

Spring 2018

“Beauty Fled, and Empire Now No More” Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s Transimperial Femininity in the Turkish Embassy Letters (1716-1718)

Rachael Gessert
Rachael.Gessert@Colorado.EDU

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.colorado.edu/honr_theses

 Part of the [European History Commons](#), [Intellectual History Commons](#), and the [Women's History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gessert, Rachael, ““Beauty Fled, and Empire Now No More” Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s Transimperial Femininity in the Turkish Embassy Letters (1716-1718)” (2018). *Undergraduate Honors Theses*. 1706.
https://scholar.colorado.edu/honr_theses/1706

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Honors Program at CU Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of CU Scholar. For more information, please contact cuscholaradmin@colorado.edu.

“Beauty Fled, and Empire Now No More”

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s Transimperial Femininity
in the Turkish Embassy Letters (1716-1718)

Rachael Gessert

April 5, 2018

Advisor Dr. Susan Kent, Department of History

Dr. Lucy Chester, Department of International Affairs

Dr. Matthew Gerber, Honors Council Representative

Attempting to provide a clear picture of Lady Mary is a monstrous undertaking. Any biographical study is necessarily fraught with historical quagmires: missing manuscripts, illegible texts, archaic language. If the past is a foreign country, then I have been a stranger in a strange land. Having returned safely, I would like to thank my guides.

Dr. Kent, for mentoring me even when it was like herding a very difficult and sleepy cat

Dr. Chester, for honest and incisive reviews and ongoing moral support

Dr. Gerber, for allowing me to join the dueling club

Martha, for letting me distract you on a regular basis just to complain, and for the snacks

Dr. Friedman, for pointing me towards the promised land

Ben, Will, and Trevor, for pizza and Wednesdays

Dr. K, for encouraging me to try

Pri and Cassie, for reading the first version and for letting me show up unannounced

My sister, for returning my books, bringing me juice, and not murdering me yet

Halsband and Grundy, for doing all my research for me and for using footnotes not endnotes

Hayley Kiyoko, Lorde, and Chris D'Elia, for providing a writing soundtrack

Ahmed Bae, this is my baby but you're the absent and estranged father

And finally, my parents, thank you for supporting me emotionally and financially all these years.

I love you so much. As always, this one's for you.

Introduction

It was a still and sultry spring when Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762) first arrived at the edge of the Ottoman Empire. Arriving in the Hellenic city of Sophia, Mary wrote to Caroline, the Princess of Wales, that she had “finished a journey that has not been undertaken by any Christian since the time of the Greek emperors”.¹ While not, perhaps, the first westerner to travel to the exotic Orient, she was the first known woman of standing and education to be permitted access to the privileged feminine places of the Ottoman Empire. In letters written during her years abroad, which she conscientiously edited before their posthumous publication, Lady Montagu detailed the sensual delights of her new surroundings. These letters, penned with astounding detail and insight, constitute the first true eyewitness account of life behind the veil of empire and inside the exclusive feminine spaces of home and harem. In the Orient, she encountered foreign women and “unimaginable antiquity, inhuman beauty, boundless distance.”²

The culturally dislocating experience of travel outside of the British metropole into the liminal space of the Orient provided the crucible in which Mary underwent a journey of self-realization based around actual and reimagined encounters with women across empires from Holland to Hungary and into the Ottoman east. Already a wife and mother, the trip to Turkey truly marked her full transition into maturity. While her early life in England hinted at the beginnings of a unique literary and philosophical voice, the experience of these female-centric and female-specific spaces created the conditions for a full realization of intellectual identity

¹ MWM to HRH Princess Caroline of Wales, April 1, 1717, in *Turkish Embassy Letters*, ed. Malcolm Jack (Athens [GA]: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 55.

² Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 167.

unbounded by a male gaze. The interactions with foreign women and the distant feminine spaces she found in the Orient allowed Montagu to articulate herself within the context of a transnational womanhood as both an agent and resister of imperialism.

This vision of imperial proto-feminism served numerous female travelers as a model for transnational female communication and feminized imperial gazing in later centuries. Such a model necessitates a similarly interdisciplinary and international model of analysis; Montagu's writing is inseparably literary and historical, personal and political. Aside from the exhaustive modern biography, existent historiography tends to emphasize a single aspect of Montagu's works, either the literary nature of her letters or of her Enlightenment biography. Another area of scholarly debate concerns Montagu's sexual and gender identity, as well as her relationship to ideas of race and ethnicity, but these arguments are typically unnecessarily ahistorical and force modern structures onto a historical framework while ignoring actual context. To actually understand Lady Mary's work, both a literary and historical lens is required in order to address the duality of her lived personal experiences of travel and her rewritings of those experiences into political and philosophical metaphor. Rather than a single methodological approach to Montagu's vast biography, an interdisciplinary analysis of a single transformative period in her life offers a better means of studying her unique place in the context of early modern imperial history.

Two centuries before Edward Said codified the scholarly and intellectual framework of modern Orientalism in his 1978 book, Lady Mary laid the groundwork for a vision of trans-imperial orientalism articulated through Montagu's experience of exclusive feminine social spaces and networks. In addition to laying a foundation for female imperialists and travel as a female act of imperial gazing, Montagu's ideas would eventually be taken up by male

imperialists like Ingres and Byron into an aesthetic of fetishized, sexualized images of Ottoman women as an erotic other. While her oriental imaginings aligned with contemporary and later imperialists notions of the East as a distant and different place both physically and psychologically, she rejected the idea of the Islamic world as temporally or culturally backwards, seeing it as existing outside of imperial time rather than before it. Montagu's writings exist in a similar state of uniqueness, both a reaction to European imperialist and orientalist ideology as well as a unique departure not necessarily away from but certainly within the framework of early modern imperialist gazing.

Part One: Embassy To Constantinople

Into the Hurry of the World

Born as Mary Pierrepont in 1689, the young Lady Mary could trace her family tree back to the Norman Conquest. After the death of her mother, she and her sister were raised by their grandmother at the elegant family estates near Sherwood Forest. Her education as a titled lady included traditional feminine skills like dance and embroidery, the archaic practice of ceremonial meat-carving, and lessons in drawing and, later, Italian. With the help of the family library, she taught herself Latin and devoured the works of Ovid alongside contemporary novels with indiscriminate appetite. Such classical texts, mentally translated first in that secluded library and later in Alexander Pope's prose, fundamentally shaped her imaginations and experience of the orient as an antique land of story and song. By her early teens, she was "formidably well read and stylistically adept", writing poems modeled off verses by the era's respected authors.³ She began construction her own literary identity through the reconstruction and subversion of other texts.⁴ She also ruthlessly self-edited her works, censoring through the destruction of papers as a means of physically rebuking the ideological in the name of an uncompromising intellectual artistry. From classical roots to Enlightenment ideology, these early works illustrate a growing philosophical and critical consciousness mixed into a distinct aesthetic understanding that would fully manifest in her later works.

As a young woman of status, she also practiced letter writing, especially to female friends and relations. This furthered her education in the practice of a literary feminine identity.

³ Isobel Grundy, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (Oxford ; New York: Clarendon Press, 1999), 17.

⁴ Leonie Hannan, *Women of Letters: Gender, Writing and the Life of the Mind in Early Modern England*, *Gender in History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 65.

To the early modern woman, “the act of letter writing both explored and constructed the life of the mind”.⁵ Letters from her youth to a group of other elite women offer unique insight into Mary’s early forays into the female intellectual sphere. In these letters, she and her female contemporaries began formulating their identities as women within the context of British society. Their correspondences contain references to subjects ranging from the trivia of daily life and personal jokes to deeper questions and insecurities about futures in a society that they saw as fundamentally exploitive of women as form of capital. Much of Mary’s writing is framed in literary terms, exchanging frequent recommendations for scandalous French novels with friends. For Mary, “wit...was the tone of all her female intimacies”, and her most sarcastic remarks often offer some of the most incisive comment.⁶ In a short letter to the infamous Anne Wortley detailing a recent illness, Montagu closes in classic style by affectionately berating her friend for not writing more often: “[you have] strove to kill me by neglect: but destiny triumphs over all your efforts; I am yet in the land of the living, and still yours”.⁷ Hidden between hyperboles and youthful musings, the young Mary outlines the beginnings her often-contradictory personality.

As a teenager, Mary set herself against marriage and followed the philosophy of early feminist Mary Astell. Montagu had an autographed copy of Astell’s pamphlet espousing women’s education, and Astell would write a glowing preface for the *Letters* in 1724.⁸ Changing

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Grundy, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 40.

⁷ MWM to Anne Wortley, August 27, before 1709, in Mary Wortley Montagu et al., *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 2 v. (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1893), 159.

⁸ Robert Halsband, *Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).117.

economic conditions and a trend towards individualism saw a societal shift that allowed more young women of means the choice of possibly remaining unmarried.⁹ Mary saw no reason to embrace the traditional mantle of domesticity by accepting what were increasingly decreed as ‘mercenary marriages’. She spoke about her matrimonial position as a wealthy woman in dramatic metaphor, saying, “people in my way are sold like slaves; and I cannot tell what price my master will put on me”.¹⁰

For years, she remained comfortable in the quiet libraries and shady parks of her family’s estates. One late summer, she wrote from Thorseby to her friend Anne Wortley:

I am now so much alone, I have leisure to pass whole days in reading, but am not at all proper for so delicate an employment as choosing you books. Your own fancy will better direct you. My study at present is nothing but dictionaries and grammars. I am trying whether it be possible to learn without a master; I am not certain (and dare hardly hope) I shall make any great progress; but I find the study so diverting, I am not only easy, but pleased with the solitude that indulges it.¹¹

However, as this allusion to Latin grammar suggests, Mary was already corresponding not only with Anne alone at this point, but also with the brother Edward Wortley, using Anne as a go-between. Referring again to Mary’s Latin, an apparently jealous Edward declares that he “shall be satisfied...[to] have the same rank among your admirers that your grammars and dictionaries

⁹ Marilyn Morris, *Sex, Money & Personal Character in Eighteenth-Century British Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 99.

¹⁰ MWM to EWM, November 14, 1710, in Montagu et al., *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 178.

¹¹ MWM to Anne Wortley, August 8, 1709, in Mary Wortley Montagu et al., *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 161.

have among your books”.¹² A flurry of letters from early fall of 1709, shortly before Anne’s sudden death that winter, show an increasing tension in Mary and Edward’s relationship.

Sir Edward Wortley Montagu was an up and coming junior politician in the Whig party. A decade Mary’s senior, he was at the peak of his political career during their courtship and early marriage. In fact, much of their correspondence reads as much like debate practice as romantic declarations. Bolstered by his family’s wealth and influence as well as his own intellectual merits, Wortley trained at Cambridge and was called to the bar in 1699. In 1706 he entered the Inner Temple, having been elected MP for the Cambridgeshire constituency of Huntingdon the year prior. He would hold this position until 1713, at which time he yielded the post to his father and accepted an appointment as Lord of the Treasury after failing to win election in another constituency. During his time in parliament, Wortley initially distinguished himself as a supporter of the anti-corruption Country movement within the Whig party, speaking “incomparably well” according to his close friend and fellow politician Joseph Addison. For Mary, one gathers that part of Wortley’s appeal lay not so much in their mutual infatuation but in their ability to cut their teeth on the other’s tongue. For example, one particularly cutting letter from Mary to Edward concluded “you think, if you married me, I would be passionately found of you one month, and of someone else the next: neither would happen”.¹³ While Edward was afraid of her imagined infidelity to the point of paranoia, she rebuffed his accusations of inconstancy, never imagining it would be husband and not wife who would first break the ideological bonds of their relationship through cruel disinterest, ultimately

¹² Anne Wortley to MWM, Sept 3, 1709, in Montagu et al., *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 170.

¹³ MWM to EWM, April 25, 1710, in Montagu et al., *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 174.

catalyzing Mary's own eventual disloyalty to their marriage vows. In exchanges with both Mary and Addison, one detects the razor-sharp edge of both Wortley's political ambition and anxieties.

Are you sure you will love me fore ever? Shall we ever repent? I fear and I hope.

After a lengthy and largely literary courtship, Mary and Edward Wortley married in 1712 against of the Pierrepont family's wishes and in spite of Wortley's financial situation. Mary soon gave birth to a son, named Edward after his father, but spent most of their early days of marriage and of her pregnancy alone in the country, cut off from both her (now estranged) family and her new husband. Wortley seldom wrote her any substantial letters. So, shut up in drafty country houses, she spent much of her time on long walks, even in the dead of winter. She wrote to her husband, "I walked yesterday two hours on the terrace. These are the most considerable events that have happened in your absence; excepting that a good-natured robin red-breast kept me company almost all afternoon".¹⁴ As a way to cope with this enforced isolation and the fragile health of her young child, she read avidly and wrote voraciously, even contributing to London satirical publications with the support of her absent husband.¹⁵ But it wasn't enough for an intellect of Mary's caliber, especially as she felt abandoned by her husband, entombed in stone country houses. "I write and read till I can't see, and then I walk; sleep succeeds, and thus

¹⁴ MWM to EWM, December 6, 1712, in Montagu et al., *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 200.

¹⁵ Diana Barnes, "The Public Life of a Woman of Wit and Quality: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Vogue for Smallpox Inoculation," *Feminist Studies* 38, no. 2 (2012): 338.

my whole time is divided".¹⁶ Apart from her growing child and an under-stocked library, Mary had little to distract her racing mind in the country and seemed depressed throughout her first years of marriage.

A few years later, in 1715, the Wortleys moved to London to establish themselves with the new Hanoverian court. Mr. Wortley was appointed to the Treasury, an appointment he almost refuses as he wished to be Secretary of State, but was inclined to accept after prompting from Mary's uncle—likely on her behalf and at her request.¹⁷ Mary also wrote to her husband urging his acceptance of such a position:

I think it looks well, and may facilitate your election...I suppose, now, you must certainly choose somewhere or other; and I cannot see that you should not pretend to be Speaker. I believe all the Whigs would be for you, and I fancy that you have considerable interest amongst the Tories...I believe people generally esteem you impartial; and being chose by your country is more honorable than holding *any* place from *any* king.¹⁸

Although her letter also assures him that money is not an issue, instead stroking his ego by flattering him and appealing to his sense of personal honor and civic pride, they did need a steady and substantial income as Wortley's failed stand for Parliament has cost them dearly the year previous. Deciding, after much debate but little concrete input from her husband, to leave her child behind, Mary travelled to London just after New Years and the Wortleys finally begun setting up a proper household together in Duke Street.¹⁹

¹⁶ MWM to EWM, 9 or 11 December, 1712 in Montagu et al., *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 203.

¹⁷ Mary Wortley Montagu et al., *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 123.

¹⁸ MWM to EWM, October 9, 1714, in Montagu et al., *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 216.

¹⁹ Halsband, *Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 43-44.

Removed from the isolation of country domesticity, Mary thrived in London's cosmopolitan environment. Although not naturally inclined for the political intrigues of court life, Lady Mary was generally popular due to the combination of her classic good looks, keen intellect, and vibrant personality. While she found the new king, George I, "an honest blockhead...more dull than lazy", her knowledge of German made her unique among the other English ladies at court.²⁰ In addition to courtiers, she cultivated a circle of intellectual friends, including satirist Alexander Pope (1688-1744) and politician Joseph Addison, as well as the enigmatic Abbé Conti. Antonio Schinella Conti (1677-1749), a former Venetian priest turned renaissance intellectual, Conti was the recipient of some of Montagu's most interesting and philosophical letters. Mary also produced the majority of her Town Eclogues during this period, which was one of the most academically productive of her life.²¹

Then tragedy struck.

That winter, Mary contracted the dreaded smallpox. The disease had killed her brother, as it did one in three people who had the misfortune of contracting it. Her family was sent away, her curtains drawn, name spoken only in hushed tones. She spent the Christmas season in a darkened bedroom with a raging fever and oozing fetid spots, struggling to breathe. At last, the fever broke and the pocks began to scab and fall off. Mary lived, but the disease changed her forever. Porcelain skin now bore deep pits and her eyelashes fell out and never regrew. In "Saturday; The Small Pox", she attempts to process some of her own feelings in verse through the voice of Flavia, speaking laments "of beauty faded, and of empire lost". Yet, if Flavia has lost her empire of beauty, Mary's poem seems almost a premonition of her own

²⁰ Montagu et al., *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 126.

²¹ Grundy, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 94.

experiences of empire and the beauty she would find in the east. A fixation on physical beauty and the female form, especially pale and unblemished skin, reoccurs frequently in her travel writings. Her acute suffering during that winter also spurred her to carefully observe the Turkish procedure of inoculation years later. The practice, widely known throughout Asia but not recognized by most Europeans, involved the introduction of a small amount of smallpox virus into a healthy individual via a crude subdermal injection of infected tissue, thus inducing a mild case of the disease in the patient and thereby conferring them future immunity. She engrafted her own child while abroad and encouraged the first inoculations back home in England including among the royal family, popularizing the procedure among the British elite.²² Decades before Edward Jenner discovered his cowpox vaccine and centuries before the eventual eradication of smallpox, Lady Montagu turned her own experience of disease into a moment of trans-cultural medical innovation by introducing the Ottoman technique of variolation into mainstream British society.

It was also during her illness that one of her satirical poems mocking the court of Princess Caroline was accidentally published. “Monday; the Drawing Room” or “Roxana” had been in distribution among a select group of friends, but at the news of Mary’s illness and presumably impending death, was released to a broader audience. There is a certain irony that many of Montagu’s major publications required the shadow of death to be carried fully into the public sphere. The publication of her work immediately resulted in its widespread misidentification and misinterpretation, potentially damaging her reputation. As a woman of standing, Lady Mary had previously eschewed publication, viewing involvement in printing as

²² Diana Barnes, “The Public Life of a Woman of Wit and Quality,” 331.

tantamount to trade and therefore beneath her.²³ This incident served to further solidify her identity as a purely manuscript poet; while her works were eventually printed, their primary mode of both composition and publication was in manuscript form. After her recovery, it was widely held that her literal and figurative loss of face would result in her effective banishment from court and the annals of history. However, Mary took her changed appearance in relative stride, and the distribution of her work was ultimately less politically problematic than her contemporaries initially predicted as neither she nor her husband appears to have materially suffered for it. Lady Mary continued to maintain a hand in her husband's affairs. As Wortley became dissatisfied with his role as Lord of the Treasury, Mary encouraged his acceptance of an ambassadorship. Wortley obtained a posting to Constantinople in 1716.

The Privilege of a Traveller

The couple departed from Britain in late summer, traveling to the Austrian capital of Vienna by way of present-day Holland and Germany. The newly reinvigorated Whig government had a decided interest in continental politics as the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires clashed over the latter's assault on the Venetian Republic; the Levant Company's subsidization of Wortley's ambassadorship highlights Britain's economic incentives for maintaining a political presence in the region. Despite a rough initial crossing, Mary was delighted by the journey. Charmed by the neat Dutch villages and stunning Bavarian landscapes, she wrote eagerly to acquaintances back home recounting the sights. She repeatedly rejected the "the privilege of a traveller" to dramatize, imploring her correspondents to accept the veracity of

²³ Kathleen Lawton-Trask, "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: New Insights from the Digital Miscellanies Index," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 41, no. 1 (January 2017): 77, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00982601-3695945>.

her accounts.²⁴ Travel letters from this period constituted a distinct genre and accounts necessarily contained a level of embellishment. For example, a letter written from Cologne features Montagu cheekily flirting with a “handsome Jesuit” as he gives her a tour of the church’s relics, whereupon she “had wickedness enough to covet St Ursula's pearl necklaces”.²⁵ Touring another set of relics near Ratisbon, she recounts to another friend how “they shewed me a prodigious claw set in gold, which they called the claw of a griffin; and I could not forbear asking the reverend priest that shewed it, Whether the griffin was a saint”. Mary spends as much time poking jabs at the Christian religiosity she found ridiculous as she does in later defending and explaining the oft-maligned Islamic faith. As a literary figure, Lady Montagu both reveled in and rejected the conventions of genre, and the mix of cynicism and idealism that colored her philosophical outlook permeated her writings.

Traveling down the blue waters of the Danube, the Wortleys arrived in Vienna sometime in early fall. Mary wrote immediately to her sister, assuring her of their safe arrival and describing the narrow streets fronted by white stone facades. Donning a monstrous Viennese court dress, the couple was well received by the Holy Roman Emperor Charles VI only a day after their arrival in the city. This was what they had come for. Amidst the nighttime splendor of German opera and afternoon strolls in the Schönbrunn gardens, the Wortley’s spent two months trying to arrange the political chess pieces for mediation between the Austrians and the Ottomans. While Wortley was busy meeting with imperial advisors and awaiting instructions from his London superiors, Mary socialized with the wives and daughters of prominent Austrian

²⁴ MWM to Lady Bristol, August 22, 1716, in *Turkish Embassy Letters*, ed. Malcolm Jack, 10.

²⁵ MWM to Lady Bristol (attr.), August 16, 1716, in *Turkish Embassy Letters*, ed. Malcolm Jack, 7.

political figures, including the Empress Elizabeth with whom she was absolutely charmed. Whilst male ambassadors operated behind closed office doors, their wives fulfilled the role of social engineer by forming and maintaining necessary political contacts and alliances. Although no longer a great beauty, Montagu's youthful vitality and striking personality that made her popular at court. While not a universal favorite, she was smart and funny. More importantly, she could speak passable German and understood "enough of that language to comprehend the greatest part of" most conversations.²⁶ This allowed her to establish a close circle of friends and acquaintances from among Vienna's cosmopolitan set, many of whom she remained in contact with later as part of an ever expanding sociopolitical network, her epistolary empire.

Montagu's writings from these months largely omit the larger political purpose of their journey, focusing instead on a cultural study of the Viennese court. Even when the couple took an almost month long detour through Prague to visit Hanover and pick up further credentials and messages from the visiting King, she never explicitly states the reason for their journey, only alluding to her own role as personal courier for the Empress and praising the King and his entourage in later letters. In Hanover, she enjoyed the company of the King and "delighted in...being busy and popular".²⁷ Yet Hanover was no weekend side-trip, as illustrated by her harrowing description of traveling by coach over the icy passes and sheer cliffs in the winter snow, sleeping husband and infant son beside her. Racing along a moonlight pass, she saw the river Elbe far below in the darkness, writing "I cannot say, that I had reason to fear drowning in it, being perfectly convinced, that in case of a tumble, it was utterly impossible to come alive to

²⁶ MWM to Alexander Pope, September 14, 1716, in Turkish *Embassy Letters*, 16.

²⁷ Grundy, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 128.

the bottom”.²⁸ Such a risky venture would not have been taken lightly by a woman who had previously agonized over whether or not to bring her son along on the comparatively short trip from their home in the country to London during winter only the previous year. Along the way to and from Hanover Mary dined with multiple important figures, including royal British envoys, foreign dignitaries, and the wives of former ambassadors. That she was totally unaware of the political importance of Wortley’s mission and thus the necessity of her own presence is therefore totally illogical. This reasoning for her silence is supported in a later missive to her husband shortly before their departure from Turkey, where she assures him “I was asked and made answer, as I always do upon your affairs, that I know nothing”.²⁹ Thus, one must conclude Mary was at the very least generally aware of her husband’s ambassadorial duties within the contentious political situation, and the omission of this information from her letters was out of intention rather than ignorance.

Whether due to imperial oversight or Wortley’s own questionable diplomatic instinct, the Hanover trip closed the ideal mediation window that appeared in November. Instead, the couple departed for the east in January, having spent the carnival season in Vienna waiting on final details and an official passport. Nearly all of Mary’s friends, including the gallant Prince Eugene, attempted to warn her of the dangers of the trip. Citing tales of wolves and barbarians, they urged her to wait for spring and the river’s thaw to continue on, but she was unfazed, signing her last letter to her sister from Vienna “if I survive my journey you shall hear from me again”, although she did express concern for the toll the trip might have on her son. In a shorter

²⁸ MWM to Lady Mar, November 21, 1716, in Turkish *Embassy Letters*, ed. Malcolm Jack, 31.

²⁹ MWM to EWM, April 9, 1718, in Turkish *Embassy Letters*, ed. Malcolm Jack, 125.

letter to Pope written the same day, she says only “how my adventures conclude I leave entirely to providence;” with the sarcastic addendum, “if comically, you shall hear of them”.³⁰ Wrapped in layers of fur and this uncertain sense of security, she and Wortley set out across the frozen steppes of Eastern Europe towards Turkish-controlled Belgrade.

A Place Where Truth Furnishes All Ideas of the Pastoral

In the twin city of Budapest, she wrote again to her sister, recounting the two-week journey from the imperial capital to the edges of the empire. Blessed with unseasonably good weather, the group made good time, arriving in early February. They traded their European guards for a contingent of janissaries sent by the Sultan. The Ottomans had held the most of the Balkan Peninsula, including parts of Hungary, since the decline of the Byzantine Empire several centuries prior. While Mary disapproved of her Turkish janissaries’ reported violence, it appeared to her little different than the crimes committed by the Christian mercenaries who also ravaged the territorial peripheries. In a rare overtly political aside, she writes that “such is the natural corruption of a military government, [Islam] not allowing of this barbarity, any more than [Christianity]”.³¹ Both eastern and western armies necessarily exploited and impoverished the region’s peoples. In response to the turmoil of the Hungarian countryside, constantly trampled between the continuous advance and retreat of imperial forces, she cited Hobbes assertion “that the natural state of man is war”. In Belgrade, she observed the city functionally under rule by a military junta, although the puppet governor still held enough

³⁰ MWM to Alexander Pope, January 16, 1717, in *Turkish Embassy Letters*, ed. Malcolm Jack, 44.

³¹ MWM to Abbé Conti, April 1, 1717, in *Turkish Embassy Letters*, ed. Malcolm Jack, 61.

power to provide them safe passage through the area and comfortable lodgings in town.

While waiting for confirmation from Turkish officials in Adrianople, the Wortleys stayed in Ottoman-held Belgrade for three weeks. A frequent battleground, Belgrade had been Islamic territory for several centuries, but would revert briefly back to the Hapsburgs by the end of that year. The Wortley's host in the city was Ahmed Bey, whom she styles Achmed Beg, a local *effendi* or Islamic scholar. Lady Montagu equated the Bey's position to that of an English count and spoke highly of him in several letters. "He has wit, and is more polite than many Christian men of quality".³² As a sudden snowfall froze the town, Mary happily spent evenings with the Bey, sharing wine by the stove and debating the finer points of their respective religions. This conversation was enabled through a shared spoken language, likely Italian, as well as a common ideological language of Deism, a belief in a supreme creator and the creator's noninterference with human affairs, the philosophy to which most Enlightenment intellectuals generally subscribed.³³ Through the *effendi*, Mary also gained her first real exposure to Arabic poetry, immediately falling in love with the musicality and romance of Persian verses. She observed the scheme to be essentially similar to that of British forms, and would later make a literal as well as anglicized translation of some Turkish poems. While she had read a version of the *Arabian Nights* back in England, stories whose veracity the Bey confirmed, hearing passages of love poems in the original Arabic stirred something in her and fueled her desire for mastering the oriental languages and literary forms she encountered. She found the Arabic "expressions of

³² MWM to Alexander Pope, February 12, 1717, in *Turkish Embassy Letters*, ed. Malcolm Jack, 53.

³³ Grundy, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 135.

love...very passionate and lively” and was “much pleased with them”.³⁴ The effendi’s residence in Belgrade served as a point of physical and cultural departure for Montagu as she crossed fully from the western nations of Europe into the mysterious lands of the east.

The Wortleys next stopped in the ancient city of Sofia, the capital of modern-day Bulgaria. It was here that Mary had her first and most striking physical experience of the feminized spaces of the Ottoman Empire. Leaving her husband and traveling in secret behind the wooden latticed windows of her conveyance, she arranged a visit to the city’s famed bagnio, the Turkish bathhouse. The bath, or *hamam*, is a public bathing space with roots in the Roman Empire and a continued presence in the cultural fabric of Turkish social life. Stepping into the steam-filled marble domes, she literally and figuratively crossed a barrier from the mundane world of the chilly streets into the warm embrace of this feminine communal space. “I am now got into a new world” she said, “where everything appears to me a change of scene”.³⁵ Thus, the bagnio becomes something akin to sacred space: clearly demarcated and separate from the rest of the world, full of ritualized cleanliness and specialized interaction. Immediately sensing the powerful sociopolitical implications of such a place, Montagu dubbed it the “women’s coffee house”, alluding to the western communities of male-dominated intellectualism institutionalized by the birth of café culture. Stripped, literally, from indicators of status and rank, women relaxed and talked freely without fear of male interruption or interference. To her, an outsider, this was a place of de facto egalitarianism, “without any beauty or defect concealed”. The women of Sofia, she was informed, bathed here at least weekly, with each visit lasting upwards of several hours.

³⁴ MWM to Alexander Pope, February 12, 1717, in Turkish *Embassy Letters*, ed. Malcolm Jack, 53.

³⁵ MWM to Lady The Countess of Bristol (attr.), April 1 1717, in Turkish *Embassy Letters*, ed. Malcolm Jack, 57.

During that time, they would be away from husbands and children, able to relax exclusively in the company of other women. While she had cultivated a sort of metaphorical coffee house through her networks of correspondence, this paper republic paled in comparison to the marble and mortar reality of a female-specific and female-centric space for exchange.

As to the physical experience of her visit to the baths, Mary expounded upon the sensual details of the experience. What many later, and mostly male, translators have interpreted as sexual desire, the original phrasing of Mary's writing emphasizes the nuanced of sensuality rather than an overt sexuality within the scene. A sensual approach emphasized actual tactile experience over mere sexual fantasy, the real weight of skin on cold stone instead of the vague notion of warmth. She delights in the viewing of the nude female figure, invoking the works of the Old Masters, "there were many amongst them, as exactly proportioned as ever any goddess was drawn by the pencil of a Guido or Titian", to convey her sense of artistic fascination.³⁶ The women appear like apparitions, dark eyes in pale faces framed by flowing hair. Turning again to literature, she invokes Milton's Eve, "our general mother", to suggest both the grace and modesty of the figures as well as the timelessness of the scene. Like Eve in the garden, these women and this space exist outside of historic reality, in an unbounded and limitless paradise beyond linear time. These women existing in a state of nature, of nudity, is for them the most natural way of existing in that moment. In fact, Lady Mary became the object of observation and gentle curiosity as she had arrived in an English-style riding habit, and was thus the only clothed body in the room. By remaining clothed, she "pulled off a brilliant improvisation, successfully negotiating the Scylla of offending her Turkish hosts and the Charybdis of scandalizing her

³⁶ Ibid., 59.

English readers”, a choice that invites multiple an examination of perspectives.³⁷ In an inversion of numerous traditional narratives, Mary writes that the women in the baths believed her to be terribly oppressed by the men of her culture after seeing her stays; as there was no translator available they were forced to conclude that her foreign foundation-garments were the result of a jealous husband attempting to immobilize his wife. Mary’s letters played the episode as humorous, allowing for a moment of shared cross-cultural confusion. This first encounter with Ottoman women forced Montagu to immediately begin confronting her preconceived notions about Islamic femininity, and would contribute to her ongoing study of beauty in the context of empire as a means of understanding female agency.

To Mary, Adrianople was a brave new world; she found the Ottoman’s second capital much to her satisfaction. She composed a flurry of letters sitting at a window overlooking a river and inhaling the smells of a fruit-filled garden carried on the gentle April breeze. As summer began, she enjoyed rambles through the picturesque countryside around the property, taking in scenes of daily life that appeared much as they had in centuries past. She saw shepherds tending goats and sheep, women weaving beneath shady cypress trees, girls dancing on the riverbanks in forms straight out of Ancient Greece. In a long letter to Pope, she rapturously explained the adventure of reading his version of Homer while simultaneously experiencing the scenes described. “It would be too tedious to you”, she told him, “to point out all the passages that relate to present custom”.³⁸ Her letters took on a decidedly romantic tone, which she defended by saying “that 'tis more than an ordinary discretion that can resist the

³⁷ Srinivas Aravamudan, “Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in the Hammam : Masquerade, Womanliness, and Levantinization,” *ELH* 62, no. 1 (1995): 69–104.

³⁸ MWM to Alexander Pope, April 1, 1717, in Turkish *Embassy Letters*, ed. Malcolm Jack, 75.

wicked suggestions of poetry, in a place where truth, for once, furnishes all the ideas of pastoral”. Like the pastoral eclogues, Turkey was an Arcadia that existed not further back in time but in a space beyond it. After a lifetime of reading classical literature, Mary was now living and breathing those ancient stories as they became enmeshed in the fabric of her own narrative.

As Wortley set about his diplomatic business, including the expansion of his comparatively small ambassadorial household and staff, his wife quickly befriended one of the other recent arrivals. The young wife of a French diplomat became her near constant companion, although Mary found the French ambassadress’ preoccupation with ceremony tiresome as the former wished to explore Turkish culture without the hassle and protocol of a large entourage. When not socializing with other westerners, Lady Montagu enjoyed unprecedented access to the company of prominent Ottoman women in their harems. Previous visitors had neither the time nor ability to gain such access, with men unable to enter female spaces and the average traveler barred from elite spaces. Like the baths, earlier male travelers associated this mysterious interior space with sexual depravity and oppression. Again, the opposite proved true, as the harem was in actuality a focal point for Ottoman family life and female community. Shortly after arriving, Montagu was invited to dine with the wife of a Grand Vizier. Arriving in her ostentatious Venetian court dress, she found the lady’s home, and the lady herself, to be surprisingly plain. Nevertheless, she enjoyed a sedate evening of good food and light entertainment. Departing early, Mary was then entreated to attend another lady. The next residence was the sort of magnificent Mary delighted in, with the lady of the house the most splendid of all. Mary “took more pleasure in looking more pleasure in looking on the beauteous Fatima than upon the finest piece of sculpture”, comparing her to a creation by the classical painter Apelles. Fatima, the young wife of a high-ranking Ottoman official, was equally charmed with Mary; she entertained

her visitor with an elegant dance demonstration accompanied by music, followed by coffee served on fine porcelain beneath flowering vines of honeysuckle and jessamine.

In All the Odd Turns of My Life

In late spring, the Ottoman court split with the sultan moving northwards towards to oversee the ongoing naval battles against the Venetian republic while wives and officials went south to govern from Constantinople. The Wortley's followed suite with husband going north to continue peace talks, and wife following the latter group and taking up residence in the neighborhood of Pera. Letters from this period are scarce; Mary spent much of the early summer outside the city in the nearby gardens and forests of Belgrade Village. This wealthy Christian exclave served as an escape from the oppressive heat and threat of disease that consumed the city proper during the summer months. Surrounded by gardens, fountains, and leisure, Mary wrote to Pope that she felt herself in Elysium. "I am still alive;" she said, "but to say truth, I look upon my present circumstances to be exactly the same with those of the departed spirits".³⁹ Her wording suggests not only the serenity of the romantic setting, but also a strange sense of displacement as she imagines herself among the dead, merely a ghost caught between a former life in Europe and this new existence in the east. Many of her letters to and from Pope contain this motif of classical death; "let not my correspondence be like traffic with the grave, from whence there is no return".⁴⁰ Once more, the specter of death haunts her most poignant

³⁹ MWM to Alexander Pope, June 17, 1717, in Turkish *Embassy Letters*, ed. Malcolm Jack

⁴⁰ Alexander Pope to MWM, October 1717, in Montagu et al., *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 416.

writings. Her feelings of detachment seem to have manifested deeply as, after the June message to Pope, she did not write again until New Year.

Many western travelers to the east, particularly women, reported feelings of cultural dislocation. In a March letter translating a love poem for a friend, she laments that she is “in great danger of losing [her] English”.⁴¹ While not perhaps literally true, this complaint serves the dual purpose of boasting her mastery of Turkish while also expressing a genuine feeling of distancing as she becomes increasingly accustomed to eastern culture. After a year and a half abroad, Mary had come to appreciate and even appropriate Turkish customs ranging from food to clothing. She found Islamic clothing afforded her greater comfort and ease of movement than western garments. Even the traditional veil, so abhorred by Europeans as a sign of female oppression, aided her in providing secure anonymity as she traversed the city. So while Mary may not have been in danger of forgetting English, she did feel trepidation at the more nebulous risk of losing her Englishness.

It was during that strange year of literary silence that Lady Montagu was pregnant with her second child. Perhaps it was the presence of this other being that prompted her literary lull. Pre-partum depression seems unlikely, as she never hesitated to express her feelings of despair during the early years of her marriage. Therefore it seems that pregnancy led Mary to turn inwards in a different way than the introspection of seen in her letters, allowing her a more direct and visceral sense of companionship than the distant connections made through her epistolary network. A daughter, also called Mary, was born in January of 1718 at the residence in Pera. Turkish women viewed labor as a social occasion, something Lady Montagu firmly

⁴¹ MWM to Lady Bristol (attr.), March 16, 1718, in Turkish *Embassy Letters*, ed. Malcolm Jack, 122.

disagreed with when it came to her own lying in. However, she did approve of the generally less restrictive cultural attitudes, telling her sister “that it is not half so mortifying here as in England”.⁴² Attended by a more limited set, likely only a midwife and assistants, the birth apparently went smoothly as both Marys were out of bed by a few weeks later.⁴³ By March, she was back to her routine of visits and letter writing, traveling across the Bosphorus to call on a wife of the previous sultan. A letter to her sister exactly details the worth of the woman’s estate while largely omitting much of the substance of their conversation. Mary also reconnected with her friend from Adrianople, Fatima, whose residence and company she continued to find endlessly diverting.

Lady Montagu’s first order of business after the birth of her daughter is arguably her most significant historical contribution. Having lost relatives and nearly her own life to smallpox, Mary was perhaps naturally drawn to the Ottoman practice of engraftment, the precursor to modern vaccination. While male travelers knew of the concept, and the idea was even in vague circulation back in English scientific publications courtesy of a Dr. Timoni, Mary was likely the first person to have both first-hand experience with the devastation of the disease as well as the access to and trust of the largely female practitioners of the engraftment process. She detailed the procedure to her childhood friend Sarah Chiswell in an April letter from Adrianople. “The small-pox, so fatal, and so general amongst us, is here entirely harmless, by the invention of *ingrafting*”, a technique that involved opening a small vein in a healthy individual

⁴² MWM to Lady Mar, March 10, 1718, in Turkish *Embassy Letters*, ed. Malcolm Jack, 113.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

and inserting “matter of the best sort of small-pox...with a large needle”.⁴⁴ The process was then repeated on several veins, the wounds covered with a nutshell and bound. The sites of engraftment would result in open sores that scarred over, the patient would experience a weakened version of smallpox that manifested as a short fever a mild outbreak of pustules “which never mark; and in eight days time they are as well as before their illness”.⁴⁵ Exactly one year after that initial April missive, Mary wrote her husband that their son was recovering from the procedure, saying that he “is as well as can be expected, and I hope past all manner of danger”.⁴⁶ Wortley was still away with the sultan, leaving Mary in full control over their family affairs until his return. Mary made this massively significant decision without the knowledge or input of her husband. Dr. Maitland, the trip’s surgeon, and Dr. Timoni, a Royal Society Fellow and the family’s personal physician in Constantinople, preformed the procedure.⁴⁷ Thus, six-year-old Edward Wortley Montagu became the first recorded European to be inoculated against smallpox. With him as living proof of the procedure’s success, Lady Montagu brought the technique of engraftment back with her from the Orient to the upper classes of British society.

Another one of the matters she organized in his absence was to liquidate their assets for the return to England. Following political in-fighting back in London, Wortley was recalled as an ambassador. While he felt the wound to his pride, peace was achieved partially because of his work during the summer, he appears to have more deeply regretted the financial

⁴⁴ MWM to Sarah Chiswell, April 1, 1717, in Turkish *Embassy Letters*, ed. Malcolm Jack, 81.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ MWM to EWM, April 1, 1718, in Turkish *Embassy Letters*, ed. Malcolm Jack, 124.

⁴⁷ Halsband, *Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 80.

repercussions of his return as the Levant Company had retroactively cut his funding. Mary felt the dismissal more personally, although for her own sake rather than her husband's. With the shadow of departure looming, she tackled the twisting alleys her city with renewed vigor. "I ramble every day, wrapped up in my serigee and asmack, about Constantinople, and amuse myself with seeing all that is curious in it".⁴⁸ Draped in layers of silken fabric, hidden from prying eyes, she traversed the city and its sights. Akin to her first visit to the hamam, she felt a power in seeing without being seen. She strolled along palace galleries, perused Byzantine ruins, and stood beneath the iconic dome of the Blue Mosque. After repeated applications to local officials, she even received special dispensation to enter the ancient Hagia Sophia, which she found timeworn and somewhat uninspiring, compared to the neighboring mosques. As usual, her last letter from the city was to her sister. She described her deep regret at being forced to leave the land and people she had come to love. "I am used to the air and have learnt the language" she wrote, "I am easy here".⁴⁹

With its hold containing Lady Mary's Turkish wardrobe, Wortley's horses, and potentially a mummy ordered by Mary, the *HBMS Preston* sailed from Constantinople in July. Passing through the Dardanelles, Mary contemplated the romance of Hero and Leander, the ruins of Troy, and the grave of Achilles where, she quipped, "Alexander ran naked round his tomb, in honour of him, which, no doubt, was a great comfort to his ghost".⁵⁰ Standing on the bow of

⁴⁸ MWM to the Lady Bristol (attr.) May 1718 in *Turkish Embassy Letters*, ed. Malcolm Jack, 133. The serigee and asmack are incorrectly transliterated forms of traditional Muslim-Turkish outerwear, similar to a contemporary abaya and niqaab respectively.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ MWM to Abbé Conti, July 31, 1718, in *Turkish Embassy Letters*, ed. Malcolm Jack, 144.

the ship, she imagined herself transported through time to antiquity and sharing a dish of tea with her foremother Sappho. Writing from Tunis to her frequent correspondent Abbé Conti, she infuses her missive with endless allusions to classical mythology and literature. After the vibrant and thriving history of Constantinople, she found the whitewashed ocean views and crumbling Roman stones somewhat lacking in poetic grandeur.⁵¹ This is her last comment from the Ottoman world; a month later, she writes her sister from Italy and returns to discussing quirks in European social convention. The Wortleys stopped briefly in Paris during October and arrived back in England by the end of the month.

Mary had been gone from Britain for a little over two years, and she would remain for another two decades before departing permanently for the continent, only to return on final time shortly before her death in August of 1762.

⁵¹ A day trip to the ruins of Carthage evoked a similar response to the local women, whom Mary callously compares to baboons.

Part Two: Reading the *Letters*

The *Turkish Embassy Letters* are remarkable in many ways: they exemplify the witty rapport of familiar letters, the keen observations of an Enlightenment intellectual, and the romantic musings of a young woman. Standing on the edges of vast empires, she writes philosophy in prose both searching and sarcastic. She dismisses earlier men “who has wrote with equal ignorance and confidence...never fail giving you an account of the women, whom, 'tis certain, they never saw, and talking very wisely of the genius of the men, into whose company they are never admitted; and very often describe mosques, which they dare not even peep into”;⁵² Montagu gained actual access to the those specialized feminine spaces of the Ottoman world.⁵² Thus, while her male predecessors had fantasized about such exotic people and places, Lady Mary displayed a meta-awareness of her own role in perpetuating a fetishizing imperial gaze while simultaneously attempting to translate her own vision of trans-imperial femininity through the lens of feminine beauty in her experience of liminal oriental spaces.

A great deal of scholarship exists regarding Montagu as an agent of proto-feminism, British imperialism, and the formation of later Orientalist aesthetics. In literary circles, Montagu’s work has been analyzed as an early influence on Orientalist artistic traditions. Portraits of Lady Mary feature her in modified Ottoman dress, begging questions about the use of costume as a means of exercising imperial power through cultural cross-dressing. This historical involvement with Montagu as an ambiguously public figure necessitates something of a dual interpretation of her works as both individualized historical truth and subjective autobiographical fiction. As she draws on a variety of literary and historical sources as points of

⁵² MWM to Lady Bristol (attr.), June 17, 1717, in *Turkish Embassy Letters*, ed. Malcolm Jack, 144.

metaphor, understanding Montagu's writings requires an approach that includes not only her biography but also a broad understanding of her world.

Extracting Montagu's more abstract ideas from their embedded context within the letters is complicated by several factors. Firstly, it bears remembering that "Lady Mary published copies of these original letters after her return, perhaps revising (in the end both re-writing and re-seeing) them extensively in the course of her long life".⁵³ Numerous modernized versions of Montagu's text exist, adapted from the original spellings or translated from French, and editorial biases and linguistic drift have undoubtedly obscured the precise content of the original letters. As such, the more general impressions may be the only reliable fragments of the original writings. While individual details and letters may be misinterpreted, edited, or otherwise embellished, it is logical to assume that broader themes about Montagu's internal and external responses to trans-imperial constructions of female beauty remain intact. Analyzed in concert with later writings, it is possible to reconstruct Mary's development into an intellectual woman from her early days of literary exploration. For example, the letters concerning the future Wortley's prenuptial arrangements, apart from illuminating the details of a budding relationship, provide Mary's implicit and explicit commentary on early modern marriage practices. Later writings concerning relative liberation of Ottoman women echo these early philosophical arguments on the commodification of women among the British elite.

The duality of Lady Montagu's writings are exemplified here in the divergent framing of her work as both a travel narrative influenced by the traditional of genre but also as a series of

⁵³ Joseph W. Lew, "Lady Mary's Portable Seraglio," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 24, no. 4 (1991): 433, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2738966>.

personal meditations that transcend the limitations of form.⁵⁴ Her writing certainly contains something of romantic flair, particularly in the heroic framing of her journey. Yet, the fiction of the letters is still founded upon what she perceived as the actual drama of her own life. The actual narrative of events is likely embellished for the sake of form, but the broader thematic concerns remain relevant despite their additional context as literary entertainment.

Geopolitical Foundations and the Imperial Imagination

Firstly, some further discussion of Orientalism as an academic framework is required. Edward Said first codified this philosophy in his groundbreaking 1978 book, a seminal work that continues to fundamentally influence discourse across the humanities since its publication. While the historical scope of Said's work emphasizes the colonial and post-imperial era, the philosophical framing of imagined geographic space is nevertheless essential for analyzing Montagu in scholarly context. In brief, Orientalism is a way of explaining and examining the ways in which eastern and western encounters have unevenly shaped traditional study and discussion of the Orient as a place. Essentially, Said posits that the Orient does not in fact exist in reality but is rather a Western construction of imagined space projected onto an eastern geography, that the Orient exists only in the mind of Orientalist scholars and the imperial gaze of the colonizer. Yet this false construction is "something more formidable than a mere collection of lies. Orientalism, therefore, is not an airy European fantasy about the Orient, but a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable

⁵⁴ Robert Halsband, "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu as Letter-Writer," *PMLA* 80, no. 3 (1965): 163, <https://doi.org/10.2307/461262>.

material investment.”⁵⁵ So while the Orient is not a physical place, the concept of the Orient as a space such as Montagu envisioned carries as much weight as a negative idea as any positively real thing.

To further understand Lady Montagu as an agent of imperialism, one must first understand something of the imperial context in which she operated. During the period in which the *Embassy Letters* were written, British politics underwent a series of internal realignments that shaped foreign policy. Born into a tradition of Whig politicians, Mary saw the ascendancy of her family’s political party following the death of Queen Anne and the Hanoverian succession. Her father was a stalwart member of the Old Guard Whigs and Mary learned politics literally from his knee at meetings of the prominent KitKat Club in London. Her husband, the future Ambassador Wortley, was a member of the more radical Country Whigs and therefore supported a staunchly anti-royalist and anti-corruption stance similar to early American notions of Republicanism. Party loyalties aside, Britain had recently emerged from ongoing conflict on the continent, largely against Bourbon France in the Nine Years War of the late seventeenth century and then the following War of Spanish Succession. By 1714, the power balance within Europe had stabilized and members of both parties in England looked further afield towards the lurking menace of the Russian Empire.

Crouched at the continent’s edge, Russian expansion could threaten European political cohesion and, in turn, British security and economic concerns. The Holy Roman Empire, and the Austro-Hungarian Hapsburg Monarchy in particular, was the largest bulwark against Russia and its sphere of influence. If Emperor Charles VI was distracted by conflict, his Ottoman neighbors to the south, Europe’s northeastern borders would be left vulnerable to aggression from

⁵⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, 6.

Russia. Additionally, Ottoman forces occupied with Europe would leave territory in the Black Sea vulnerable to Russian incursion, essentially allowing Russia to open a back door to Europe via the warm-water ports of Crimea. Thus, it was naturally in the interest of British foreign policy to promote peace between Constantinople and Vienna as a means of protecting English stability within Europe more broadly. As the wife and daughter of politicians, as a keen philosopher and scholar of classic history and literature, Lady Montagu would have understood this complex geopolitical situation as the background upon which her own narrative was set.

Her understanding the Ottoman world, on the other hand, requires a bit more extrapolation. Lady Montagu owned a copy of Galland's French version of *Mille et Une Nuit*, and an English version of the same manuscripts was also widely available in the first decade of the eighteenth century.⁵⁶ While iconic, this work was not unique, as tales of the near east were long established within British culture as part of a discourse of early Orientalism. As first outlined by Said, Europeans have largely constructed conceptions of 'the East'. For example, since the time of the British Crusades and the Fall of Constantinople, "Islam and Muslims came to [symbolize an Other] that could be used to mobilize support for territorial conquest, and to redirect intra-European conflict outward".⁵⁷ The canon of imagined Islam contained images of the *reconquista* in Moorish Spain, of the debauched and scheming harem women found in novels, and of the mysterious wonders of the east recounted by travelers in the tradition of Marco Polo. Based on these imaginings, "Islam became an image...whose function was not so much to

⁵⁶ Grundy, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 135 n.3.

⁵⁷ Isra Ali, "The Harem Fantasy in Nineteenth-Century Orientalist Paintings," *Dialectical Anthropology* 39, no. 1 (March 2015): 35, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-015-9372-7>.

represent Islam in itself as to represent it for the medieval Christian”.⁵⁸ Italy in particular, being the traditional last gateway to the east and frequent combatant against it, held a rich artistic tradition of orientalist images that combined the religious imagery and humanism of the Renaissance with traditional constructions of eastern culture and otherness. Titian and Guido Reni, some of Mary’s artistic touchstones, painted Salomés and Sultanas in this exoticizing and eroticizing oriental mode. Thus, westerners living along the borders of European domain viewed the Islamic empire of the Ottomans as barbaric and oppressive force that threatened their security, both in terms of literal physical territory as well as ideologically through the supposed corruption and destruction of Christianity.

However, scholars also note a distinct shift in European views regarding the orient during the late seventeenth and eighteenth century. Said himself points to a switch “in the eighteenth century from Renaissance constructions of the Orient as a barbaric 'other'...to acts of 'selective identification'” by which the one could begin to identify aspects of the self within the other and vice-versa.⁵⁹ This cultural conception leads to both a broader embrace of eastern culture, such as the rise of Turkish fashion, and a more nuanced rejection of it, such as the arbitrary delineation of good and bad Arabs that persists into the modern era. In order to appreciate Montagu’s writing fully, it is necessary to understand what she was writing in response to. She derides men like Montesquieu who narrated oriental people and places when they had no actual knowledge of such foreign spaces, asserting that “tis certain, there are many people that pass years here in [Constantinople], without having ever seen it, and yet they all

⁵⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, 60.

⁵⁹ Rosalind Ballaster, *Fabulous Orient: Fictions of the East in England, 1662-1785* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 16.

pretend to describe it”.⁶⁰ Additionally, the *Embassy Letters* subvert the traditional divide between ancient civilizations and oriental empires by interweaving them into a fluid narrative of association rather than static disunion.⁶¹ Montagu’s work set the precedent for later constructions of oriental places as timeless space, bound as equally by the fantasy of an historic past as by a rejection of modernity.

Unlike male authors, she had direct access to the objects and places of her fantasy: the harem. Later authors interpreted these scenes of intimate femininity as inherently sexual, leading to ongoing speculation regarding Montagu’s own sexual orientation. After their falling out, Pope accused her of lesbianism, and multiple modern scholars have attempted similar arguments. Marilyn Morris boldly claims Lady Mary was “a gay man trapped in a woman’s body”, while other historians have suggested was merely engaging in a sort of performative queerness.⁶² However, both of these extremes of interpretation fundamentally overlook the nuance of Mary’s own writing and experiences as well as the mutability of early modern sexual identities. While both men and women occupied highly gender-specific social roles, these roles were accompanied by a high degree of homo-social interaction that encouraged intimate friendships. Thus, while modern western culture sharply divides platonic and romantic relationships in terms of physical and emotional familiarity, historical actors were unrestrained by such notions. Thus, to argue or reject Mary as a lesbian on the basis on her social relationships alone overlooks Montagu’s biographical context.

⁶⁰ MWM to Lady Bristol, April 10, 1718 in *Turkish Embassy Letters* ed. Malcolm Jack, 126.

⁶¹ Ballaster, *Fabulous Orient*, 17.

⁶² Marilyn Morris, “Transgendered Perspectives on Premodern Sexualities,” *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 46, no. 3 (2006): 595, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sel.2006.0028>.

That is not to say Montagu was a paragon of straight-laced heterosexuality. While not the perverse homosexual Pope painted her, nor the desperate philanderer she was cast as after her death, Montagu's writings reveal her undeniably Sapphic leanings. Rather than a trespasser into regions of queer identity, Mary's time in Turkey reveals wanderings among foreign homo-social networks as a crucible for exploring her own sexual identity. Like countless travelers before, the orient allowed Montagu to fashion fantasies based on sensual and aesthetic experiences. The scent of flowers on a rustling breeze, the taste of strong coffee, the weight of silk on skin: these tactile memories formed the basis of Mary's romantic imaginations and ultimately entwined her experiences of foreign travel with fantasies of foreign women. This sensualized connection further support the network of ideological connection between women and empire in an orientalist context.

Mary's writings construct an equally fantasized yet less clearly fetishized version of oriental feminine beauty. Unlike male imaginings, her fantasizing fixated not only on the physical body of the feminine, but also the physical space and by extension the intellectual and social place this space occupied. Certainly, she delighted in gazing upon nude figures "well proportioned and white skinned; all of them perfectly smooth and polished by the frequent use of bathing", but she also enjoyed the pure sensual experience afforded by gazing, and most importantly she intellectualized that enjoyment into a fantasy of female liberation.⁶³ Whereas male imperialists sought to define the orient as a place in simplistic terms, Mary relished her experience of the east as timeless, a liminal space.

Initially suggested as a concept in the field of anthropology, liminality has traditionally been used as a means of analyzing literary rather than historical works. First used to explain rites

⁶³ MWM to Lady Bristol (attr.), May, 1718, in *Turkish Embassy Letters* ed. Malcolm Jack, 135.

of passage, the concept of liminality refers to an experience or state of being betwixt and between. Recent post-structuralist scholarship has increasingly embraced the idea of liminalism as a means of examining subaltern groups. While the identification of a marginalized people necessarily depends on the distinction of both people and margins, and is thus inconsistent with a pure post-structuralism, “we are left, then, with a Foucauldian insight: any social order has its marginalized groups. What liminality as a category can do...is to focus our gaze on these groups”.⁶⁴ Thus, liminality allows for the identification and analysis of people and places that occupy an in-between space within the larger historical narrative, providing a means of assessing the whole via inferences made from the negative rather than positive spaces of narrative. Additionally, liminality and Orientalism are syncretic frameworks, in that both offer the concept of mental geographies as a means of reevaluating physical locations.

Said broaches a version of liminality in his framing of Orientalism. Different from a physical location, or place, a space is an area of social action, a stage for historical analysis rather than a setting.⁶⁵ Using the metaphor of a house, Said explains the poetics of space: “the objective space of a house—its corners, corridors, cellar, rooms—is far less important than what poetically it is endowed with...thus a house may be haunted or homelike, or prisonlike, or magical. So space acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here. The same process occurs when we deal with time”. Like crossing the threshold of a room in a house, passing the threshold between the real and imagined spaces that constitute the Orient requires a mental

⁶⁴ Iver B. Neumann, “Introduction to the Forum on Liminality,” *Review of International Studies* 38, no. 2 (April 2012): 477, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210511000817>.

⁶⁵ Amanda Flather, *Gender and Space in Early Modern England*, Royal Historical Society Publication (Woodbridge, UK ; Rochester, NY: Royal Historical Society/Boydell Press, 2007), 2.

process that creates a fuzzy boundary, an in-between place.⁶⁶ Even the consideration of real, physical boundaries between east and west is largely subjective. “A line is drawn between continents, [separating] the otherwise silent and dangerous space beyond familiar boundaries” into places to be genuinely created and articulated by Europeans.⁶⁷ Montagu’s *Letters*, although significantly more culturally nuanced than comparable works, fall into Said’s framework of western narratives or oriental people and places.

In narrating exotic liminal space, one returns again to the site of the hamam. One of the most notable pieces in the *Letters*, Mary’s depiction of the baths is a study in contrasts. Hot steam and cold pools, dark corners and circles of light, white skin and black eyes. The baths were both private in the sense that access was limited to women, men were not allowed, and also public in that this was a shared communal space full of women. In early modern British society, interior spaces were less starkly gendered than in Ottoman culture; while the domestic space of the interior was traditionally conceived of as feminine, most rooms were multifunctional areas and the private spaces within the home were not necessarily coded as feminine.⁶⁸ By contrast, the harem and hamam were exclusive feminine spaces, but implied a public rather than private interiority. British women, as heads of household, controlled access to their domestic interiors, but regularly confronted the “permeability of domestic spatial boundaries”.⁶⁹ The Islamic gender dynamics of Islamic architecture and culture allowed for a more selectively permeable membrane. Montagu’s experience of this boundary led her to conclude the “Turkish women

⁶⁶ Said, *Orientalism*, 55.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁶⁸ Flather, *Gender and Space in Early Modern England*, 43.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

[were] the only free people in the empire”.⁷⁰ While both Ottoman and British women were nominally confined to the domestic interior places of their homes, Mary argued that the liminality found in specialized feminine spaces allowed Muslim women greater control over their action and movements within their domain.

Montagu viewed this freedom as extending outside of the interior spaces through the wearing of the veil. All women in public wore the *yaşmak*, an Ottoman form of a niqaab that Mary incorrectly transliterated as *asmack*, in order to cover their hair and face as part of the Islamic concept of hijab (modesty). A *ferace* or long overcoat was then thrown over the body in order to fully conceal a woman’s identity. Montagu asserted it was easy to see how Turkish women were more liberated than their British counterparts, as “this perpetual masquerade gives them entire liberty of following their inclinations, without danger of discovery”.⁷¹ While Mary half-jokingly suggests the identity-concealing hijab facilitates extra-marital affairs, there is a strong implication that the real freedom lay in a woman being able to publicly conduct her affairs, sexual or otherwise, uninhibited and unobserved in a way that was not possible in Europe. Thus the hijab allowed Ottoman women to make their specialized feminine interior spaces portable, allowing them the freedom of movement unconstrained by observation, thereby creating within themselves something of a continual liminality. That freedom also translated into Montagu narrating a more liberated view of herself, and her travels in Turkey were fundamentally defined by encounters with liminality. The hamam, the harem, even her clothing served as spaces of cultural dislocation.

⁷⁰ MWM to the Countess of Mar, April 1, 1717 in *Turkish Embassy Letters* ed. Malcolm Jack, 126.

⁷⁰ Ballaster, *Fabulous Orient*.

⁷¹ MWM to Lady Mar, April 1, 1717, in *Turkish Embassy Letters*, ed. Malcolm Jack, 71.

Foreign Bodies: Cultural Cross-Dressing and Dislocation

Another way of examining Lady Mary's experience with liminality is reflected in her understanding of her own physical body. Universally lauded as attractive in her youth, smallpox fundamentally altered the way in which Mary viewed herself, her body, and her physical beauty. Her repeated emphasis on smooth white skin, loosely braided hair, and large black eyes echo her own aesthetic sensitivities, both in what she found attractive in other women and what she found lacking in herself. After the smallpox, her skin was no longer unmarred, her eyes overly sensitive, and she may still have been recovering from hair loss due to fever. Thus, while her circulated poetry suggests a reconciliation with her changed appearance, Mary's specific interest in the beautiful features of Eastern women arguably reflect an ongoing conflict as her sense of beauty was still essentially shaped by Eurocentric beauty ideals that reflect the image of her own 'faded' beauty.

The eurocentrism and self-identification in Lady Montagu's construction of beauty also bear analyzing through the specific lens of empire. British aesthetic philosophy during the era held an equivalence between ideal feminine beauty and English pastoral imagery. "The aesthetics of the beautiful no longer connect beauty only to women. Beauty now belonged to both Englishwomen and the English landscape, which were seen as analogous and connected because the one could exist only in the other".⁷² By traveling both physically and ideologically outside of the traditional private sphere and engaging more publicly, women were able to step into a different performative role as agents of imperialism. While there was previously a link

⁷² Grewal Inderpal, "Home and Harem: Domesticity, Gender, and Nationalism," in *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire, and the Cultures of Travel* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 32.

between an embryonic cult of domesticity ascribed to gender and feminine expression of nationalism, the popularization of travel by women resulted in the projection of nationalist sentiment onto grander themes of women as agents of imperializing domesticity.⁷³ The period aesthetic of beauty emphasized the clarity, lightness, and familiarity, while rejecting the darkness of the foreign as merely sublime. Thus, a connection between feminine beauty and imperial landscapes did not extend to the orient.

Additionally, not only was beauty absent from the orient, but so was civilized society in the eyes of Enlightenment thinkers. Period philosophy held that such torrid climatic zones, those countries nearer the equator and furthest from the frigid zones of Britain, produced savage cultures.⁷⁴ Unlike the refined societies of Europe, the men and women of distant lands in Asia and Africa belonged to martial races that knew only violence and brutality. Once again, torrid zones were not only strictly physical geographies, but also human geographies and bodies. Women's bodies contained a "torrid zone", too, an inconvenient feature that seemingly defied geographic location and which threatened to undermine of progress of civilization of European countries by its very existence".⁷⁵ If western ladies could threaten European imperialism with their physical being, then the primitive women of the east with their sexual deviance and sensual hedonism were infinitely more dangerous.

However, Mary's portraits and writings directly subvert these notions of a negatively aesthetic liminalism. The warmth of the Turkish climate is far preferable to bitter British cold,

⁷³ Ibid., 33.

⁷⁴ Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain 1640-1990*, (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1999), 90.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Montagu's poem "Constantinople" contains quite a few thoughts on the subject; such as "No Killing Cold deforms ye Beauteous Year". And not just the weather is to be lauded. Mary sought to present her subjects as somehow familiar, as partially equivalent to European conceptions of beauty and the 'feminine picturesque'. Lady Montagu repeatedly invoked the notion of 'beauties of the empire' in letters from both European and Ottoman courts, thus presenting novel exotic images in terms of familiar words.⁷⁶ These generalizations are in contrast to those made regarding European courtiers, for while "the young [Ottoman] women being all beauties, and their beauty highly improved by the high taste of their dress",⁷⁷ one "may easily suppose how this extraordinary dress sets off and improves the natural ugliness, with which God Almighty has been pleased to endow" the Hapsburg women.⁷⁸ Additionally, her imperial beauties were firmly situated within oriental situations, feminized and familiarized by the language of domesticity and interiority. Thus, "something patently foreign and distant acquires, for one reason or another, a status more rather than less familiar".⁷⁹ Lady Mary's linkage of beauty to empire explicitly points to an intersection of femininity and orientalism within a broader network of imperial ideology and aesthetics.

A material history approach assesses the use of costume in constructions of identity provides further concrete support of the interconnection between female beauty and female

⁷⁶ Pratapaditya Pal and Vidya Dehejia, *From Merchants to Emperors: British Artists and India 1757-1930*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986) in John Marx, "Modernism and the Female Imperial Gaze," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 32, no. 1 (1998): 55.

⁷⁷ MWM to Abbé Conti, May 29, 1717, in *Turkish Embassy Letters* ed. Malcolm Jack, 99.

⁷⁸ MWM to Lady Mar, September 14, 1716, in *Turkish Embassy Letters* ed. Malcolm Jack, 17.

⁷⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, 58.

agency within an imperial and oriental context. In letters to her sister, Mary repeatedly describes local fashions in exquisite minutia, from the towering lace headdresses of the Viennese court to the sheepskin coats of Slavic peasants, as well as passages about her own attire. Once in Turkey, she began adopting the Ottoman style of dress with its layers of flowing silk and draped brocade, and portraits of the Lady Montagu often feature her garbed in romanticized Turkish attire. The use of costume as a means of materially and mentally construction imperial identities can be read in the various rejection and assimilation of foreign clothing by imperial outsiders.

One key means of cultural interaction and perhaps transgression is Montagu's affection of Ottoman dress, her status permitting her to engage in a form of ethnomasquerade. Ottoman costume had influenced European fashion for decades by Mary's time; the origins of Turkish inspired dress lie in the masquerade tradition of southern European courts.⁸⁰ The action of trans-cultural costuming is variously interpreted as a means of asserting imperial power, as a further fetishizing of oriental forms, or even as an attempt to assimilate some aspect of Ottoman culture. "Oriental dress was the touchstone for the very ambiguous act of formal dressing up, an activity in which self-enhancement and disguise are gloriously confused", and the line between the wearer as a spectator of an 'other' and as a spectacle of borrowed otherness becomes blurred.⁸¹ Once again, Mary occupies the dual position of object and gazer, seeing and being seen, the same position she enjoyed when she initially adopted the veil.

Again, one returns to the dichotomy of Montagu's own narrative; she is both a public persona who engages in performative imperialism as well as a private figure romanticizing

⁸⁰ Adam Geczy, *Fashion and Orientalism: Dress, Textiles and Culture from the 17th to the 21st Century* (London ; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

⁸¹ Ibid.

herself in relation to a transimperial context. One interpretation attempts to reconcile these positions by suggesting that Lady Mary's ethnomasquerade was merely a rhetorical strategy selected to emulate male narratives and thus lend authenticity to her own account of intercultural contact, and that this episode of mimicry then set the template for all future female travelers to the region.⁸² As Lady Mary cast herself as the modern reenactor of classical mythology, future women would construct their journey to the east within the framework of Montagu's narratives, foreign costuming often replacing a travelling outfit as the explorers' de facto attire. However, unlike court masquerades or passing travelers, Mary's wardrobe was more assimilated rather than appropriated in that she purchased in and was gifted the items in their country of origin rather than importing them, thus lending her a more genuine authenticity in her clothing rather than the mere impression of verisimilitude found in most cases of oriental costuming for imperial rhetoric.

It is worth noting that, before her adoption of caftan and veil, Lady Mary's daily travelling attire was the more subdued riding habit. Relatively conservative in cut but durable in make, the habit allowed the wearer maximum comfort and freedom of movement while still being stylish enough to wear in public. While more formal occasions required a change of dress, much of Mary's trip across the continent was made in a humble riding habit. In addition to being practical, the outfit also served as a visceral, tactile reminder of her Britishness. For example, she wore her starched wool riding habit to the hamam in Sophia when all the local ladies were in the nude, thereby setting herself apart as an object of observation as much as she wrote in the guise of observer. Additionally, the habit itself was something of a liminal form, much like the hamam.

⁸² Kader Konuk, "Ethnomasquerade in Ottoman-European Encounters: Reenacting Lady Mary Wortley Montagu," *Criticism* 46, no. 3 (2004): 394-95. <https://doi.org/10.1353/crt.2005.0007>.

Women's dress of the early modern era featured pockets, a separate article of clothing much larger than their modern counterparts. A personal and personalized item, a lady's pocket generally contained anything from a small sewing kit to money and valuables to the eponymous pocketbook. The pocket was worn atop the undergarments but beneath the out layers of clothing, accessed through discrete slits in the wide skirt. Neither visible to the outside world nor in full contact with the wearer's body, the pocket occupies something of a liminal space between the exterior and interior, thus making the pocket an ideal material metaphor for examining the relationship between female spaces of the domestic interior and public exterior as well as conceptions of privacy and the self.⁸³

Mary kept a travel journal, a separate manuscript from her *Embassy Letters*, but from which she sourced much of her epistolary material.⁸⁴ There is ongoing scholarly debate about when the actual *Embassy Letters* were first written, whether during the trip itself or potentially cribbed from the initial correspondence years later. One thing is certain, however, Mary carried a journal and she almost certainly carried it in her pocket so as to have it on her person at all times should something noteworthy or amusing occur. The journal, filled with her unfiltered writing, would have been a constant weight at her side, a more reliable travelling companion than her husband ever was. At night, pockets were stashed under one's pillow for safekeeping, so it is possible she slept with these writings, one is almost tempted to imagine the ideas percolating into her dreams through a sort of osmosis. That these intensely private writings provided the

⁸³ Ariane Fennetaux, "Women's Pockets and the Construction of Privacy in the Long Eighteenth Century," *Eighteenth Century Fiction* 20, no. 3 (2008): 307–34, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ecf.0.0009>.

⁸⁴ Anita Desai, introduction to *Turkish Embassy Letters*, ed. Malcolm Jack (Athens [GA]: University of Georgia Press, 1993) xxiv. The journal she kept on the trip as well as most other diaries are lost to scholars as they were destroyed by her daughter shortly before her Lady Mary's death.

basis for an essentially public manuscript further blurs the lines between Mary's personal and political writings, between truth and reality, between her outward projections of a persona and her internal constructions of self. Understanding the *Letters* to have such a physical connection to their author furthers the case that their writing was a personal construction of identity.

Picturing the Orient and the Rhetoric of Aesthetic

The rhetoric of orientalist aesthetics and ideology, the framework within which Mary exists, is fundamentally based on the idea of gazing. Gazing as a word here implies an act that exists somewhere between actively seeing and passively looking. When imperialists looked upon a landscape, human or geographic, they did not necessarily see what was empirically there but rather gazed upon a setting and imagined a space of imperial reality. In historical analysis, "seeing is the origin of knowing. Writing is reproduction, transmission—the communication of knowledge gained through (visual, visceral) experience".⁸⁵ But experience is subjective, Montagu's repeated rewriting and therefore re-seeing of her experiences further confuses the issue. There is something ironic in Mary's interest in gazing when her own gaze was so damaged. Even before her illness, she complained about "the weakness of [her] sight".⁸⁶ After the smallpox, many of her letters were written by windows in order to make use of the filtered daylight, as bright sunshine bothered her sensitive eyes. These vision problems would have furthered the dreamlike state through which she viewed much of her travels, ringing figures in hazy halos, blurring lines and softening edges so that the image seen reflected the fuzzy spaces

⁸⁵ Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (July 1991): 776.

⁸⁶ MWM to Mrs. Hewet, November 1714, in Montagu et al., *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 155.

she imagined. Yet that action of rewriting, or rewording, is a historical encounter in itself, as “language is the site of history's enactment. Historical explanation cannot, therefore, separate” the experience and the language of a historical encounter in its analysis.⁸⁷ Thus, the *Letters* represent something of a dual gaze, both the initial visual encounter and the subsequent emotionally visceral experience contained in the rewritings, serving as separate yet complimentary acts of imperial gazing.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's public projection of her identity was an image of intelligence and elegance carefully curated for an imperial gaze. Several portraits of Lady Mary from this period and later depict her magnificently attired in Oriental clothing. These images promote her self-identified status as a member of the literati with foreign connections and exquisite taste. For example, in a portrait attributed to Jonathan Richardson the Younger (1674-1771), Montagu appears as the central figure upon a vague baroque landscape, clothed in extravagant yet elegant ‘Turkish dress’, and flanked by a young black page.⁸⁸ She strikes a dramatic figure, pale skin and glowing robes a stark contrast to the darkness of the pastoral backdrop and, more importantly, the dark figure of the page at her right drawing the eye and mind to uncomfortable questions. The contrast in lighting furthers the Romantic conception of the pure beauty of the imperial versus the sublime nature of the Orient. The work is a stark contrast to Mary's earlier portrait by Charles Jervas (1675-1739), which feature a slightly awkward teenager styled as a shepherdess rather than this image of imperial majesty and oriental drama. Utilizing ‘authentic’ oriental costume allowed a portrait's sitter publically express their imperial allegiance by commemorating their foreign connections by visually authenticating a

⁸⁷ Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” 793.

⁸⁸ This figure's presence alone could constitute an entire study, but is not addressed significantly in this text as that is outside the scope of this paper.

persona of exotic fashion and power.⁸⁹ Thus, the use cultural cross-dressing in imperialist portraiture was both a visual assertion of power via the de-contextualization of cultural artifacts as well as an attempt somehow cross the cultural boundary being affirmed through the affectation of those same elements. Portraiture guides both subject and viewer through the act of imperial gazing.

However, even the relationship to an imperial gaze articulated in her portraiture is ambiguous. Jervas and Richardson feature a vague landscape, with Jervas including a mosque and Richardson a black page as further nods to an oriental context. However, court painter Godfrey Kneller (1746-1723) and later the Italian portraitist Carlo Francesco Rusca (1693-1769) opted for both a more closely cropped image and less clearly defined setting. These latter works, although separated by several decades, seem more portraits of Mary as a woman rather than Montagu as a lady. Warm ochre and burnt sienna backgrounds echo the warm tones of the Ottoman world, with Mary herself mimicking the Turkish women with their pale skin, flowing hair, and dark eyes. Her figure and clothing are almost impressionistically realized, not the hyperrealism of Richardson and Jervas. Viewed in chronological order (Kneller, Jervas, Richardson, Rusca), one sees Montagu's evolution into a fully articulated woman, first putting on and ultimately casting of the mantle of imperialist power in order to refocus the gaze upon her broader intellectual existence.

Montagu's aesthetic rhetoric lays the foundation both for later writers and for future imperial thinking. Biographer Isobel Grundy points to Virginia Woolf's Orlando as a relevant parallel to Montagu's experience, arguing it as a potential citation on Woolf's part. More

⁸⁹ Tara Mayer, "Cultural Cross-Dressing: Posing and Performance in Orientalist Portraits," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 22, no. 02 (2012): 289, April 2012, accessed September 29, 2016, doi:10.1017/s1356186312000168.

recently, Alison Winch's article "'Drinking a Dish of Tea With Sappho': The Sexual Fantasies of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Lord Byron" discusses Byron's reported fascination with Montagu; he supposedly occupied her same Venetian house and later discovered and published previously lost love letters she had written to an Italian count. Winch proposes that this, combined with other writings by Byron, speak to a sort of intellectual obsession on Byron's part as well as a basis for examining both writers in terms of potentially complimentary fantasies of transgressive sexualities. Yet Byron, a man known to history for his sexual deviance and unrestrained and often uncomfortable hedonism, is an unlikely sympathizer for Montagu. Her writings manifest a vision of refined epicureanism, rejecting the lewd or lascivious in which Byron excelled. Byron's Venetian adventures seem more of an egotistical research project than a reverent historical tribute. Similarly, Ruth Bernard Yeazell argues that the neoclassical French painter Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres created his iconic *Grande Odalisque* and *Le Bain Turc* as an obsessive homage to Montagu's letters. The paintings visually interpret Montagu's letters into canvases of nude flesh and sensual poses surrounded by the blue hues of a vaguely Oriental setting. However, Ingres's, and to a lesser extent Byron's, interpretation of Montagu is more purely fantasy than translation.⁹⁰ Their art overlooks the nuance of Mary's writings in favor of fetishized tropes and an excuse to depict hyper-sexualized nudes. These repeated attempts at artistic projection onto Montagu's work reflect the broader trend of intellectuals taking up her perceptions of the orient in order to bolster their own imperial agendas.

This sort of retro-projection of the male gaze onto female narratives and feminine spaces is pervasive. Said first outlined the construction of harem fantasies and visions of an exotic

⁹⁰ Ruth Bernard Yeazell, "Public Baths and Private Harems: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Origins of Ingres's *Bain Turc*," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 7, no. 1 (1994).

orient, asserting them as the result of imperial male imagination. However, Mary's writings construct an equally fantasized yet less clearly fetishized version of oriental feminine beauty. While Pope writes to her of "the extreme effeminacy, laziness, and lewdness of life" in the East, she makes no reply.⁹¹ Shortly before her departure from Constantinople, she expresses an adjacent idea to Conti: "we die or grow old before we can reap the fruit of our labours. Considering what short-liv'd, weak animals men are, is there any study so beneficial as the study of present pleasure?", again using Enlightenment philosophy of man's purpose and natural state to argue for an intellectualized epicureanism.⁹²

Unlike male authors, she had direct access to the objects and places of her fantasy: the harem and the hamam. Additionally, her fantasizing fixated not only on the physical body of the feminine, but also the physical space and by extension the intellectual and social place this space occupied. Mary's fantasy was as much about what these places meant as what they were; she was romanticizing what she saw rather than seeing what others fantasized. Instead of imagining an erotically foreign place, she is able to perceive empires of beauty within the 'exotic' spaces of the east. She conjures an almost universal vision of female beauty and liberation. Whereas male imperialists sought to define the orient as a place in simplistic terms, Mary relished her experience of the east as timeless, a liminal space; outside of a historical reality rather than constrained by it. Certainly, she enjoyed looking upon nude figures with unblemished skin and long tresses, but she also enjoyed gazing and the sensual and sensory delights it provided.

⁹¹ Alexander Pope to MWM, June, 1717 in Montagu et al., *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 428. Her lack of reply is partially due to the beginning of her period of literary silence during her pregnancy, although her correspondence with Pope often sidestepped his talk of such issues.

⁹² MWM to Abbé Conti May 19, 1718, in *Turkish Embassy Letters*, ed. Malcolm Jack, 142.

Montagu's gazing was also not necessarily sexual, although it was still constrained by larger frameworks of the imperial gaze, focusing on tactile details beyond the pseudo-sexual images of her encounters such as the repeated sensory images of coffee and perfume. Mary intellectualized her enjoyment into a fantasy of female liberation rather than womanly wantonness.

Letters to Pope in particular highlight the divergence between Montagu's interpretation of her experiences in the east as relating to imperial womanhood and female agency, compared to Pope's hyper-masculine imaginings of sexual deviance. Mary's harem and hamam were the site of female interiority, of the unseen and unbounded. In a particularly crude letter, Pope told her "I shall look upon you no longer as a Christian, when you pass from that charitable court to the land of jealousy, where the unhappy women converse with none but eunuchs, and where the very cucumbers are brought to them cut".⁹³ Mary made to reply to these insinuations, not stooping to acknowledge such language. Her next letter to him, written some months later, with the excuse that she'd been busy despite numerous letters to other correspondents suggesting otherwise, Montagu responded to his violent subtext with explicit scenes of bloodshed. Passing the recent battlefields south of Hungary near the imperial border, "I could not look, without horror, on such numbers of mangled human bodies, nor without reflecting on the injustice of war, that makes murder not only necessary but meritorious".⁹⁴ Her statement here avoided the pitfalls of a specific value judgment, reaching instead for higher Enlightenment questions of morality and human nature. Where Pope imagined fantastical places, Mary was faced with the brutality that resulted when imagined projections encroached on the physical geography and

⁹³Alexander Pope to MWM, November 10, 1716, in Montagu et al., *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 420.

⁹⁴MWM to Alexander Pope, February 12, 1717, in Turkish *Embassy Letters*, ed. Malcolm Jack, 51.

reality of human lives. While still confounded by a fundamentally western Orientalist mindset, Montagu's direct experience with real imperial spatial conflicts and the position of women within such struggles allowed her to conceive of the east as like most other great places: simultaneously terribly violent and terribly beautiful, a nuance generally lacked by her contemporaries who took a binary view of the issue.

To Pope and other male outsiders, Ottoman places are a physical interior that bounds a site of fantasy, fetishized because it is hidden, but which they desire to view. Men seek to possess the place of the Orient, while Mary attempted to occupy the space as a female co-inhabitant. She was still, perhaps, appropriating a cultural space, but her invasion is at least one which desired an understanding rather than mere conquest. "By placing herself inside the central frame with the Oriental women, yet also insistently remaining outside the larger frame as artist, producer, and letter writer, she foregrounds her solidarity with the Turkish women as subject/subjected: all women become *objets d'art* for the Western male".⁹⁵ Her narration of Ottoman women and their specialized spaces broke from the traditional travel narrative of people and places. Men like Pope sought to possess beauty, were envious of the harem as it was a forbidden space. "I think I love you as well as King Herod could Herodias... and would as freely give you my heart in a dish as he did another's head" he declares, as though love or desire or beauty are objects that can be given and taken rather than amorphous concepts which can be only appreciated. For Mary, neither beauty nor love were such simple concepts, yet life could be made simple only through the pure and unrestrained enjoyment of such notions.⁹⁶ Her beauties exist not as vague props

⁹⁵ Lew, "Lady Mary's Portable Seraglio," 443.

⁹⁶ MWM to Abbé Conti, May 19, 1718, in Turkish *Embassy Letters*, ed. Malcolm Jack.

upon a landscape, wild and untamed, but as clearly defined individuals who exist both within and beyond the setting of their specialized interiors.

The Darling Frailty of Mankind

Montagu's desire for bidirectional gazing, to both see and be seen, manifests throughout her work. Her writings speak of longing: for escape, for comfort, for change, for stability. She desires, not in the male imperialist way of desiring to possess, but a soul-deep hunger that drove her to pen volumes and cross continents. Her republic of letters, her empire of beauty, these are not possessions but creations. She doesn't want to watch from the shadows, she wants to be on the inside looking out. To a modern audience, her desires often seem contradictory. She seeks stability through constant change, draws close by pushing away, embraces and casts off people and personas as easily as she changes her wardrobe. One must attempt to excavate the layers of sarcasm and sentiment that make up her identity in order to begin understanding the substance at the center of her self. So, Constantinople, the crux of empires, the meeting of east and west, straddled between the land and sea, is the axis from which everything spins. And standing on that center axis is Lady Mary, spinning her own network of dichotomy and watching the universe turn in awe.

It is tempting to modernize Montagu in an attempt to humanize her, but doing so not only deprives her of context it objectifies her actions as if people exist outside of time. Previous scholars have blindly branded her an imperial apologist, and oriental resister, but none of these assessments are correct. Just like Ingres or Byron, many historians also suffer from an almost compulsive need to project modern ideological structures onto the foundation of Mary's biography. The truth, as always, lies somewhere in the middle. As a white, Christian, upper-class, British traveler, she benefits from and promotes the act of imperial gazing. In envisioning

the people and places of the Ottoman Empire into something else, she is culpable for perpetuating and arguably even originating orientalist sentiment. But her vision, blurry and unbounded, does not fit neatly into either early modern or contemporary models of imperial gazing. Montagu embraces an idea of time and space that is beyond traditional orientalism. She views the east as timeless not because it is backwards or locked in the past, but because there are places within it which offer access to liminal spaces outside of linear time. Her relationships with the woman of the east are similarly divergent from traditional narratives of east-west communication. While there is a level of oriental exoticising and eroticizing in Montagu's writings, she does not sexualize Ottoman women, objectifying and abstracting them, but rather sensualizes them further into a full reality. They are not merely part of the romantic eastern setting, but actors engaged with the scenery as much as any European. By envisioning oriental places as liminal spaces and through engaging with Ottoman woman through a modified sort of imperial gazing, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu created a timeless and transnational empire of beauty in the form of her posthumously published *Turkish Embassy Letters*.

Epilogue

After their return to England, the family settled once more in the country, in a large Twickenham house near the Thames. Wortley never again held a real political post, possibly due to his wife's withdrawal from both his career and public life. All accounts suggest that their marriage had become merely a formal arrangement by the time of their return. Instead of investing in court life, Mary turned her focus inward, raising her children, enjoying a quiet life, and beginning the lifelong process of polishing her writings from the trip. Unlike the country living arrangement of her early married life, these years seem both peaceful and productive, with none of the desperate loneliness she'd suffered in the North. She had friends, family, a lute, and her writing to occupy her, and was close to London without the congestion and intrigues of the city. During her increasingly infrequent visits to the dual London courts, she promoted engraftment or variolation amongst her elite circle. She gained the support of some, including the Princess who had the royal children inoculated in 1722, and the derision of others who resisted her as both a foolish woman and an advocator of eastern nonsense. All in all, she found a quiet country life to be a "tranquil and easy situation".⁹⁷ Wortley spent most of his time in the North managing the ancestral estate, leaving his family behind, a situation that both parties seemed to find agreeable. Mary ultimately settled permanently in Twickenham, remaining there among the green fields and gardens for two decades.

Pope lived in the same town, and his obsession with her continued upon her return. He commissioned Kneller to paint her portrait, continuing a subliminal theme of his desire to possess her image that first appeared in his letters to her requesting a "fair Circassian slave" in

⁹⁷ MWM to Lady Mar, 1721, in Montagu et al., *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 458.

Mary's image.⁹⁸ Pope's obsession eventually resulted in a massive falling out between the two, with their quarrel playing out in verse on the society pages of satirical publications. It was during this time that Pope accused Montagu of lesbianism, publically calling her a "furious Sappho" in his work. The fight sparked her public downfall. While Voltaire sent her manuscripts for review and the formidable Mary Astell remained a close friend, the perception of Montagu as a fallen woman had already begun. She spent the next decade in relative isolation, publishing occasionally, but primarily concerned with her family. Her son, the infamous traveler Edward Wortley Montagu, was now a young man and rebelling by repeated escapes from school. Lady Mar, Mary's sister Frances, had become depressed following the death of their father, so Mary took responsibility for her sister's family. Frances, married to an ex-Jacobite, was formally awarded in Mary's custody after a lunacy inquisition, and the sisters lived in the relative quiet of Twickenham.

In 1736, Mary met and became infatuated with the Italian count Francesco Algarotti. However, Algarotti seems more a convenient excuse, a means to an end. The Count was a handsome Renaissance man, and she was not the first to develop an attraction to him; her close friend politician John Hervey also wrote Algarotti love letters, and she became the third side of a bisexual love triangle. Her husband was gone, her son was perpetually involved in scandal, her daughter had married, her sister was distant, her friends had largely abandoned her. Nothing tied her to England, and it seems Mary experienced something of a mid-life crisis. Recalling, perhaps, the transformative encounters of her youth in Turkey, she followed Algarotti to Venice. Her would be lover never arrived, having been called to Berlin, but it seems not to have mattered. Mary found Mediterranean living once again much to her liking. The climate was

⁹⁸ Alexander Pope to MWM, October, 1716, in Montagu et al., *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 417.

warmer, the food better, the men more chivalrous and the ladies prettier. She travelled up and down Italy and along the coast into the south of France, settling briefly in Avignon before returning to Venice. She took at least one recorded lover, although one imagines there were several, and continued to write from abroad. One of her final poems, published by Algarotti in friendship, was *A Hymn to the Moon*: “my friend, my goddess, and my guide”. Despite all the triumphs and tragedies of her life, the romance and the drama, Mary still searched for constancy in her narrative.

Lady Montagu did not return to Britain until 1762, shortly before her death. In Rotterdam, that same city she had travelled through so many decades before, she left a manuscript of her *Letters* with a confidant. Now in her seventies, hair grayed, skin wrinkled, eyesight faded, she was at once a dramatically changed woman from the young lady on her way to Turkey, yet fundamentally still the same person. Her life, her writings, her travels, had all served only to amplify a fundamental personality. Half a century and a lifetime later, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu stood, head high, gazing out upon a vast and beautiful imperial horizon, a world spinning around her. And for us she still remains, through her writings, suspended there in the frozen amber of a moment, a spark of brilliance among the embers of history.

Notes and Abbreviations

Notes on Names: Although she styled herself Lady Mary Wortley, I have chosen to identify her by second surname in order to separate her identity from that of her husband and for the sake of clarity so that any reference made to Wortley reads as the Mr. Wortley rather than his wife.

Notes on Dates: Prior to the Calendar Act of 1752, England used the Julian system while the rest of Europe used the New Style or Gregorian Calendar. In addressing the resultant eleven-day gap, I have chosen to use a general month or season to guide readers, apart from a few important dates that are specified in the Gregorian form. All dates noted in citations are formatted using the same system as their original text.

List of Abbreviations

MWM Lady Mary Wortley Montagu

EWM Edward Wortley Montagu

Bibliography

Primary Sources—Paintings

Kneller, Godfrey. *A Woman Called Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*. 1720 1715. Oil on canvas, 89.2 x 69.2 cm. Paul Mellon Collection. Yale Center for British Art.

Richardson the elder, Jonathan. *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*. circa 1718. Oil on canvas, 1367 x 1088 x 52mm. Graves Gallery. Museums Sheffield.

Richardson the younger, Jonathan. *Portrait Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*. c 1726. Oil on canvas.

Rusca, Carlo Francesco. *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762) Writer and Traveller*. 1739. Oil on canvas. Turkey, Ankara, British Embassy. Government Art Collection.

Unknown. *Portrait of a Woman*. n.d. Oil on canvas, 91.5 x 72.5 x 2.0 cm. Royal Collection Trust.

Vanmour, Jean Baptiste. *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu with Her Son, Edward Wortley Montagu, and Attendants*. circa 1717. Oil on canvas, 693 mm x 909 mm. Primary Collection. National Portrait Gallery.

Primary Sources—Other

Montagu, Mary Wortley. *Turkish Embassy Letters*. Edited by Malcolm Jack. Athens [GA]: University of Georgia Press, 1993.

Montagu, Mary Wortley, Louisa Stuart, W. Moy Thomas, and James Archibald Stuart-Wortley-Mackenzie Wharnccliffe. *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*. 2 v. London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1893. [//catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/007681915](https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/007681915).

Secondary Sources

- Ali, Isra. "The Harem Fantasy in Nineteenth-Century Orientalist Paintings." *Dialectical Anthropology* 39, no. 1 (March 2015): 33–46. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-015-9372-7>.
- Al-Rawi, Ahmed. "The Portrayal of the East vs. the West in Lady Mary Montagu's Letters and Emily Ruete's Memoirs." *Arab Studies Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (2008): 15–30.
- Aravamudan, Srinivas. "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in the Hammam : Masquerade, Womanliness, and Levantinization." *ELH* 62, no. 1 (1995): 69–104. <https://doi.org/10.1353/elh.1995.0002>.
- Ballaster, Rosalind. *Fabulous Orient: Fictions of the East in England, 1662-1785*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Barnes, Diana. "The Public Life of a Woman of Wit and Quality: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Vogue for Smallpox Inoculation." *Feminist Studies* 38, no. 2 (2012): 330–62.
- Beynon, John C. "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's Sapphic Vision." In *Imperial Desire: Dissident Sexualities and Colonial Literature*, edited by Philip Holden and Richard J. Ruppel, 21–43. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
- Fennetaux, Ariane. "Women's Pockets and the Construction of Privacy in the Long Eighteenth Century." *Eighteenth Century Fiction* 20, no. 3 (2008): 307–34. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ecf.0.0009>.
- Fernea, Elizabeth Warnock. "An Early Ethnographer of Middle Eastern Women: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762)." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 40, no. 4 (October 1, 1981): 329–38. <https://doi.org/10.1086/372902>.
- Flather, Amanda. *Gender and Space in Early Modern England*. Royal Historical Society Publication. Woodbridge, UK ; Rochester, NY: Royal Historical Society/Boydell Press, 2007.

- Geczy, Adam. *Fashion and Orientalism: Dress, Textiles and Culture from the 17th to the 21st Century*. London ; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.
- Grewal, Inderpal. *Home and Harem. Nation, Gender, Empire and the Cultures of Travel*. Duke University Press, 1996. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822382003>.
- Grundy, Isobel. *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*. Oxford ; New York: Clarendon Press, 1999.
- . “‘Trash, Trumpery, and Idle Time’: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Fiction.” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 5, no. 4 (1993): 293–310. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ecf.1993.0046>.
- Halsband, Robert. “Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Eighteenth-Century Fiction.” *Philological Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (1966).
- . “Lady Mary Wortley Montagu as Letter-Writer.” *PMLA* 80, no. 3 (1965): 155–63. <https://doi.org/10.2307/461262>.
- . *Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*. London: Oxford University Press, 1961.
- Hannan, Leonie. *Women of Letters: Gender, Writing and the Life of the Mind in Early Modern England*. Gender in History. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016.
- Heffernan, Teresa. *Veiled Figures: Women, Modernity, and the Spectres of Orientalism*. Toronto: University Of Toronto Press, 2016.
- Kietzman, Mary Jo. “Montagu’s Turkish Embassy Letters and Cultural Dislocation.” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 38, no. 3 (1998): 537–51. <https://doi.org/10.2307/451062>.
- Kingsley Kent, Susan. *Gender and Power in Britain 1640-1990*, 2002.
- Konuk, Kader. “Ethnomasquerade in Ottoman-European Encounters: Reenacting Lady Mary Wortley Montagu.” *Criticism* 46, no. 3 (2004): 393–414. <https://doi.org/10.1353/crt.2005.0007>.

- Lawton-Trask, Kathleen. "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: New Insights from the Digital Miscellanies Index." *Eighteenth-Century Life* 41, no. 1 (January 2017): 76–95.
<https://doi.org/10.1215/00982601-3695945>.
- Lew, Joseph W. "Lady Mary's Portable Seraglio." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 24, no. 4 (1991): 432–50. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2738966>.
- Marx, John. "Modernism and the Female Imperial Gaze." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 32, no. 1 (1998): 51–75. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1346056>.
- Mayer, Tara. "Cultural Cross-Dressing: Posing and Performance in Orientalist Portraits." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* 22, no. 2 (2012): 281–98.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186312000168>.
- Meriwether, Rae Ann. "Transculturation and Politics in the Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu." *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 53, no. 3 (2013): 623–41.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/sel.2013.0033>.
- Morris, Marilyn. *Sex, Money & Personal Character in Eighteenth-Century British Politics*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.
- . "Transgendered Perspectives on Premodern Sexualities." *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 46, no. 3 (2006): 585–600. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sel.2006.0028>.
- Neumann, Iver B. "Introduction to the Forum on Liminality." *Review of International Studies* 38, no. 02 (April 2012): 473–79. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210511000817>.
- Roberts, Mary. *Intimate Outsiders: The Harem in Ottoman and Orientalist Art and Travel Literature*. Objects/Histories. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. 1st Vintage Books ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

Scott, Joan W. "The Evidence of Experience." *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (July 1991): 773–97.

<https://doi.org/10.1086/448612>.

Sherman, Sandra. "Instructing the 'Empire of Beauty': Lady Mary Worthy Montagu and the Politics of Female Rationality." *South Atlantic Review* 60, no. 4 (1995): 1–26.

<https://doi.org/10.2307/3201233>.

Teo, Hsu-Ming. *Desert Passions: Orientalism and Romance Novels*. 1st ed. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012.

Weitzman, Arthur J. "Voyeurism and Aesthetics in the Turkish Bath: Lady Mary's School of Female Beauty." *Comparative Literature Studies* 39, no. 4 (2002): 347–59.

<https://doi.org/10.1353/cls.2002.0035>.

Winch, Alison. "'Drinking a Dish of Tea With Sappho': The Sexual Fantasies of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Lord Byron." *Women's Writing* 20, no. 1 (February 2013): 82–99.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09699082.2013.754259>.

Yeazell, Ruth Bernard. "Public Baths and Private Harems: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Origins of Ingres's Bain Turc." *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 7, no. 1 (1994).