mere account of a meeting between the two writers. Everything speaks instead of an extraordinary moment, of a rescue from solitude, of a pivotal step in the career of Thomas Carlyle.

In Emerson's account, the encounter of the two writers did not belong to the quotidian reality and to casual circumstances, but it rose to an ulterior level. By commenting so incisively on Carlyle's career, Emerson wanted to leave a permanent sign with his narrative. Away from the homogeneity of the masses, the American author reproduced in his familiar letter the protected isolation of their first meeting, and offered to Carlyle a meaningful role in the literary and cultural landscape of the time. He wanted

to reassure him about the existence of an audience, made of the humblest men, who were reading his works, and listening to his intimations from the ends of the earth. Of course, in Emerson's mind, those faraway places were the regions of New England, near his home, where Carlyle was having some recognition and success, and where his essays were being circulated.¹³⁴

From his first letter, Emerson painted a picture of an inhospitable British public sphere for Carlyle, a milieu where his work did not find the appreciation and conversation it deserved, and where Carlyle's prophetic scrutiny of his current age was mostly lost on his audience. Opposing the corrupted British context to the humble American readers, Emerson intended to assure Carlyle that his small American audience was made of faithful disciples, who, despite the distance ("the word you utter is heard though in the ends of the earth") were able to hear. The picture is complete when Carlyle, once again referred to in the third person, assumes an epic and heroic status, and becomes a latter-day Cincinnatus, a self-sufficient "lonely philosopher": "I remembered with joy the favored condition of my lonely philosopher, --his happiest wedlock, his fortunate temper, his steadfast simplicity, his all means of happiness not that I had the remotest hope he should so far depart from his theories as to expect happiness." If his public is distant, the "lonely philosopher" is aloof in his bucolic simplicity, and his theories are not to be bartered with aspirations of happiness. Nonetheless, Emerson is consistent in affirming that on the one hand there already existed a circle of people who were interested in hearing about Carlyle, and to whom Emerson reported when he returned from his travels; on the other hand, Carlyle's critiques were as valid in the United States,

¹³⁴ Leon Jackson documented Carlyle's early networks of readers in his "The Social Construction of Thomas Carlyle's New England Reputation," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, 106

as they were pertinent to England. Therefore, in Emerson's vision, there was already compatibility between Carlyle's analyses and a group of people in New England capable of listening.

After providing a positive overlook, Emerson continued his letter with sharp admonitions, expressing his perplexity about Carlyle's style in regards to the first four installments of *Sartor Resartus* that appeared in *Fraser's Magazine*:¹³⁵

Evermore thanks for the brave stand you have made of Spiritualism in these writings. But has literature any parallel to the oddity of the vehicle chosen to convey this treasure. I delight in the contents, the form which my defective apprehension for a joke makes me not appreciate I leave to your merry discretion. And yet, did ever wise and philanthropic author use so defying a diction? As if society were not sufficiently shy of truth without providing it beforehand with an objection to the form. Can it be that this humour proceeds from a despair of finding a contemporary audience and so the Prophet feels at liberty to utter his message in droll sounds.

Emerson is at a loss in trying to comprehend the tone and framework of *Sartor Resartus*, along with its playfulness: the diction is "defying," the vehicle is odd, and the message is conveyed in "droll sounds." For Emerson form and contents have to coincide, and while he delights in the contents, he cannot appreciate the form of *Sartor Resartus*. Emerson is clearly perplexed by the jocosity and the intricate levels of signification of the work. Since language, according to Emerson, is the perfect expression of spiritual facts¹³⁶

(1996): 165-89; and also in his "The Reader Retailored: Thomas Carlyle, His American Audiences, and the Politics of Evidence," *Book History*, 2.1 (1999): 146-172.

¹³⁵ Emerson is commenting on Book I (published in the 1833 issues of *Fraser's Magazine*), which contains all the preliminary introduction and presentations –supposedly prepared by the editor –of the protagonist, Herr Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, Professor of Things in General. In the serial form the only title was *Sartor Resartus*. The phrase "The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh" was added in the first British edition of 1838.

¹³⁶ In his early work *Nature*, published anonymously in 1836, in the section "Language," Emerson discussed language providing a system of equations:

1. Words are signs of natural facts.
2. Particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts.
3. Nature is the symbol of spirit."

Further on, he clarifies: "A man's power to connect his thought with its proper symbol, and so to utter it, depends on the simplicity of his character, that is, upon his love of truth, and his desire to communicate

he is afraid that the irony employed by Carlyle is an intervening strategy that creates distance and that does not allow the necessary perception of correspondences and unity. Emerson's perplexity was probably caused by the indefinable structure of *Sartor Resartus*, and by the irony that constantly engaged the reader. In general, Emerson was not completely averse to the use of the comic. On the contrary, in his essay on "The Comic," he considers that "the perception of the comic is a tie of sympathy with other men, a pledge of sanity, and a protection from those perverse tendencies and gloomy insanities, in which fine intellects sometimes lose themselves."¹³⁷ But Emerson also advocated a clear understanding of the joke or the pun, a moment of clarity marked by a shared laugh, and some of his thoughts about the comic seem to be pertinent to Carlyle's figure: "Reason does not joke, and men of reason do not; a prophet, in whom the moral sentiment predominates, or a philosopher, in whom the love of truth predominates, these do not joke, but they bring the standard, the ideal whole, exposing all actual defect; and hence the best of all jokes is the sympathetic contemplation of things by the understanding from the philosopher's point of view."¹³⁸ The critique Emerson expressed towards Carlyle regards the disconnection between the topic treated and the tone and diction employed. For Emerson, Carlyle's diction is too removed from the contents expressed; Carlyle's curious style confounds the perfect system of symbols that should generate language: the vehicle is at odds with the contents it carries. Instead of providing

it without loss. The corruption of man is followed by the corruption of language." R. W. Emerson, "Nature". *Essays & Lectures*, Ed. Joel Porte (New York: The Library of America, 1983), 20, 22.

¹³⁷ "The Comic" was first delivered as a lecture in 1839, then published in *The Dial* in 1843. See R. W. Emerson, "The Comic," *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Centenary Edition. Letters and Social Aims*. Vol. 8. Ed. Edward Waldo Emerson. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1904), 162.

Julie Ellison in her article "The Laws of Ice: Emerson's Irony and 'The Comic'" claims that "overtly ironic passages play a crucial role in the dynamics of [Emerson's] essays, where they represent 'spasms' of protest against the serenity of the moral faculty" p. 73 Ellison places Emerson's ideas about the comic within the philosophical romantic tradition, where "irony is a critical mode that introduces conflict into

the reader with a “sympathetic contemplation of things,” the prophet Carlyle confounds his audience.

It is also interesting that Emerson attributed Carlyle’s writing style to a lack of a contemporary audience: “can it be that this humour proceeds from a despair of finding a contemporary audience and so the Prophet feels at liberty to utter his message in droll sounds.” Differently from what irony should usually establish (a level of complicity in a part of the audience, a series of complicit nods between the author and some readers, often at the expenses of another group or groups of readers, through which the readers will partake of a more profound understanding of the text or the situation), Emerson believes that just the opposite occurred: postulating the absence of an audience (complicit or not), the author gave free rein to his most bizarre creative power. Of course the author in question – Carlyle--is a “prophet,” thus having a moral and historical responsibility that regards his tone and style, and not only the contents.

The question of the relation between an author (in this case Carlyle) and his audience takes center stage and becomes a crucial topic discussed in the epistolary correspondence between the two authors. According to Emerson, the public is a controlling and restraining force, and only the existence of a perfect communication—a direct correspondence – between an audience and its prophet can guarantee the clarity of the prophet’s message. However, it should be noted, that the absence of an audience does not demean Carlyle’s status, –he still remains a prophet— but it certainly renders his message incomprehensible.

prose.” Julie Ellison, “The Laws of Ice: Emerson’s Irony and ‘The Comic,’” *ESQ, A Journal of the American Renaissance*, 30, 2 (1984): 73-82.

¹³⁸ R.W. Emerson, “The Comic,” 159.

Emerson's musings over authors, literary styles and audiences did not end here. Immediately after, in the next paragraph in fact, Emerson posed another possibility: maybe the disconnection between the author and his public was caused by the very complicated style used by that writer. After having granted Carlyle an external, unfavorable circumstance as an excuse for his baffling style, Emerson confronted him once again more directly, making him accountable for the absence of an audience: the audience was there, but Carlyle did not see it. Emerson, therefore, tried to reverse the logic so far advanced, and suggested that Carlyle was indeed attuned to his era, and his work was somehow in harmony with the historical and cultural climate, only he did not recognize it yet. Carlyle could indeed rightly occupy the position of bard of the age, if only – says Emerson— he could simplify his language:

admit, as you will, that no poet is sent to the world before his time ...
Believe then that harp and ear are formed by one revolution of the wheel;
that men are waiting to hear your Epical Song; and so be pleased to skip
those excursive involved glees, and give us the simple air, without the
volley of variations.

After having called him “teacher” and “prophet” now Emerson starts to define Carlyle as a “poet,” describing his work as an “Epical Song,” thus inscribing Carlyle’s writing into a noble and exclusive genre, and a genre – epic—that perpetuates traditional lore. Emerson attempts to balance explicit criticism with diffused compliments, insisting that since Carlyle is already a bard *in nuce*, he has to believe in that one revolution of the wheel that would harmonize his harp to the ear of his public. The act of believing (“when you surrender yourself”) is already sufficient¹³⁹ in order to acquire the status of poet. For this reason, Emerson believes that his British friend will have to surrender himself to

¹³⁹ See Myra Jehlen, *American Incarnation. The Individual, The Nation, The Continent* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), chapter 3 “Necessary and Sufficient Acts,” 76-122.

these possibilities, and should renounce “the volley of variations” that only obscures Celestial truths. The voice of the age is something one should not strive for, but acquire by surrender. In typical Emersonian fashion, achievements are not accomplished by agitated and repetitive actions (the “excursive involved glees” or “the volley of variations”) but through surrendering to the promise inherent not only in the self, but also in the relation with one’s age. As the only concession to Carlyle, Emerson advances the hypothesis that maybe Carlyle should consider having prefaces where “the theory of [his] rhetoric” could be explained.

The point Emerson makes in this passage is that there is a correspondence between an author (better yet, a “poet”) and his time, and that for this very reason “men are waiting to hear [his] Epical Song.” It is the poet’s task to be direct in his style and to use a simple language. Literary style should therefore be attuned to its contemporary audience because it is generated in the same milieu. By conflating expressions evoking a mythical past (Epical Song, nations and ages guiding pens and diamond gravers), with practical pieces of advice (using prefaces to explain his rhetoric), Emerson tries to convince Carlyle of two apparently contradictory aspects: on the one hand Carlyle is the “lonely philosopher,” distant from the masses, belonging to an Epic tradition, and alone in denouncing the diseases of the age; on the other hand his “diamond graver” is guided by nations and ages, and he has a public that could comprehend him.

In a later essay, “The Poet,” published in 1844, Emerson took up again this conception, and explained how the poet is both representative of his age, and somewhat isolated, because he possesses the soundest voice, and is capable of speaking that truth that other men only intuit vague glimpses of:

...for the poet is representative. He stands among partial men for the complete man, and apprises us not of his wealth, but of the commonwealth. The young man

reveres men of genius, because, to speak truly, they are more himself than he is. ... He is isolated among his contemporaries, by truth and by his art, but with this consolation in his pursuits, that they will draw all men sooner or later.¹⁴⁰

The poet is then not “partial” like other men, but he is the complete man, and he informs all other people of the common wealth, of the public (because shared by all) capabilities available to them. According to Emerson, the “common wealth,” the *public* good, does not lie in political actions, or social reforms, but it is revealed in the expressions of the poet, that are common and publicly available to everybody. Common wealth is another way to refer to the things of the public, and for Emerson it does not reside anywhere but in Nature.¹⁴¹ The project of making Carlyle more public involved the recognition and surrender on Carlyle’s part to be the poet of the age, and his willingness to speak the “common wealth,” and not some partisan matter using an obscure style.

In his letter, Emerson invests Carlyle with the important role of being a poet, of speaking his “celestial truths” so that men can comprehend him. Emerson, in this passage, does not directly address the question of nationality, or national traditions, when he speaks of “nations and ages” guiding the pen of the poet. By defining Carlyle’s future work as an Epical Song, Emerson seems more inclined to inscribe him into a genre that, although reflecting specific historical and mythological traditions, can be appreciated by larger audiences. For this reason Emerson mentions “celestial truths” as the material Carlyle deals with, something transcendental that has nothing to do with the local, the specific, and the mundane.

¹⁴⁰ Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Poet,” *Essays & Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: The Library of America, 1983), 448.

¹⁴¹ In the “Introduction” to *Nature*, Emerson writes: “Philosophically considered, the universe is composed of Nature and the Soul. Strictly speaking, therefore, all that is separate from us, all which Philosophy distinguishes as the NOT ME, that is, both nature and art, all other men and my own body, must be ranked under this name, NATURE.” Emerson, “Nature,” 20.

Going back to Emerson's entreaties and suggestions about stylistic modifications, one has to pause and reflect on the matter of giving his audience the "simple air" —as Emerson phrases his advice to Carlyle: "give us the simple air, without the volley of variations" —, because the issue is not of easy resolution or immediate clarification. For one, Emerson cannot be regarded as a writer who favors simple language, if by simple language we mean a style that does not engage the reader in constantly interpreting the writer's sentences. In the passage quoted from Emerson's letter, there is scarcely a sentence that does not contain a metaphor: defining Carlyle as a poet who does not give simple air but celestial truths in excursive involved glees is not exactly transparent and straightforward. Simplicity for Emerson did not mean avoiding the metaphorical or symbolical levels of language, but on the contrary, it involved engaging the reader in looking at those ulterior, ideal levels of language, while maintaining a clear correspondence between the words and their meanings. Emerson probably regarded his own metaphorical complexity as different from Carlyle's "excursive involved glees," since these latter are moving too far from their origins. As he explained in "The Poet," poetic language is already forever present, one only needs to unveil it:

For poetry was all written before time was, and whenever we are so finely organized that we can penetrate into that region where the air is music, we hear those primal warblings, and attempt to write them down, but we lose ever and anon a word, or a verse, and substitute something of our own, and thus miswrite the poem. The men of more delicate ear write down these cadences more faithfully, and these transcripts, though imperfect, become the songs of the nations.¹⁴²

Not everybody is able to enter the "region where air is music," and even then, one might be tempted to "substitute something of [one's] own," allowing personal feelings

¹⁴² Emerson, "The Poet," 449.

and experiences to “miswrite the poem.” There really is nothing personal in poetry, according to Emerson, and poets don’t make the mistakes of transferring too much of themselves in their “transcripts.” When poems are finally transcribed, they become “the songs of the nations.” Probably Emerson thought that Carlyle lacked the fundamental faith in believing in a primordial state of perfect correspondence between the “primal warblings” and “the songs of the nations.”

Although some ideas about language expressed by Professor Teufelsdröckh in *Sartor Resartus* could be considered as similar to Emerson’s¹⁴³, the context where those ideas were suggested was defying for Emerson. While Keith Harris heightens the similar conceptions that Emerson and Carlyle shared about language, especially with reference to the centrality given to the metaphorical aspect of language,¹⁴⁴ I am more inclined to consider the different levels of metaphorical complexity Carlyle and Emerson seemed to favor. In *Sartor Resartus*, the constant play on language, and the different references (and etymologies) the words could direct the reader to, according to Emerson’s vision, probably undermine the stable systems of references on which metaphors are based. Even when Professor Teufelsdröckh describes language as all-metaphorical, he proceeds in a linguistic whirlwind, rather than an ordained system:

Language is called the Garment of Thought: however, it should rather be, Language is the Flesh-Garment, the Body, of Thought. I said that Imagination wove this Flesh-Garment; and does not she? Metaphors are her stuff: examine Language; what, if you except some few primitive elements (of natural sound), what is it all but Metaphors, recognised as such , or no longer recognised; still

¹⁴³ Carlyle claimed that he intended to write a “good Essay on Metaphors” and *Sartor Resartus* may be regarded as the fulfillment of that intention. See Thomas Carlyle, *Two Note Books of Thomas Carlyle: From 23rd March 1822 to 16th May 1832*, ed. Charles Eliot Norton (New York: Grolier Club, 1898), 142. G. B. Tennyson in his *Sartor Called Resartus. The Genesis, Structure, and Style of Thomas Carlyle’s First Major Work* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965) discussed Carlyle’s style and he describes it as “distinctly a 19th c. phenomenon,” (239) thus providing a cultural and historical context to his writing.

¹⁴⁴ Kenneth Marc Harris, *Carlyle and Emerson: Their Long Debate* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 21.

fluid and florid, or now solid-grown and colourless? If those same primitive elements are the osseous fixtures in the Flesh-Garment Language, --then are Metaphors its muscles and tissues and living integuments. An unmetaphorical style you shall in vain seek for: is not your very *Attention* a *Stretching-to*?¹⁴⁵

The density of the sentences, along with the overabundance of adjectives and the rhythm of the syntax distract the reader and conceal the clarity necessary to read the metaphors correctly. It seems that whereas Emerson maintained an unshakable faith in the promise inherent in language, Carlyle undermined the correspondences between the metaphorical level and the literal meaning with his overflowing prose.

In addition to the already radical demands for simplicity and clarity, Emerson requested Carlyle to provide the “theory of [his] rhetoric” in his prefaces, in order probably to offer another helping tool to those readers who could not make sense of some of Carlyle’s “spendthrift style.”

Emerson’s insistence on questions regarding language, literary style, and comprehensibility signal how those were exactly the places where the connection of the author with his era could be articulated, and where, consequently, changes and reform were possible. Carlyle, according to Emerson, was not yet in complete harmony with his age, and that’s why Emerson insisted on advocating simplicity and lack of resistance:

I look for the hour with impatience when the vehicle will be worthy of the spirit when the word will be as simple and so as resistless as the thought, and in short when your words will be one with things. I have no hope that you will find suddenly a large audience. Says not the sarcasm “Truth hath the plague in his house.” Yet all men are potentially ... your audience.

Although Emerson insists that literary language should be the place where “words [are] one with things,” he is far from promising that this perfect correspondence

¹⁴⁵ Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, Book I, Chapter XI, p. 128.

would grant any larger audience. At its best, it will reach the potential that is inherent in all men.

In his reply to Emerson's first letter (dated August 12, 1834) Carlyle did not seem to be taken aback by Emerson's perplexities and unsolicited advice, but responded enthusiastically to the missive from America. Once again I will quote the letter in its entirety in order to provide the tone, and then observe it in details:

5. Great Cheyne Row, Chelsea, London, August 12, 1834

My Dear Sir,

Some two weeks ago I received your kind gift from Fraser. To say that it was welcome would be saying little: is it not as a voice of affectionate remembrance, coming from beyond the Ocean waters, first decisively announcing for me that a whole New Continent *exists*, that I too have part and lot there! 'Not till we can think that here and there one is thinking of us, one is loving us, does this waste Earth become a peopled Garden.' Among the figures I can recollect as visiting our Nithsdale Hermitage, all like *Apparitions* now, bringing with them airs from Heaven or else blasts from the other region, there is perhaps not one of a more undoubtedly *supernal* character than yourself: so pure and still, with intents so charitable; and then vanishing too so soon into the azure Inane, as an Apparition should! Never has your Address in my Notebook met my eye but with a friendly influence. Judge if I am glad to know that there, in Infinite Space, you still hold by me.

I have read in both your Books, at leisure times; and now nearly finished the smaller one. He is a faithful thinker that Swedenborgian Druggist of yours, with really deep ideas, who makes me too pause and think, were it only to consider what manner of man *he* must be, and what manner of thing, after all, Swedenborgianism must be. 'Thro' the smallest window, look well and you can look out into the Infinite.' Webster also I can recognise: a sufficient, effectual man; whom one must wish well to, and prophecy well of. The sound of him is nowise poetic-rhythmic; it is clear, one-toned, you might say metallic, yet distinct, significant not without melody. In his face above all I discern that 'indignation,' which if it do not make 'verses,' makes *useful* way in the world—the higher such a man rises the better pleased I shall be. And so here, looking over the water, let me repeat once more what I believe is already dimly the sentiment of all Englishmen, Cisoceanic and Transoceanic, that we and you are *not* two countries, and cannot for the life of us be; but only two *parishes* of one country, with such wholesome parish hospitalities, and dirty temporary parish feuds, as we see; both of which brave parishes *vivant! vivant!* And among the glories of *both* be Yankee-doodle-doo, and the Felling of the Western Forest, proudly remembered; and for the rest, by way of parish-constable, let each cheerfully take

such George Washington or George Guelph as it can get, and bless Heaven! I am weary of hearing it said, 'we love the Americans,' 'we wish well' &c &c: what in God's name should we do else?

You thank me for *Teufelsdröckh*: how much more ought I to thank you for your hearty, genuine tho' extravagant acknowledgement of it! Blessed is the voice that amid dispiritment stupidity and contradiction proclaims to us: *Euge!* Nothing ever was more ungenial than the soil that poor Teufelsdröckhish seedcorn has been thrown on here; none cries, Good speed to it; the sorriest nettle or hemlock seed, one would think, had been more welcome. For indeed our British periodical critics, and especially the public of Fraser's Magazine (which I believe I have now done with) exceed all speech; require not even contempt, only oblivion. Poor Teufelsdröckh! Creature of mischance, miscalculation, and thousandfold obstruction! Here nevertheless he is, as you see; has struggled across the Stygian marshes, and now, as a stitched Pamphlet 'for Friends,' cannot be *burnt*, or lost—before his time. I send you one copy for your own behoof; three others you yourself can perhaps find fit readers for: as you spoke in the plural number, I thought there might be three; more would rather surprise me. From the British side of the water, I have met simply *one* intelligent response; clear, true, tho' almost enthusiastic as your own: my British Friend too is utterly a stranger, whose very name I know not, who did not print, but only write and to an *unknown* third party. Shall I say then: 'In the mouth of *two* witnesses'? In any case, God be thanked, I am done with it; can wash my hands of it, and send it forth; sure that the Devil will get his full share of it, and not a whit *more*, clutch as he may. But as for you, my Transoceanic Brothers, read this earnestly, for it *was* earnestly meant and written, and contains no *voluntary* falsehood of mine. For the rest if you dislike it, say that I wrote it four years ago, and could not now so write it, and on the whole (as Fritz the Only said) 'will do better another time.'— With regard to style and so forth, what you call your 'saucy' objections are not only most intelligible to me, but welcome and instructive. You say well that I take up that attitude because I have no known public, am *alone* under the Heavens, speaking into friendly or unfriendly Space; add only that I will not defend such attitude, that I call it questionable, tentative, and only the best that I in these mad times could conveniently hit upon. For you are to know, my view is that now at last we have lived to see all manner of Poeties and Rhetorics and Sermonics, and one may say generally all manner of *Pulpits* for addressing mankind from, as good as broken and abolished: alas, yes; if you have any earnest meaning, which demands to be not only listened to, but *believed* and *done*, you cannot (at least I cannot) utter it *there*, but the sound sticks in my throat, as when a Solemnity were *felt* to have become a Mummery; and so one leaves the pasteboard coulisses, and three Unities, and Blair['s] Lectures, quite behind; and feels only that there is *nothing sacred*, then, but the *Speech of Man* to believing Men! *This*, come what will, was, is and forever must be *sacred*; and will one day doubtless anew environ itself with fit Modes, with Solemnities that are *not* Mummeries. Meanwhile, however, is it not pitiable? For tho' Teufelsdröckh exclaims: 'Pulpit! Canst thou not *make* a pulpit, by simply *inverting the nearest tub*'; yet alas he does not sufficiently reflect that it is still only a *tub*, that the most inspired utterance will come from *it*, inconceivable, misconceivable to the million; questionable (not of *ascertained*

significance) even to the few. Pity us therefore; and with your just shake of the head join a sympathetic even a hopeful smile. Since I saw you, I have been trying, am still trying, other methods, and shall surely get nearer the truth, as I honestly strive for it. Meanwhile I know no method of much consequence, except that of *believing*, of being *sincere*: from *Homer* and the *Bible* down to the poorest Burns's *Song* I find no other *Art* that promises to be perennial.

But now quitting theoretics, let me explain, what you long to know, how it is that I date from London. Yes, my friend, it is even so: Craigenputtoch now stands solitary in the wilderness, with none but an old woman and foolish grouse-destroyers in it; and we for the last ten weeks, after a fierce universal disruption, are here with our household-gods. Censure not; I came to London for the best of all reasons: To seek bread and work. So it literally stands; and so do I literally stand with the hugest gloomiest Future before me, which in all sane moments I goodhumouredly defy. A strange element this; and I as good as an Alien in it. I care not for Radicalism, for Toryism, for Church, Tithes or the 'Confusion' of useful knowledge: much as I can speak and hear, I am alone, alone. My brave Father, now victorious from his toil, was wont to pray in evening worship: 'Might we say, We are not alone, for God is with us!' Amen! Amen!

I brought a *Ms.* with me of another curious sort; entitled the *Diamond Necklace*: perhaps it will be printed soon, as an Article or even as a separate Booklet; a *queer* production, which you shall see. Finally I am busy constantly studying with my whole might for a Book on the *French Revolution*. It is part of my creed that the only Poetry is History, could we tell it right. This truth (if it prove one) I have not yet got to the limitations of; and shall in no way except by *trying* it in practice. The story of the Necklace was the first attempt at an experiment.

My sheet is nearly done; and I have still to complain of you for telling me nothing of yourself except that you are in the Country. Believe that I want to know much and all. My Wife too remembers you with unmixed friendliness; bids me send you her kindest wishes. Understand too that your old Bed stands in a new room here, and the old welcome at the door. Surely we shall see you in London one day. Or who knows but Mahomet may go to the Mountain? It occasionally rises like a mad prophetic dream in me that I might end in the Western Woods! From Germany I get Letters, Messages and even visits; but now no tidings, no influences, of moment. Goethe's Posthumous Works are all published; and Radicalism (poor hungry, yet inevitable Radicalism!) is the order of the day. The like, and even more, from France Gustave d'Eichthal (did you hear?) has gone over to Greece, and become some kind of Manager under King Otho. Continue to love me, you and my other friends; and as Packets sail so swiftly let me know it frequently. All good be with you!

Most faithfully, T. Carlyle.

Coleridge, as you doubtless hear, is gone. How great a Possibility, how small a realized Result! They are delivering Orations about him, and emitting other kinds of Froth, *ut mos est*. What hurt can it do?¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ Slater, *The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle*, 101-6 (italics in original)

In his ebullient letter Carlyle immediately established a connection not only with Emerson but also with a slightly larger readership: “To say that it was welcome would be saying little: is it not as a voice of affectionate remembrance, coming from beyond the Ocean waters, first decisively announcing for me that a whole New Continent *exists*, that I too have part and lot there!”¹⁴⁷ Carlyle immediately grasped the significance (not only in terms of affection and friendship) implied in the existence of a “whole New Continent” for him. He stressed the similarities between their two countries, rather than focusing on the divergences: “let me repeat once more what I believe is already dimly the sentiment of all Englishmen, Cisoceanic and Transoceanic, that we and you are not two countries, and cannot for the life of us be; but only two parishes of one country with such wholesome parish hospitalities, and dirty temporary parish feuds.” Carlyle’s jocund and at times flattering tone dominates the whole letter, and is a sharp contrast to Emerson’s somewhat pompous stance. Setting the relation between British and Americans and also the personal correspondence between Emerson and himself in a parish-like context (with “parish hospitalities, and dirty temporary parish feuds”) is a striking difference from the epical setting and the austere tone chosen by Emerson in his first letter. Taking advantage of the possibilities granted by letter-writing, Carlyle seems willing to pick up certain trends that Emerson started in his letter, while letting go of others.

Although a few critics¹⁴⁸ have emphasized the insurmountable differences between Carlyle’s and Emerson’s political opinions, philosophical stances, and literary

¹⁴⁷Ibid., 101.

¹⁴⁸Henry James, in his review of the Carlyle – Emerson Correspondence wrote: “the temperament of the one was absolutely opposed to the temperament of the other.” Henry James, Jr. “The Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson,” *The Century Illustrated Magazine* 26, (June 1883): 269. Kenneth Mark Harris, in the only book-length study of the relation between Emerson and Carlyle to this date, speaks of a subterranean commonality, what he defines a “strain of irrationality,” but he also stresses how “[the great deep cleft that divided them] was visible from the first, and throughout their lives it grew deeper and wider.

styles, it is in their epistolary exchange that a constant, albeit feeble and tentative at times, discussion took place. In this sense their correspondence was the ideal venue for Carlyle and Emerson, since it did not force them into a strict and controlled exchange, but it provided a wide area of possibilities for them to be sketchy, incongruous, irregular and very often self-referential in their writing to one another. For example, in his letter Carlyle thanks Emerson for having acknowledged his *Sartor Resartus*, commenting very briefly on Emerson's critique about his style: "You thank me for Teufelsdröckh: how much more ought I to thank you for your hearty, genuine tho' extravagant acknowledgement of it!" But Carlyle was obviously more interested in lamenting the reception that his work had in England, and in fact he dedicated more space to this issue. The scarce popularity of *Sartor Resartus* obviously hurt Carlyle, and for this he blames the public, and especially the "ungenial soil," the uncongenial British milieu as the main causes of the obscure fate his work seems destined to:

Nothing ever was more ungenial than the soil this poor Teufelsdröckhish seedcorn has been thrown on here; none cries, Good speed to it: the sorriest nettle or hemlock seed, one would think, has been more welcome. For indeed our British periodical critics, and especially the public of Fraser's Magazine (which I believe I have now done with) exceed all speech; require not even contempt, only oblivion. Poor Teufelsdröckh! Creature of mischance, miscalculation, and thousandfold obstruction!.¹⁴⁹

According to Carlyle, his work did not fall among the ideal public, and the serial form (the installments of *Sartor Resartus* published in the past two years in *Fraser's Magazine*) failed to build an audience of faithful readers. Nevertheless, *Sartor Resartus* was reprinted in book form for a very restricted and friendly group (in that edition the title page bore the inscription "Reprinted for Friends from Fraser's Magazine") in the

But in a sense the cleft only serves to reveal the fundamental solidity of the bedrock." The metaphor of the deep cleft is taken from one of Carlyle's letters. Harris, *Carlyle and Emerson. Their Long Debate*, 2, 3.

scanty number of 58 copies. Out of these survived pamphlets, Carlyle sent four copies to Emerson with this letter, imagining a personal circulation¹⁵⁰ of his “creature of mischance” on the other side of the Atlantic: “but as for you, my Transoceanic Brothers, read this earnestly, for it *was* earnestly meant and written, and contain no *voluntary* falsehood of mine. For the rest, if you dislike it, say that I wrote it four years ago, and could not now so write it, and on the whole ... will do better another time.” By addressing his “Transoceanic Brothers,” Carlyle is willing to ideally get acquainted (at least rhetorically) to those humblest men residing in the ends of the earth described by Emerson in his missive. Interestingly, Carlyle imagined speaking not only to Emerson as the recipient of the letter, but also to that restricted number of people who would be receiving his book, readers who had been evoked by Emerson’s assurances. He conceived his audience to be formed by single individuals with whom he entertained a personal relation: they were “Transoceanic Brothers,” not an undistinguishable mass, but rather a brotherhood. From now on, Carlyle started considering an audience – both fictional and real—on the other side of the Atlantic, with which he could communicate.

Keeping on with reflections about his readership, Carlyle again responded to Emerson’s criticism by relating his writing style to questions of audiences: “With regard to style and so forth, what you call your ‘saucy’ objections are not only most intelligible to me, but welcome and instructive. You say well that I take up that attitude because I have no known public, and alone under the Heavens, speaking into friendly and unfriendly space.” By assuming the figure of the solitary bard, Carlyle justifies his style

¹⁴⁹ Slater, *The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle*, 103.

¹⁵⁰ Leon Jackson in his article “The Social Construction of Thomas Carlyle’s New England Reputation,” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, 106 (1996) traces the diffusion of those early four copies among Emerson’s friends and family, with graphics and detailed documentation (172). Those copies were communally read, lent, sent by mail and became very mobile objects.

by claiming not to have a “known public.” He depicts himself as the prophet who is alone under the heavens (in the tradition of the old testament prophets¹⁵¹) and whose utterances are sent to friendly and unfriendly space, seemingly without directions, or intentionality. While Carlyle implicitly admits that there should be a relation between the audience and the author’s literary style, he also shuns the possibility of actually confronting directly a public.

Emerson’s next letter (dated November 20, 1834) continued the conversation about the lack of an audience for Carlyle’s works, and overtly engaged with the quality of the publics and the differences between British and American readers. By using a light tone, Emerson balanced Carlyle’s portentous and dramatic style:

I feel like congratulating you upon the cold welcome which, you say, Teufelsdröckh has met. As it is not earthly happy, it is marked of a high sacred sort. I like it a great deal better than ever, and before it was all published, I had eaten nearly all my words of objection. But do not think it shall lack a present popularity. ... But this has too much wit and imagination not to strike a class who would not care for it as a faithful Mirror of this very Hour. ... The great men of the day are on a plane so low as to be thoroughly intelligible to the vulgar. Nevertheless, as God maketh the world forever more, whatever the devils may seem to do, so the thoughts of the best minds always become the last opinion of Society. Truth is ever born in a manger, but is compensated by living till it has all souls for its Kingdom.¹⁵²

In one of his characteristic moves, Emerson brings the volume to a celestial level (“As it is not earthly happy, it is marked of a high sacred sort”), on the one hand celebrating its higher virtues not belonging to the earthly world, but on the other hand entertaining the possibility that it will become popular for a certain class of readers.

¹⁵¹ George Landow identifies Carlyle as the quintessential Victorian Sage, and the initiator of the genre of the ancient wisdom tradition. See George Landow, *Elegant Jeremiahs: The Sage from Carlyle to Mailer*. (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 1986), 30. While I find some of his suggestions useful, I am not convinced by the criteria Landow employs in order to establish generic distinctions. I consider, instead, more useful to place both Emerson and Carlyle as interlocutors of the puritan tradition of the jeremiad.

¹⁵² Slater, *The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle*, 107.

While he liked it “it a great deal better than ever,” Emerson remains only partly convinced by *Sartor Resartus*, since he had only eaten “*nearly* all [his] words of objection” (emphasis added). Emerson’s oscillations in his analysis of possible audiences (“present popularity,” “not to strike a class who would not care for it as a faithful Mirror of this very Hour,” “the great men of the day are on a plane so low”) dizzily arrives –yet again—to the promise of future rewards, and not of immediate success: “Truth is ever born in a manger, but is compensated by living till it has all souls for its Kingdom.” If on the one hand Emerson is hopeful that *Sartor Resartus* will find its public, he is also convinced that it will be mostly a matter of potential and future fulfillments.

Right before closing the letter, Emerson began to express his pleas to Carlyle about a voyage to America, citing a friend who “remarked, when I expressed the wish that you would come here, ‘that people were not here as in England sacramented to organized schools of opinion, but were a far more convertible audience.’”¹⁵³ For the prophet Carlyle, the American readership could be more pliable than the rigid British audiences. Emerson therefore believed that Carlyle would find a more favorable terrain for converting some publics in the United States than in England.

The hint is not lost on Carlyle, who commented also on the commercial nature of America in his letter dated February 3, 1835: “I should rather fancy America mainly a new Commercial England, with a fuller pantry: little more or little less. The same unquenchable , almost frightfully unresting spirit of endeavour, directed (woe is me!) to

¹⁵³ Ibid., 110.

the making of money, or money's worth."¹⁵⁴ For Carlyle the financial spirit is a disgrace, but it also opens a series of possibilities in that fuller pantry that is America.

Meanwhile Emerson continued his work of circulating and advancing Carlyle's fame among his circle in New England. The fact that Emerson's mediation and Carlyle's gradual disclosure to American publics were generated in a private correspondence, tinges their most common concerns with an aura of privateness and familiarity that renders Carlyle's writings and his personality more agreeable to those concentric circles of American readers who became interested in his works through communal readings and personal acquaintances.

In a letter dated March 12, 1835 Emerson asked Carlyle to send a number of copies of *Sartor Resartus* to be sold in the United States:

Some friends here are very desirous that Mr. Fraser should send out to a bookseller here fifty or a hundred copies of the *Sartor*. So many we want very much; they will be sold at once. If we knew that two or three hundred would be taken up, we should reprint it now. But we think it better to satisfy the known inquirers for the book first, and when they have extended the demand for it, then to reproduce it, a naturalized Yankee. The lovers of Teufelsdröckh here are sufficiently enthusiastic. I am an icicle to them. They think England must be blind and deaf if the Professor makes no more impression there than yet appears. I, with the most affectionate wishes for Thomas Carlyle's fame, am mainly bent on securing the medicinal virtues of his book for my young neighbors.¹⁵⁵

Emerson presents himself as the spokesperson of a group – he maintains the plural— thus trying to convince Carlyle of the existence of a circle of active readers who, after having become acquainted with his works, and having appreciated *Sartor Resartus*, now actually would like to own the book. These are only the “inquirers for the book,” and Emerson does not exclude the possibility of later expanding the audience, by reprinting the book in New England, reproducing not only a book but also its readers,

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 117.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 120.

shifting the nationality along the way. *Sartor Resartus*, so profoundly a product of the German and British traditions, would then be “reproduce[d] it, a naturalized Yankee.” According to Emerson, Carlyle’s book could be admitted within the American publishing industry as a naturalized product. The phrase “naturalized Yankee” is doubly suggestive, because the expression “naturalized” refers both to the introduction of a natural specimen (plant or animal) where it was not originally indigenous, and also to the action of admitting a foreigner into a country, granting to that person the same rights of a native-born. In this sense nothing is forced upon the nature of the book, but its transformation into a “Yankee” would be harmless and natural, both for the book itself, and for the context that welcomes it. The process of naturalization is possible because, according to Emerson, *Sartor Resartus*’s nature has been already comprehended by the American public. Furthermore, that book seems to contain virtues especially beneficial to a specific group of readers: Emerson’s young neighbors.

Unfortunately Fraser did not agree to print *Sartor Resartus* in book form, or, as Carlyle wrote to Emerson in his letter dated May 13, 1835 he thought the plan ludicrous: “As for Fraser however, the idea of a New Edition is frightful to him; or rather ludicrous, unimaginable. Of him no man has inquired for a *Sartor*.”¹⁵⁶ Therefore, Carlyle could only send Emerson another four copies, to be distributed among friends, and he had to postpone any other more grandiose project for a later time.

However, *Sartor Resartus* was to become a Yankee after all, since it was in Boston that it was published in book form, by James Munroe and Company, thanks to the effort of one of those readers who came across one of those eight copies originally sent by Carlyle to Emerson. Le Baron Russell, a graduate from Harvard, managed to find

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 129.

subscribers, asked Emerson to write a preface, and prepared the first edition, published in 1836 and sent to Carlyle by Emerson in April 1836. As it has become customary, Emerson's words accompanying the book were not particularly animated or warm:

With [this sheet] goes our American reprint of the Sartor. Five hundred copies only make the edition, at \$ 1.00 a copy. About 150 copies are subscribed for. How it will be received, I know not. I am not very sanguine, for I often hear or read somewhat concerning its repulsive style. Certainly, I tell them, it is very odd. Yet I read a chapter lately with great pleasure.¹⁵⁷

Emerson's words are not encouraging, and even though his tone might have been determined by other circumstances (a letter is always deeply affected by the moment in which it is written and by the material and emotional conditions of the writer), his letter is remarkably cold, verging on the offensive. Once again, Emerson did not miss the opportunity to remark that he harbored doubts about the style (which he now defines "repulsive") and started to have reservations about the reception of the work as well.

His preface to this edition is similarly and problematically mixed. The "Preface by the American Editors" explained the reasons why such a volume was published: "The Editors have been induced, by the expressed desire of many persons, to collect the following sheets out of the ephemeral pamphlets in which they first appeared, under the conviction that they contain in themselves the assurance of a longer date."¹⁵⁸ A number of expectant readers subscribed to the book, and contrasted the ephemerality of its original venue of publication. Whereas the Editors are convinced of a longer life for the book, they would not necessarily anticipate a wide and welcoming audience. Echoing what he had already written to Carlyle, Emerson states: "The Editors have no expectation

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 142.

that this little work will have a sudden and general popularity.”¹⁵⁹ As if it was a matter of exclusivity, the “Editors” did not seem to be alarmed about the size of the audience: success is not counted in numbers, but rather in the uplifting of a small audience. For this reason, Emerson’s concern is about the distribution, the republication, the divulgence of Carlyle’s book, not necessarily about its sudden success.

Because for Emerson interacting in the public meant essentially being able to address the commonality in all men, and appealing to the potential good in everybody, he was not concerned about reaching a wider audience, but about reaching the right audience. Making Carlyle public was not to render him available to a general public, but to make him transparent enough to be comprehended by a small group of chosen few: those who would “listen to his wisdom.” For this reason Emerson insisted on transformations at the level of style, desiring for Carlyle the accessibility from those potential perfect readers. The Preface, hence, does not contain justifications, praises or strong urgency, only possibilities:

[The Editors] will not undertake, as there is no need, to justify the gay costume in which the Author delights to dress his thoughts, or the German idioms with which he has sportively sprinkled his pages. It is his humor to advance the gravest speculations upon the gravest topics in a quaint and burlesque style. If his masquerade offend any of his audience, to that degree that they will not hear what he has to say, it may chance to draw others to listen to his wisdom; and what work of imagination can hope to please all?¹⁶⁰

In the preface Emerson concedes more than he does when writing directly to Carlyle, since the preface is obviously a public genre, directed to known and unknown readers, who should be drawn to the work, not driven away from it. But despite the

¹⁵⁸ “Preface of the American Editors,” *Sartor Resartus. In Three Books*. Second Edition. (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1837), 3. This edition, like its predecessors, did not explicitly attribute the work to Carlyle.

¹⁵⁹ “Preface of the American Editors,” 3.

¹⁶⁰ “Preface of the American Editors,” 3.

necessity to speak positively of the book and despite the advice Emerson once gave Carlyle (about explaining his rhetoric in prefaces: “in some of your prefaces you should give us the theory of your rhetoric”), Emerson does not provide any explanation or introduction to a possibly uninformed audience.

Curiously enough, in the first British edition of *Sartor Resartus* (which was published in London in 1838) this preface is reprinted entirely, along with other miscellaneous excerpts of reviews of *Sartor Resartus* (there are extracts from conversations entitled “Taster to Bookseller” and “Bookseller to Editor”; a review of *Sartor Resartus* from the *Sun Newspaper*; an excerpt from the review appeared in the *North American Review* in October 1835), under the title “Testimonies of Authors.”¹⁶¹ All those writings, being mostly reviews and criticism, engage with the complex international editorial public sphere, on the one hand positioning the book in a truly transatlantic editorial context (there are British and American reviews alike), on the other dismissing the critical and perplexed stances expressed in those prefatory materials by including them within the book. After all, the British edition was the first to present *Sartor Resartus* with the subtitle *The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh*. It is then even more interesting to find, that before discovering those opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh, the reader would be treated to other views, not entirely favorable, of that same volume. The reader then would probably be even more bewildered by the levels of editorship and authorship of the book. Carlyle hence did not quite follow up on the idea of using the prefaces as an explanatory piece; on the contrary, he intended prefatory material as a playground, as writings that would complicate even more his already complex work, and not as opportunities to lure the readers towards the text. By 1838

Carlyle seemed appeased that *Sartor Resartus* had reached (and would continue to reach) not a generalized public, but a limited and sympathetic readership.

Despite all his perplexities, but in fact, probably because of his profound belief in Carlyle's capability of engaging with "celestial truths," hence public and common to everybody, Emerson continued his work of republication, committing to print more of Carlyle's writings. In 1838 he arranged an American edition of some of Carlyle's essays, and the book was issued in multiple volumes with the title *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, with the Boston publisher James Munroe. Once again the preface to this collection was written by Emerson, and it was signed with his initials. In what is titled "Advertisement," Emerson states:

The interest with which the publication of his work has been demanded, makes the Editor sure of its welcome. Mr. Carlyle's recent works have made him known as a writer to numbers to whom the essays in these volumes will be new. But many readers will here find pages which, in the scattered anonymous sheets of the British magazines, spoke to their youthful mind with an emphasis that hindered them from sleep. It is a fact worth remembering in our literary history, that his rich and cheerful genius found its earliest audience in or near New England, from young men who had complained with the first Quaker, that, in the multitude of teachers, 'none spake to their condition'. Such will be glad to trace in this collection the spiritual history of the author, the course of his reading, the depth of his studies, and what outward materials went to the edification of the man.¹⁶²

This time the identities of both the author and of the editor are clear: Carlyle's name appears on the front page, and it is repeated in the preface, while Emerson's name is signaled by his initials. At this point Emerson could count on different degrees of audiences, as he could rely on gradual degrees of Carlyle's publicness. The readers would then be more or less informed, more or less interested in Carlyle's works, and in his life, and they would be expecting some signature pieces from him. Emerson did not

¹⁶¹ See *Sartor Resartus, The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh*. In Three Books. London: Saunders and Otley, 1838.

fail to remind the readers that they now had a responsibility: it was in or near New England after all, that Carlyle's "rich and cheerful genius found its earliest audience."

A steady traffic of sheets and volumes kept on traveling back and forth, and after having read Carlyle's *The French Revolution*, Emerson communicated his approval:¹⁶³

I think you a very good giant, disporting yourself with an original and vast ambition of fun; pleasure and piece not being enough for you, you choose to suck pain also, and teach fever and famine to dance and sing. I think you have written a wonderful book which will last a very long time. I see that you have created a history, which the world will own to be such. You have recognized the existence of other persons than officers and of other relations than civism. ... We have men in your story and not names merely. ... We have always the co-presence of Humanity along with the imperfect damaged individuals.¹⁶⁴

The combination of writing history with an attention to individuals, and the representation of a vast range of relations (not only the civic respect for the revolutionary order, but also other public and private feelings) constitute for Emerson a major achievement. He still believes that the style could be improved ("I insist ... that it could be more simple, less Gothically efflorescent. You will say no rules for the illumination of windows can apply to the aurora borealis,"¹⁶⁵) and he admits to enjoy clear sentences ("I find refreshment when every now and then a special fact slips into the narrative couched in sharp business like terms,"¹⁶⁶) but Emerson has certainly softened his critical stance, and made his critiques milder. Emerson immediately thinks the book suitable for the American public, and starts planning its republication. In a letter dated February 9, 1838, Emerson informed Carlyle that the book had been published, and that Emerson himself had taken some financial risk. This time Emerson seemed to be satisfied with the reception:

¹⁶² *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* by Thomas Carlyle (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1838, 4 vol.), vol. I, p. iv.

¹⁶³ The letter dates September 13, 1837.

¹⁶⁴ Slater, *The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle*, 167.

The book has the best success with the best. Young men say, it is the only history they have ever read. The middle aged and the old shake their heads and cannot make anything of it. In short it has the success of a book which as people have not fashioned has to fashion the people. It will take some time to win all but it wins and will win.¹⁶⁷

The characterization of the audience interested in *The French Revolution* is interesting because, even more explicitly than before, it is now divided by Emerson in terms of generations: Carlyle appeals to the young, while he is still a mystery to the older public. Similarly to the mention in his preface to Carlyle's *Essays* ("pages which, in the scattered anonymous sheets of the British magazines, spoke to their youthful mind with an emphasis that hindered them from sleep"¹⁶⁸) Emerson suggests that young men will be attentive to Carlyle's work. Rather than being an accurate statistical analysis, this is an Emersonian projection in his desire to empower the younger generations. What is remarkable is Emerson's willingness to regard Carlyle no longer as the isolated bard, the lonely philosopher, but as an active interlocutor, who, albeit the transatlantic distance, and despite his moving in other civic and cultural circles, is able to communicate to a young American readership. In fact, it is exactly Carlyle's distance and his not being rooted in the controversial and mundane American context that makes him the more attractive to the younger generations. Carlyle provided the right distance to the material reality of the local to have his readers aspire to the transcendental, rather than focusing on the details of their own circumstances. Even his chosen theme, the French Revolution, is ideally close to the American readers, but also distant enough to allow them room for reflection and speculation. Naturally Emerson's optimism in a future and even larger

¹⁶⁵ Slater, *The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle*, 167.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 178.

¹⁶⁸ *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* by Thomas Carlyle (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1838, 4 vol.,) vol. I, p. iv.

audience is unabated, so that, for Emerson, Carlyle did not only address current audiences, but he was also going to be relevant for future readers: “it will take some time to win all but it wins and will win.” The public, originated in a young American generation, becomes as transcendental as the writing, moving from the present age, to future times.

This rather unique epistolary correspondence, where most of the letters read more like soliloquies than profound interactions and real communication, reveals the same dialectics of distance and closeness – that is, a relevance that is premised exactly on the assumption of geographic and temporal distance – that Emerson discusses with reference to Carlyle’s future audience. By means of the distant communication enabled by the epistolary exchanges, and carried out with each single letter, distance came to play a crucial role, and became the generative engine that allowed for a number of things to happen. Carlyle’s distance in terms of geographical location from the New England-based Emerson favored the idea that Carlyle’s material readership –his real public –could as well, and in fact should be a transnational audience, one formed by spirits attuned to his abstractions and his idealistic tendencies. Thus, the sphere of the public, no longer premised on the assumption of a commonality of material interests and shared national belonging, is widened both in space and in time. From various tentative geographical definitions aimed at locating their interlocutors (Emerson depicted a mythical Scottish environment for his first encounter with Carlyle; Carlyle spoke of “two parishes of one country” for England and the United States), they reach a point of imagining the public of Carlyle’s writing in a space removed from England’s national boundaries. The geographical displacement here becomes a temporal one: by materially creating and ideally advocating an American audience for Carlyle, Emerson is securing for the latter’s

writings a public that extends across temporal as well as spatial boundaries. According to Emerson's transcendental vision, America as the young nation *par excellence*, was always the future readership, and Carlyle could rely on future generations of always young American publics.

The distance between the two authors, enhanced by their scarce success at real communication – something that only epistolary writing could maintain – encouraged an idealization that would have not occurred were they to live and converse frequently and in close quarters, and that did not in fact occur in the more public and official writings that Emerson devoted to Carlyle's works. Their letters, with their high level of abstraction and idealization, and the projections they enabled on the authors' part of their own expectations, became a space of promise and possibility, creating a veritable microcosm of that idealized transnational public space thriving on the distant communication between an idealized bard and an ideal public of attuned spirits, which Emerson envisaged as the future generations of young American readers.

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CURRICULUM VITA

Sonia Di Loreto

Education

Ph.D. English. Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ. 2010.

M. A. English. Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ. 2002

Ph.D American Studies. Università Roma Tre (Italy). 2000

Current Occupation

Assistant Professor of American Literature, Università di Torino (Italy). October 2008-present.

Teaching Positions Held

Assistant Professor of American Literature, Università di Torino (Italy). 2008-present.

Adjunct Professor, Università di Napoli (Italy). 2002-2006.

"Assegnista di Ricerca," (Research Fellow) Università di Napoli (Italy). 2006-08.

Teaching Assistant, Rutgers University. 2000-04.

Publications

"'Many of Your Opinions Could not Be Firm': A Transatlantic Approach to Teaching Colonial American Literature." *American Solitudes: Individual, National, Transnational*. Eds. D. Izzo, G. Mariani, P. Zaccaria. Roma: Carocci Editore, 2007. 336-340.

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