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Networks and Commons: Margaret Fuller's Transnational Exchanges

Abstract: Letters are usually studied as biographical and historical tools or as the work of a single author. But what if we concentrate instead on the networks of epistolary exchanges, rather than on the distinct objects being circulated? If we focus on the interconnections, the overlapping in space and time, we will have to envision the creation of a commonality that transcends private, public, domestic, foreign and national spheres. The status of the letter in the nineteenth century, with protocols of communication linking the public arena with the intimate sphere, points to that space where individuals, away from certain conventions of public discourse, could experimentally articulate their opinions about public issues; a space where writers projected their privateness into a sphere of intellectual, discursive and political commons.

By reading the triangulation of the letters exchanged among Margaret Fuller, Giuseppe Mazzini and Costanza Arconati, and by looking specifically at the Fuller Papers (held at Houghton Library), I would like to consider how ideas about republican and democratic possibilities were transmitted, and discussed in a multilingual (English, French, Italian) and international context during the 1840s. Moreover, I would like to ponder the ways in which scholars can imagine and create a digital archive that will take into consideration the modes of interaction in epistolary exchanges that are built across nations, languages, and political ideas.

Biography: Sonia Di Loreto is Assistant Professor of American Literature at the University of Torino (Italy), where she teaches courses on nineteenth-century American literature, colonial American literature, and transatlantic literary relations. She is completing a book manuscript on Margaret Fuller's transnational networks, which aims at reconstructing the networks of communication – especially epistolary exchanges, but also print exchanges—that Margaret Fuller established and maintained in Italy and Europe.