

Margaret Fuller's Archive: Absence, Erasure, and Critical Work

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In a letter dated 27 July 1850, Horace Greeley, editor of the *New York Tribune*, urges Ralph Waldo Emerson to work on an edited volume of Margaret Fuller's papers:

Dear Sir:

All say we must have a proper edition of Margaret's works, with extracts from her unprinted writings, which were the freest and most characteristic of any. [...] But if I had time and capacity, I have not the knowledge essential to a proper Memoir of our departed friend; and all say you ought to write that, *must* write it. [...] I have only one anxiety in the premises — that the book shall be got out before the interest excited by her sad decease has passed away. Her friends will buy it any how; but I wish it to reach a larger circle. [...] I think the whole should consist of two fair duodecimos of 400 pages if we cannot find her work on Italy, and three such in case that shall be found. And I am very anxious that it should be before the public by the middle of September or at farthest the first of October.¹

Fuller (*Fig. 1*), one of the leading public intellectuals of the nineteenth century, had died a few days earlier, on 19 July, in dramatic circumstances during the shipwreck of the vessel *Elizabeth*, along with her Italian husband Giovanni Ossoli and their son Angelo, en route to New York. She was returning to the United States after having spent a few years in Europe and having covered the European revolutions for Greeley's newspaper. As the timely letter written by Greeley reveals, immediately after her death

¹ Horace Greeley to R. W. Emerson, 27 July 1850, in *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. by Ralph L. Rusk and Eleanor M. Tilton, 10 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939–95), iv: 1848–1855, ed. by Ralph L. Rusk (1939), p. 225. This article was written thanks to a research grant from the Houghton Library (Harvard University) and to a fellowship from the American Antiquarian Society, which I gratefully acknowledge. I would like to offer special thanks to Elizabeth Maddock Dillon for the constant conversations and unfaltering support. I am grateful to Alexis Wolf, Kate Newey, Robyn Jakeman, and the anonymous peer reviewer for their generous help and constructive advice that helped to strengthen this article.



Fig. 1: Margaret Fuller in 1846, before leaving for Europe, photograph, Purdy & Frear. Margaret Fuller Family Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, MS Am 1086 (106).

her friends and colleagues mobilized in order to deal with and arrange her papers and documents, both the ones they possessed and, more interestingly, those they did not. In this article I explore the space created by the ‘if’ (‘if we cannot find her work’) and the ‘in case’ (‘in case that shall be found’) mentioned in the letter by Greeley, as indicative of the possibilities and doubts inherent in any archival work. I would like to ponder on the conditional origins of Fuller’s archive, both the material archive of her papers and the discursive space generated by uncertainty, unrecovered objects, and scattered remnants. I believe that the imaginative and possibilistic space created by ‘if’ and ‘in case’ is at the origin of the archival impulse and, in this specific case, is what guided the creation of Fuller’s archive in its various instantiations.

Margaret Fuller (1810–1850) was born into the New England elite and cultivated her education from an early age. Growing up in Cambridge, Massachusetts in the early nineteenth century, she met some of the eminent literati of the time, became editor of *The Dial*, the transcendentalist magazine, and, while for many decades she was mostly remembered for being a friend and colleague of men such as Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Bronson Alcott, she has more recently acquired recognition for distinguishing herself from their cultural trajectory. After publishing *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* in 1843, she started a regular collaboration with the *New York Tribune*: she moved to New York, took care of the literary section of the paper, and observed and wrote about the social environment of the city. Finally, in 1846, her dream of visiting Europe was realized and she was able to secure an assignment for the newspaper, thus becoming one of the first American women to work as a foreign correspondent.

Europe in the 1840s was exciting and challenging, especially for a woman who was ardently waiting to become more militant in her politics. According to Robert Hudspeth, Fuller had always been interested in the concept of heroism, but what was only an abstract ideal while she lived in the United States became a real existential question when she met Giuseppe Mazzini in London and participated in his project to create a Roman Republic.² After visiting England and France, she settled in Italy, supporting the republican political experiment in Rome in 1849 through her writing and active participation. While in Rome she went on to marry Giovanni Ossoli, one of the young *guardie civiche*, an officer of the republican militia, and had a child. After the demise of the Roman Republic, and as a consequence of soul-searching about what path to take and where to live, Fuller, with her husband and child, decided to move back to the United States, where she believed she could continue her profession. Thus, the family embarked on the merchant vessel *Elizabeth* on 17 May 1850. This ship, with a small number of passengers, was carrying various items of merchandise and commodities, among which were blocks of marble and specimens of artistic production from Europe, such as, for example, a statue of Senator John Calhoun by Hiram Powers destined for Charleston. But the Ossolis and the other passengers never arrived, perishing in the shipwreck off the coast of Fire Island, near New York.

The circumstances of Fuller's death were tragic, and they inspired a large number of eulogies, both scholarly and less so. Taking Fuller's death as a starting point, and going beyond the sensational and tragic pathos of her demise, I would like to consider her death from an 'archival' point of view, that is, in conjunction with the creation of her archive: both the

² Robert N. Hudspeth, 'Margaret Fuller and the Ideal of Heroism', in *Margaret Fuller: Transatlantic Crossings in a Revolutionary Age*, ed. by Charles Capper and Cristina Giorcelli (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), pp. 45–65.

material archive that comprises the Fuller Family Papers, housed at the Houghton Library (Harvard University), and the scholarly archive — the production of critical discourse centring on Fuller. It is my contention that the archive's generative force resides in her death and, more specifically, in the double absence — that of her body and that of the manuscript — caused by her demise. The material void created by the absence of her body, never recovered, and the absence of the manuscript on the European revolutions, which can only be presumed to have existed, but for which there is no trace, no evidence, and no fragments, generated a desire for the material objects that is articulated in different ways. While all archives are inexorably linked to problems of loss, death, and the afterlife of papers and objects, in the case of Fuller it is possible to identify various archival movements and methodologies that deal with these problems in distinctive ways. In what follows, I will consider three versions of the 'Fuller archive', all pertaining to the fabric of time and related to perceptions and expressions of grief.

Fuller's death, as tragic as it was, produced immediately contrasting reactions, including a sigh of relief on the part of her detractors and even some of her acquaintances. Before her ill-fated transatlantic crossing, one of her closest friends, Rebecca Spring, with whom Fuller had shared part of her travels in Europe, advised against moving back to the United States. In one of her last letters to Fuller, Spring exhorted her to reconsider:

I must now say my most important thing and stop. And that is that much as we should love to see you, and strange as it may seem, we, as well as all your friends who have spoken to us about it, believe it will be undesirable for you to return at present. We believe all you write from Italy will be better received and that if you return you will lose the power to write as well for you would not be so happy and [...] your dear friend Giovanni would not — and could not be so happy here as in his own beautiful Italy [...]. It is because we love you we say stay! It is because we believe it best for you, and in this advising you, you have a proof of the true friendship and affection of, Rebecca.³

Even though one can read Spring's exhortation to write from Italy as a sort of transnational American Studies praxis *ante litteram*, her comments are likely addressing something else. Spring's less than veiled hints at the questionable presence of Giovanni Ossoli in the midst of their Boston circle is only one of the disturbances that Fuller's radical choices produced in her

³ Rebecca Spring, letter to Margaret Fuller, 14 April 1850. Margaret Fuller Family Papers, vol. 11, p. 136. Houghton Library, Harvard University, MS Am 1086, my transcription.

friends. In Fuller's coterie, the Ossolis as a couple would be a dissonance, and Giovanni, the Italian who had been represented by Fuller's American friends as a semi-literate, although well-meaning young man, would be an even more problematic figure. This point of view, taken for granted by subsequent readers, has been variously reiterated until now, especially because it was crystallized by early biographers. In 1883 Julia Ward Howe describes Ossoli

to have belonged to a type of character the very opposite of that which Margaret had best known and most admired. To one wearied with the over-intellection and restless aspiration of the accomplished New Englander of that time, the simple geniality of the Italian nature had all the charm of novelty and contrast.⁴

However, in the most recent biography we read that 'Margaret Fuller had chosen Giovanni for pleasure, the most radical act of her life so far', thus stressing the passionate nature of Fuller and Ossoli's relationship.⁵ Notwithstanding the complexity of describing a union between two people of different inclinations, cultural backgrounds, languages, and religious affiliations, it becomes apparent that the life lived by Fuller away from her New England friends and family, with the added interruptions in communication inherent in any epistolary exchange, and the epistemic difficulty of imagining another space and time, caused a sense of uncertainty regarding her choices and, possibly, her ideas.

The union with Ossoli, combined with her sudden death, was something that Fuller's American friends and acquaintances had to negotiate and reconcile themselves with, since, as Charles Capper tersely puts it, 'all her friends [including Emerson] struggled to come to terms with [this] [...] tragedy or nontragedy' of her death.⁶ The highly anticipated work on the European revolutions that Fuller was carrying with her to submit to an American publisher — the document that Greeley defines as 'her work on Italy' — had created a great amount of expectation among Fuller's family and friends. Its absence, and the material circumstances of Fuller's death,

⁴ Julia Ward Howe, *Margaret Fuller (Marchesa Ossoli)* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1883), p. 257.

⁵ Megan Marshall, *Margaret Fuller: A New American Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), p. 309. Marshall discusses Fuller and Ossoli's relationship at length, drawing also from their personal correspondence, and she comments: 'Loving and being loved by G. Ossoli, soon to be commissioned a sergeant in the newly mustered Civil Guard — the Spirit of Rome — had intensified all sensory experience, the aspect of Italy, as Mickiewicz had tried to tell her, that she could never learn from books' (p. 306).

⁶ Charles Capper, *Margaret Fuller: An American Romantic Life*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), II: *The Public Years*, 517.

obviously prompted them to try to recover whatever they could from the shipwreck, including all the papers they could find.⁷ The manuscript that Fuller had just completed and that she had mentioned in her numerous personal letters was, along with her and her husband's bodies, the most searched for object from the wreck (only the child's body came ashore). With the intention of trying to stop scavengers from getting hold of things they would not value, Emerson sent Thoreau to search for the Ossolis' remains and belongings.

Thoreau's pencilled draft notes from that search have been acquired by the Houghton Library at Harvard (and made available online) and, along with the Fuller Family Papers, have become part of what I will term the 'archive of Margaret Fuller's ghost manuscript'. This is what I will discuss as the first instantiation of the Fuller archive.⁸ Fuller's death, and especially the void left by the never-recovered manuscript, have always haunted researchers, who have generated a fascinating material archive of fragments collected from various correspondents, papers, and other materials from the shipwreck: a *disjecta membra* of things and stories. Thanks to Thoreau's specific sensibility towards objects, what Branka Arsić defines as his 'vitalist ontology', his notes about his searches and researches around the shipwreck are suffused with the willingness to try and make sense of things that are simultaneously dead and alive.⁹ Arsić, in her discussion of Thoreau's experience on Fire Island, speaks of 'confusing taxonomical dislocations' recorded in his notes, as the language articulates his attempt 'to connect the ragged remnant — the "mad fragmentation" each archive is composed of — to things that he can only imagine or remember' ('Our Things', p. 176). In his notes and some journal entries regarding this experience, Thoreau mixes the materiality of the clothes he sees on the shore with imagined dresses and memories of other clothes he bought from the scavengers.

⁷ 'A squad of Margaret's friends descended on Fire Island. On the twenty-fourth, Spring, Greeley, Arthur, Eugene, and Charles Sumner, soon to be elected United States senator, who came down from Boston to look for his brother's remains, spent the day and part of the next looking for bodies among the ship's castoffs that littered the beach. [...] For three days [Thoreau, Ellery Channing, and William Channing] conducted interviews with survivors and talked with many of the scavengers, trying to figure out what had happened and track down what was left of the Ossolis' things, which they discovered was not a lot, thanks to the energetic scavengers' (Capper, II, 513).

⁸ Thoreau's notes have been transcribed and digitized by *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau* project, located at Davidson Library at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and directed by Elizabeth Witherell <http://thoreau.library.ucsb.edu/resources_essays.html> [accessed 8 October 2018].

⁹ Branka Arsić, 'Our Things: Thoreau on Objects, Relics, and Archives', *Qui Parle*, 23 (2014), 157–81 (p. 174). For a more complete treatment of Thoreau's theory of vitalism, see Branka Arsić, *Bird Relics: Grief and Vitalism in Thoreau* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

According to Arsić, on reading some of his journal reflections it becomes evident that ‘what is called death is less the cessation of being than its transformation into a different *manner* of existence’ (‘Our Things’, p. 177, emphasis in original). In this regard, Thoreau’s is not only a very personal, anti-sentimental articulation of grief, but also the first attempt to compose and organize Fuller’s archive. For this reason, he faces the enormous difficulty of curating objects that can only be presumed to have belonged to Fuller. In his lists, as if they were catalogue notes or curatorial files, along with the object (‘calico dress’, ‘ladies shift’, ‘a gentleman’s shirt’) he has to note the temporary owners of those things, those who, maybe unwillingly, are bequeathing their findings to him. In doing so, Thoreau starts to consider the current after-death lives of these fragments (*Fig. 2*):

I saw at John Skinner’s Patchog a calico dress like the pattern I [brought] much torn — with silk fringes — and drawers & a night gown torn. Elikom Jones said he would forward a ladies shift which a Quorum man had got — with perhaps the initial S M F on it —

At Carman’s Rowland’s in Patch — a gentleman’s shirt.¹⁰

As with the ‘if’ and ‘in case’ used by Greeley, Thoreau’s ‘perhaps’ conveys the full dilemma about archives and their origins: what is the relation between these things and their supposed owner? How should these profoundly intimate things be treated? Papers and clothing are not only reminiscent of the dead people they belonged to, but they are contiguous to, and synecdoches of, their bodies, thus creating a unique and oddly intimate but impersonal relation with those who are handling them. Furthermore, there is a problem of attribution: Thoreau cannot be sure if these materials are Fuller’s and Ossoli’s, and he is uncertain of their value. But what becomes significant in this peculiar archival recovery is Thoreau’s acknowledgement of the intermingling of life and death caused by the work of the sea.

Differing from what would be Emerson’s and others’ method of considering and organizing the Fuller archive, especially in terms of inclusion and exclusion, Thoreau’s ‘vitalist orientation’ towards the material and the ideal allows him to be open to the idea of the archive as an assemblage, based on a fluid concept of archival objects.¹¹ Drawing upon the theoretic-

¹⁰ Henry David Thoreau Field Notes, manuscript, c. 1850s. Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, MS Am 3032, Leaf 7^r. Transcription available in *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau* <http://thoreau.library.ucsb.edu/project_resources_essays/13.pdf> [accessed 8 October 2018]. S M F (Sarah Margaret Fuller) are Fuller’s initials.

¹¹ Arsić, ‘Our Things’, p. 171. Apart from Bruno Latour’s notion of assemblage, I draw here upon the work of Antoinette Burton and Elizabeth Maddock Dillon. See Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Ox-

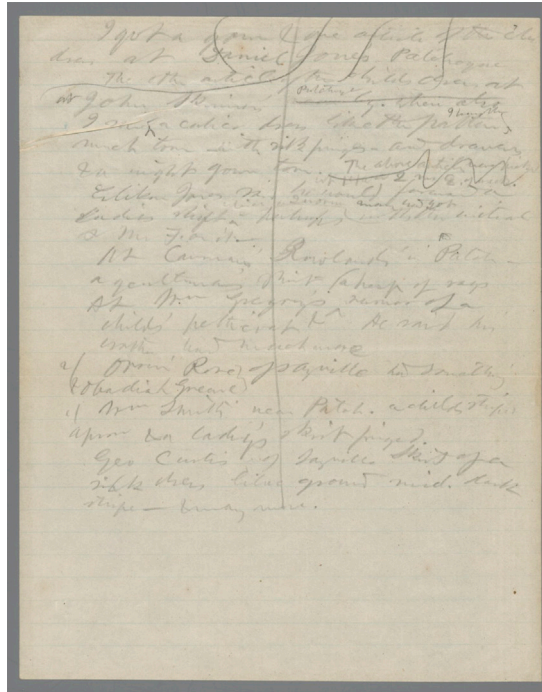


Fig. 2: Henry David Thoreau field notes: manuscript, c. 1850s. Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, MS Am 3032, Leaf 7^r.

cal work of Elizabeth Maddock Dillon on the assemblage and the archive in the colonial context, where she emphasizes how ‘acts of juxtaposition, decontextualization, and recontextualization — what we can call remix and reassembly — allow the archive to tell a different story’ (p. 259), I would like to stress how Thoreau’s collection is an assemblage of items, which favours and envisages new relations among incongruent objects, both dead and alive. Because of the urgency of recovery, the temporality of Thoreau’s creation of his archive is a mixture of fast movements and slower reflections, especially since he wrote his notes not only as a companion piece to what he was collecting, but also as the starting point of subsequent elaborations and musings. The time spent collecting this first provisional archive is an intimate one, in close proximity to the location of death and absence,

ford: Oxford University Press, 2005); for discussions of assemblages and archives, see especially, Antoinette Burton, “‘An Assemblage/Before Me’: Autobiography as Archive’, *Journal of Women’s History*, 25.2 (2013), 185–88; and Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, ‘*Translatio Studii* and the Poetics of the Digital Archive: Early American Literature, Caribbean Assemblages, and Freedom Dreams’, *American Literary History*, 29 (2017), 248–66.

and it is used to establish personal relations with the objects recovered, inspecting their current meaning beyond their past employ.

Thoreau reported the near complete loss of the papers with no further comments:

He delivered to Dominy & a large man (Prine says it was Le Roy) ‘separate bundles of letters & papers’ which the large man opened on the spot & separated & threw down on the beach what he thought of no value — What he threw down had writing on them.¹²

He then concentrated his observations on the new entities created by the combination of personal items and the work of the sea and sand, that together have formed impermanent and coalesced objects, where the organic material of the sand fills the void left by the absent body:

Everything like a pocket among the rags was filled out with sand by the action of the waves though every one had been ripped open. I picked up the skirt of a gentlemans coat with a pair of linen gloves beside it the latter so knotted up among the rags that I could not separate them without a knife — yet the fingers were filled with sand as if there was a hand in them.¹³

‘The action of the waves’ and the ‘sand’ are lending a second life to the gloves, and Thoreau, by way of recording these findings and his experience, is providing a new context and a new meaningful sense of existence to the objects. As Arsić states, ‘Thoreau’s list crosses boundaries between what is formed and disseminated, destroyed and restored, actual and imagined, reassembling ragged reality into new compounds that are now irrecoverably attached to his life by virtue of being recorded on his list of losses’ (‘Our Things’, p. 176). Apart from being ‘irrecoverably attached to his life’, I believe that Thoreau’s notes constitute the first movement, or instantiation, of the Fuller archive. His is a repository of organic materials, if not an archive of documents in the traditional sense, in which Fuller’s objects and belongings try to find a second life, and new meanings, after the distance they crossed from Europe. These fragments, although differing from the documents and letters, carry with them just as strongly traces of Fuller’s life in a distant continent, along with the uncertainty about who she was and what she had produced. Because of their ontology, they reveal, even

¹² Henry David Thoreau Field Notes, manuscript, c. 1850s. MS Am 3032, Leaf 4^v <http://thoreau.library.ucsb.edu/project_resources_essays/08.pdf> [accessed 11 October 2018].

¹³ Henry David Thoreau Field Notes, manuscript, c. 1850s. MS Am 3032, Leaf 9^r <http://thoreau.library.ucsb.edu/project_resources_essays/17.pdf> [accessed 11 October 2018].

more than paper documents, the depth and porousness of Fuller's life in Europe.¹⁴

The second attempt to systematize both Fuller and her archive is the one carried out by Emerson, William Henry Channing, and James Freeman Clarke. Soon after Fuller's death and, more specifically, once it became clear that neither her body nor her body of works would be restored to her family and her public, some of her closest friends started to plan and work on what was to be published in 1852 as the *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*. Since there was no manuscript to keep Fuller's intellectual legacy alive, the *Memoirs* came to life.

The collective effort behind the writing of the *Memoirs* allowed and in fact triggered the creation of the material archive that now exists, since the editors mailed letters to Fuller's correspondents, both in the United States and Europe, asking them to send their side of the correspondence along with all pertinent documents belonging to Fuller. What the editors received, and what survived in these passages, is a large part of the Fuller Family Papers at the Houghton Library. The archival effort behind the creation of the *Memoirs* is an interesting reaction and juxtaposition to what I term the 'silent ghost of the manuscript', the work on the European revolutions that was never found. If the silence — the absence of the manuscript — is the productive force behind all the attempts to construct a Fuller archive, the *Memoirs* deals with this vacant object in a very specific way. The ghost manuscript and the *Memoirs* embody two kinds of silence that are inherent in the archival process, and they pose different methodological challenges. In the case of the ghost manuscript, the silence is the absence, the regretful loss of a definite work by Fuller, a work that would have fused her intellectual endeavours with her life's passions; it is a silence full of an ongoing desire for something that could not be recovered, and the generative force that keeps imagining possibilities for the Fuller archive. In contrast, the *Memoirs* suggests another type of silence: the silence of suppression and erasure, a normative silence made of substitutions.

As I have already mentioned, the *Memoirs* is the product of some of Fuller's American friends, with whom she had continued to correspond throughout her stay in Europe. Almost immediately after her death, they responded to Greeley's urge to provide an official version of Fuller's life and writings. After Greeley and Emerson started to collect the materials, a small group of friends worked on what Arthur Fuller, in his preface to the

¹⁴ For recent work on theoretical paradigms on things and objects in literature, see, among others, Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); *Things*, ed. by Bill Brown (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Jonathan Lamb, *The Things Things Say* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Lynn Festa, 'Crusoe's Island of Misfit Things', *The Eighteenth Century*, 52 (2011), 443–71.

1859 edition of the *Memoirs*, defined as a ‘work of love, to diffuse wide a knowledge of my sister’s eventful life and noble character’.¹⁵

The shared critical perspective is that this work is a ruthless cut and paste of fragments of letters sent or received by Fuller, pieces of her writings, and quotations from other works. The 1852 edition consists of two volumes: the front page of the first bears the title *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, with two epigraphs by Ben Jonson and Leonardo da Vinci. The table of contents lists the chapters (such as ‘Youth’, ‘Cambridge’, ‘Groton and Providence. Letters and Journals’, ‘Concord’, and ‘Boston’) adding, in some cases, the name of the editor or author who contributed that chapter, so that, for example, the chapter ‘Cambridge’ has the byline ‘by J. F. Clarke’, while ‘Concord’ is ‘by R. W. Emerson’. The second volume has no indication of names in the table of contents but it adds them directly in the title of the chapter’s body. Given all the intervention and doctoring, the work that resulted in the *Memoirs* is flat — in the sense that the historical depth of the epistolary exchanges was evened out — and homogeneous, in the sense that the multiplicity of languages, typical of Fuller’s opus, was normalized and standardized, and everything was rendered in English.

In one of the earliest studies of the *Memoirs*, Bell Gale Chevigny warned about not only the ‘compromises [the editors] made with her texts’ but also her own time’s ‘urge to temper [Fuller’s free individuality]’. While Chevigny mostly dwelled on the political and moral challenges ‘that Fuller’s life [...] posed’, noting ‘the *Memoirs*’ editors’ persistent effort — by omission or addition — to *make over* the moral image of Margaret Fuller, especially in the two areas of sacred and profane emotion, or religion and passion’, I would like to turn my attention to another issue, the problem of the multilingual status of Fuller’s writings and the question of translation.¹⁶ It seems, in fact, that another version of the silence produced by this work is the erasure of Fuller’s cosmopolitanism by silencing her use of languages other than English.

When discussing Fuller’s major innovations in nineteenth-century American culture, Colleen Glenney Boggs emphasizes how Fuller’s posthumous works are all missing one important trait: the practice of translation. Speaking about the *Memoirs* and other documents, Boggs claims that ‘the literary loss extends to her publications and surviving manuscripts, which were disemboweled by a group of her friends’. According to Boggs, the *Memoirs*’ editors’ ‘primary aim seems to have been to repatriate Fuller

¹⁵ Arthur Fuller, ‘Preface’, in *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, ed. by R. W. Emerson, W. H. Channing, and J. F. Clarke, 2 vols (New York: The Tribune Association, 1859), 1, 3.

¹⁶ Bell Gale Chevigny, ‘The Long Arm of Censorship: Myth-Making in Margaret Fuller’s Time and Our Own’, *Signs*, 2 (1976), 450–60 (pp. 451, 452), emphasis in original.

by erasing the central feature of her theory of a multilingual American literature: translation'. Not only are Fuller's letters in languages other than English absent from the *Memoirs*, but there is no real consideration or engagement with her translation work: 'Fuller had been known in her lifetime as a translator, but her literary executor, her brother Arthur Fuller, purged her books of the translations they contained, and her book-length translations passed out of print.'¹⁷

One example of glossing over the linguistic richness of Fuller's epistolary exchanges is her correspondence with an aristocratic Italian lady, Costanza Arconati. When the two first became acquainted, they would write in French or English. They began to communicate in Italian when Fuller settled in Rome and Florence. In the *Memoirs* the only language transpiring from this correspondence is English, with only a sentence in French used by Emerson as an epigraph to one of the chapters. The switching of languages, that marked not only Fuller's gradual fluency in Italian but also the increasing intimacy of the two friends, is erased in the *Memoirs*. If a preoccupation concerning the American audience of the *Memoirs* — which would probably have preferred to read the text in English — perhaps inspired the editors to discard everything that could not fit the national frame they designed for Fuller, other, more private concerns guided some of the editing labour.

When looking at one of Fuller's manuscript letters to Emerson, sent soon after having met Thomas Carlyle in England, one has to confront the heavy ink marks left by the editors of the *Memoirs* that, once and for all, hid what Fuller wrote in her document. Emerson and Carlyle had a long history of epistolary exchanges and collaboration, and Fuller, in her letter, spoke very candidly about Carlyle. While the letter reads, '[of you he spoke] worthily, as he seldom writes to you, and most unlike the tone of his prefaces, so that for the moment I was quite reconciled to him' (*Fig. 3*), in the *Memoirs* the passage was erased and substituted by the more neutral short sentence: '[of you he spoke] with hearty kindness.'¹⁸ In the transition between private and public, between manuscript and published, certain choices became permanent. Similar to the erasure of the translation work that immobilized the language into a normative English, the comments written by Fuller, more intimate and private, were normalized into a more benevolent representation of placid interactions between Emerson and Carlyle.

¹⁷ Colleen Glenney Boggs, 'Margaret Fuller's American Translation', *American Literature*, 76 (2004), 31–58 (p. 31).

¹⁸ Letter (manuscript transcript) to Ralph Waldo Emerson, Paris, 16 November 1846, Margaret Fuller Family Papers, vol. 9, pp. 216–17. Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, MS Am 1086, my transcription; *Memoirs*, II, 185.

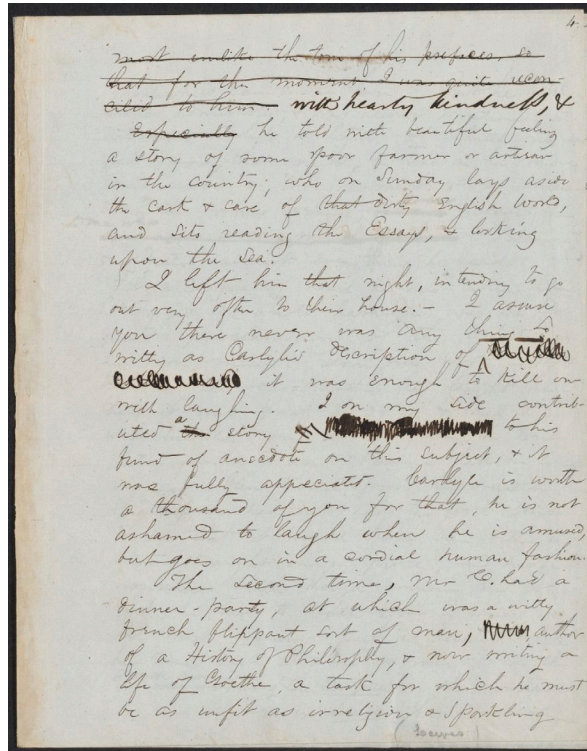


Fig. 3: Letter (manuscript transcript) to Ralph Waldo Emerson, Paris, 16 November 1846. Margaret Fuller Family Papers, vol. 9, pp. 216–17, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, MS Am 1086.

If the absent manuscript, Thoreau's notes, and the *Memoirs* can all be associated with death, and, to be more precise, Margaret Fuller's death by drowning and its generative force for the creation of an archive, they exemplify different models of temporality. Drawing upon Dana Luciano's study of grief in nineteenth-century America, I would like to propose a reading of the absent manuscript, Thoreau's efforts, and the *Memoirs* as a way to meet some of the methodological problems inherent in the archival work. Luciano states that 'by the nineteenth century grief had become something to be cherished rather than shunned'. Grieving for an absent beloved allowed the creation of a spatio-temporal dimension suspended by the progressive time of the everyday. Considered from this perspective, we could say that the absent and silent manuscript is this rupture in time, an implicit invitation to grief, and represents what Luciano defines as 'the slow time of deep feeling'¹⁹ that is very similar to the personal, intimate, and unorganized time of the archive.¹⁹ While Thoreau, with his early endeavours and intimate

¹⁹ Dana Luciano, *Arranging Grief: Sacred Time and the Body in Nineteenth-Century*

contacts, represented in his writings the search for Fuller's body and her papers as a fragmented, urgent, reflective temporal movement, the editors of the *Memoirs* reorganized the intimate fragments in a formal way, without allowing themselves the temporality of grieving described by Luciano. On the contrary, they immediately engaged in a temporality that was progressive, measurable, and ultimately capitalistic. What guided them was their desire to realign and reorganize a life, Fuller's, that had been lived outside of the American protocols of femininity and national belonging. By reframing Fuller's work within a traditional, nationalist idea of literature, the editors functioned not only as literary executors but also as customs officers, complying with the strict border regulations of the land.

So far we have seen two very different models of perceiving and constituting the Fuller archive: the organic, intimate, and inclusive assemblage of Thoreau, and the normative, public, and nationalistic one implemented by Emerson and his co-editors. But there is another model that can be pursued: that of the palimpsest.²⁰ What if, therefore, we consider the material archive of Fuller's works as a palimpsest, made of layers, but also made of the relations between different surfaces? The first person who alerted me to consider Fuller's work as a palimpsest was her friend and correspondent Costanza Arconati. If Fuller's writings have always had the quality of a rich profundity, with her constant engagement with genealogies of women, for example, or her acknowledgement of cultures and languages other than English, her letters are also complex systems both conceptually and materially. In a letter written to Fuller in December 1847, Arconati illustrates some of the difficulties in reading Fuller:

Ma chère amie, votre dernière lettre m'a mise à la torture, je l'étudie depuis huit jours comme on ferait d'un palimpseste. Il y a la difficulté d'écriture d'abord et puis le papier transparent de sorte que ce qui est écrit sur une page passé sur l'autre et se confond avec ce qui est écrit sur l'autre. A l'avenir prenez, je vous prie, de très gros papier, du papier de cuisine.²¹

America (New York: New York University Press, 2007), p. 2.

²⁰ For theories on the palimpsest, see Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. by Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997); Sarah Dillon, *The Palimpsest: Literature, Criticism, Theory* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2007).

²¹ Costanza Arconati, letter to Margaret Fuller, Florence, 30 December 1847, Margaret Fuller Family Papers, vol. 11, pp. 40–46, Houghton Library, MS Am 1086: 'My dear friend, your last letter has put me to the torture, I studied it for eight days as one would a palimpsest. First there is the difficulty of the writing, and then the paper so transparent that what is written on one page is seen through upon the other and is confounded to what is written there. In future I beg you to take very thick paper, kitchen paper.' My transcription and translation.

Reading Fuller's manuscript texts can be torture: a constant suffering that contains the frustration of not understanding, and simultaneously the desire for decoding the handwriting and the meaning of the text. Through this hermeneutical effort described by Arconati, and through the typical temporality of the archive, with its non-linear and non-progressive way of reading (in the archive we read in circles, we go back and forth, we read multiple texts at the same time, we dwell on the same texts for a long time), we can disengage Fuller's work from her literary executors and re-establish her in a much larger spatio-temporal dimension that might reach our contemporary generation of scholars.

In this last section of my article I would like to conclude by mentioning a current project that aims at creating a Fuller archive that derives from the notion of the palimpsest and is based on the model of assemblage, and that, in the words of Luciano, proposes to multiply 'the futures of the past' (p. 17). In 2015, with a group of Fuller scholars and friends, I started to plan and envision a digital humanities project that could reflect the transnational approach and the multilingual interest of Fuller's writings. What resulted is the Margaret Fuller Transnational Archive (MFTA), a project that aims to digitally map networks of publication involving Fuller and the circles of European political and cultural figures with whom she came in contact during the years she spent in Europe, in the momentous era of European revolutions of the 1840s.²² Our primary intent is to represent the complexity of Fuller's cosmopolitan world and, in order to do so, the MFTA moves beyond the nation as the basic unit of analysis. Rather than looking only at the locations as the fundamental places of origin of the writings, the MFTA aims to emphasize the interconnections, interrelations, and dissemination of ideas that travel beyond national borders and confines.

Moving from the sand combed by Thoreau on Fire Island and distancing itself from New England's fulcrum of Emerson, the MFTA takes both Europe and the United States as centres of communication and dissemination. The project aims to stress that Fuller, through her private relations and in her professional capacity as a European correspondent for the *New York Tribune*, established forms of collaboration with Italian political exiles such as Costanza Arconati, Cristina di Belgiojoso, and Giuseppe Mazzini during the Italian Risorgimento, while working steadily to maintain a constant flow of communications with her American readers, her family, and her friends in the United States. Currently, the MFTA repository primarily includes Fuller's texts, but in its next instantiation it will incorporate other documents, especially newspaper articles written by Cristina di Belgiojoso

²² The Margaret Fuller Transnational Archive <<http://margaretfullerarchive.neu.edu/home>> is a collaborative archival project housed at Northeastern University's NULab for Texts, Maps, and Networks (Boston). The team is formed by Sonia Di Loreto, Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, Ryan Cordell, William Bond, and Sarah Payne.

and Mazzini and originally published in various newspapers in London and Paris, such as the *People's Journal* and *Ausonio*.

If, in the past, critics have explored the cultural work done by these figures individually, and numerous scholars investigated the cosmopolitan characteristic of Fuller's cultural production, to date there has been no attempt to draw a comprehensive map of the periodical publications supported by Fuller and her circles, a map that could represent the transnational cultural work done by these figures.²³ All of the participants in Fuller's network of correspondents (Horace Greeley, Cristina di Belgiojoso, and Giuseppe Mazzini, among others) considered periodical publications a fundamental vehicle for the dissemination of ideas and the creation of new publics. All of them worked in order to found, write, edit, and facilitate periodical publications. They worked closely with the local press to foment republican and nationalist ideals, with the objective of constituting a transnational public sphere. Within a transatlantic mediascape, the MFTA intends to uncover the different trajectories of both the periodical publications and the personal exchanges.

In this digital work one of the privileged methodological approaches is the attention to the concept of correspondence, both in its generic distinctions and its wider sense. The MFTA considers the newspaper articles (published with the heading 'foreign correspondence' in the *New York Tribune*) and the private letters exchanged by Fuller in their ontological significance of inhabiting a movement, creating a multilayered space where the intimate and the more public encounters are possible. These personal epistles and the 'foreign correspondence' cross multiple boundaries and instantiate numerous temporalities, engaging with the personal, the political, and the historical dimensions of time. By addressing both the more intimate space of interpersonal relations and the political action of communication and

²³ Among the most recent works emphasizing Fuller's cosmopolitan and international interests are: Brigitte Bailey, *American Travel Literature, Gendered Aesthetics, and the Italian Tour, 1824–1862* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018); *Transatlantic Conversations: Nineteenth-Century American Women's Encounters with Italy and the Atlantic World*, ed. by Beth L. Lueck, Sirpa Salenius, and Nancy Lusignan Schultz (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2017); *Toward a Female Genealogy of Transcendentalism*, ed. by Jana L. Argersinger and Phyllis Cole (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014); *Margaret Fuller and Her Circles*, ed. by Brigitte Bailey, Katheryn P. Viens, and Conrad Edick Wright (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2013); Leslie Elizabeth Eckel, *Atlantic Citizens: Nineteenth-Century American Writers at Work in the World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013); *Transatlantic Women: Nineteenth-Century Women Writers and Great Britain*, ed. by Beth L. Lueck, Brigitte Bailey, and Lucinda L. Damon-Bach (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2012); Colleen Glenney Boggs, *Transnationalism and American Literature: Literary Translation 1773–1892* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007); Paola Gemme, *Domesticating Foreign Struggles: The Italian Risorgimento and Antebellum American Identity* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005).

debate, the MFTA tries to reconfigure a vicinity with the archival objects, through a careful observation of the details and the appreciation of the complexity of networks and layers.

As discussed above, the MFTA project claims to represent a space that is outside that of the nation and, in so doing, it intends to create an archive that is not only transnational but also multilingual. For this reason, the repository comprises texts in different languages (English, French, Italian), thereby reflecting the languages used by the writers in their publications.

If the MFTA can be viewed as a palimpsest, it is simultaneously a combination of different types of archives that can be reshaped into an assemblage of texts, images, and critical readings. Our archive aggregates the 'family archive' — the original source of the Fuller Family Papers, housed at the Houghton Library, and bequeathed to Harvard University by a direct descendent of Margaret Fuller; the periodical press archive provided by the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts; the 'patriotic', national archive of the Museo del Risorgimento in Milan, where documents about Italian figures are preserved in the name of a national heroic past; and the official and state archive of the Archivio di Stato in Rome, where various records about Fuller's private life as well as political documents about the Roman Republic are housed. By assembling these myriad texts, we intend to generate a space where links, connections, and networks become visible and useful to the scholar, beyond the restrictions of national and language-based critical perspectives.

Even in this case, the ghost manuscript of Fuller's works is still the generative force for the archive because, by way of its absence, it sheds light on the richness of political analysis and cultural work done by Fuller and her circle in Europe. Drawing from the organic, vitalist archive of Thoreau, a digital, transnational archive seems like another attempt to travel the distance between the United States and Europe and to return some objects and papers to their cosmopolitan, organic, and productive life. The MFTA's attempt at decentring the nation is, therefore, another way to try and occupy that conditional, doubtful, but possibilistic space of the 'if' and 'in case' evoked by Greeley.