
Catharine Sedgwick as ‘Transatlantic Friend’: The Translation and International Circulation of the Memoir of Bianca Milesi Mojon

Lucinda Damon-Bach*¹

¹Salem State University – United States

Abstract

In 1858, in Harper’s New Monthly Magazine, Catharine Sedgwick anonymously published her translation of major excerpts of a privately printed French memoir of Bianca Milesi Mojon, a Milanese-born artist, translator, and political activist who supported the Italian Risorgimento, whom Sedgwick had met during her European tour (1839-40). Through her translation Sedgwick felt she was “doing the public a favor by opening to them a book to which they would not otherwise have access”; in so doing, she, perhaps unwittingly, launched the transatlantic circulation of Mojon’s life story. Four years later, Sedgwick’s translation was the source of a heavily cribbed essay on Mojon in the British publication, *The English Woman’s Journal* (1861). As critic Janice Schroeder has noted, *The English Woman’s Journal* was “a forerunner of both women’s movements and public feminist writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.” Sedgwick’s translations from the French and Italian, and her biographical sketches—both small subsets of her publications overall—have received little critical attention to date. Lauded as “extremely faithful and almost entire,” by the “American hand” of a “transatlantic friend,” Sedgwick’s publication of Mojon’s “private” life can be seen as an early contribution to public feminist writing, one that expands our understanding not only of Mojon and Sedgwick, but of women’s self-perceptions and sense of political agency within and through the act of writing.

*Speaker