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# Translations and Transformations of an Ambassatrice

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## Abstract

Caroline Crane Marsh (1816-1901) lived abroad for almost thirty years as wife of U.S. Minister to Constantinople (1854) and then the newly unified Kingdom of Italy (1860), where she was referred to as "ambassatrice." Within the context of her voluminous letters and journals, three poems illuminate Marsh's ongoing transformations prompted by contact with other cultures. These "border crossings" included reading and translating "mythologies" and poems. This presentation will discuss an ode to a teacher of "culture" from Marsh's translated collection, *Wolfe of the Knoll and other Poems* (1859), and two unpublished poems (farewell ode "Banished Thy Coast" and devotional "Frustra Laboravi"). Drawing from Paula Bernat Bennett, I read the poems "in situ" to underscore that for Caroline, the "making" of each was as valuable as the "being." Each poem reflects "an ideological . . . moment that was passing even as she was" (Anthology and "Mill Girls"). Within the contexts of her first publication (a letter from Constantinople containing her cultural observations), interactions with Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Virgil's *Aeneid*, and Matthew Arnold and his *Literature and Dogma*, Marsh's translations and original creations reflect her ongoing transformations and developing identity. Of note is her movement from assisting her husband, to translating verses, writing encyclopedia entries, creating her own poetry, organizing aid for a Florentine orphanage and school and providing for Turkish immigrants. Finally, the analysis points to what Eléna Mortara has dubbed "transatlantic emancipations" of "liminal figures" that occur through "step[ping] outside the national box." That is, it asserts that Marsh "is not [merely] addressing her own situation" but rather reads, writes, and enacts "an assertion of universal human rights" (Bennett) as she moves outside herself, "finding connections" and "shed[ding] new light on the intercourse of cultures" (Mortara).

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