

2019

# 'Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's The Turkish Embassy Letters (1763): Agency, Authority and the "female spirit of contradiction"'

## 'Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's The Turkish Embassy Letters (1763): Agency, Authority and the "female spirit of contradiction"'

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<http://hdl.handle.net/10026.1/14727>

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.24382/636>

University of Plymouth

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**UNIVERSITY OF  
PLYMOUTH**

**Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's The Turkish Embassy Letters (1763):  
Agency, Authority and the 'female spirit of contradiction'**

by

**Michelle Marie Lester**

A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth  
in partial fulfilment for the degree of

**Research Masters**

Faculty of Arts and Humanities

**January 2019**

## Acknowledgements

This research project has been more than twenty years in the dreaming, and there have been a few people who have cheered me on throughout all that time, never doubting or losing confidence in me, even when my own self-belief was hard to muster. In one of those odd twists of fate, Dr. Rachel Christofides has been there from the beginning, from when I first embarked on a postgraduate course based at Rolle. Pregnancy with my second son would put paid to that attempt, but Rachel would join my supervisory team in the latter stages of this one, and her help last summer kept me afloat. I cannot thank the wonderful women of my supervisory team enough. It was Dr. Kathryn Gray who first heard my proposal, and who has steered me kindly, humorously but with rigour to the finishing line. Without Dr. Bonnie Latimer, I'm not sure I would ever have quite found my way to this extraordinary period and Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters*. Thanks must go, too, to Professor Angela Smith, whose friendship I have enjoyed since our boys went to nursery together, and whose no-nonsense support has guaranteed that there'd be no turning back.

Women and friendship are constants that have helped to see this project to fruition, and a big load of love goes to Chelvi and Vicki. During many a café visit, they have listened to my convoluted outpourings and convinced me that I have something to say. Without the support of my dear friend and Head of Faculty, Dee, who ensured that my timetable would accommodate the ResM, I could not practically have undertaken the degree. My lovely colleagues in ELB have listened and encouraged, even when I'm sure they would rather not have their busy brains assailed with tales from the Eighteenth Century!

The greatest thanks go, of course, to my two beautiful boys, Joe and Luke. During the time that I have been working on this thesis, Joe has graduated with a first-class degree and is now himself doing a Masters. He has been my study-buddy and an irrepressible retriever of obscure sources! Luke, too, has finished GCSEs and A' Levels, and will soon leave for uni himself. Both have tolerated having a mother umbilically-attached to her laptop, and I'm looking forward to being back in their lives.

Finally, in a 'female spirit of contradiction' of my own, I reject Adrian's assertions that there is nothing to acknowledge him for. Him I thank for his unwavering love and support, for undertaking solo dog-walks and far more than his fair share of housework, and for enduring lonely weekends. At our kitchen table, he has shared my obscure enthusiasms and joined me in plotting travels of our own. Let our next adventure commence!

## Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Research Masters has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Doctoral College Quality Sub-Committee.

Work submitted for this research degree at the University of Plymouth has not formed part of any other degree either at the University of Plymouth or at another establishment.

A programme of advanced study was undertaken, which included the following taught modules:

- MAEL700 Research Methods and Debates in Literary and Cultural Studies
- MARE700 Research in the Arts and Humanities

Word count of main body of thesis: 24,851

Signed:



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Date: 14/07/2019.....

Michelle Marie Lester: ‘Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s *The Turkish Embassy Letters* (1763): Agency, Authority and the “female spirit of contradiction”’

## **Abstract**

*The Turkish Embassy Letters* is considered both inaugural and atypical of women’s travel writing, and scholarship is largely orientated around Montagu’s focus on women and their lives in the different countries she travelled to and stayed in between 1716 – 18. While this dissertation maintains a primary engagement with gender, it evaluates the text’s participation in myriad discourses and genres of the Restoration and early Augustan period. The cultural conditions that saw a significant growth in female participation in the world of print and, thereby, in intellectual exchange with men - often in writings loosely operating within a ‘Republic of Letters’ - act as the shaping context for my analysis of her construction of agency and authority in her epistolary travel narrative.

The dissertation begins with a rare consideration of the *Letters*’ emulation of popular ‘Grand Tour’ narratives and examines how Montagu self-fashions as a female Grand Tourist. I propose that Montagu’s ‘double-voiced’ strategy of conformity and repudiation, while characteristic of proto-feminist writing of the day, effects the innovation for which the text is often acclaimed. Attention to Montagu’s use of satire, imitation and translation gives rise to analyses of her letters to Alexander Pope and Antonio Conti which at least partially challenge conventional accounts of her friendship with each of these ‘Men of Letters’ and propose the subversive elements of her correspondence. I conclude with an examination of Montagu’s negotiation of the role of motherhood, rarely a focus of scholarship of a text nevertheless written by a

woman who travelled to Turkey with a young son and there gave birth to a daughter. I argue that Montagu's *Letters* demonstrate a preoccupation throughout with the social and cultural roles available to women, while a consistent attention to the narrative unity of the *Letters* offers a reading which sees the text's form as paradigmatic of Montagu's message of unity over division.



## List of Contents

<b><u>COPYRIGHT STATEMENT</u></b> .....	<b>1</b>
 <b><u>LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU’S THE TURKISH EMBASSY LETTERS</u></b>	
<b><u>(1763): AGENCY, AUTHORITY AND THE ‘FEMALE SPIRIT OF</u></b>	
<b><u>CONTRADICTION’</u></b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b><u>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</u></b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b><u>AUTHOR’S DECLARATION</u></b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b><u>ABSTRACT</u></b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b><u>LIST OF CONTENTS</u></b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b><u>LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS</u></b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b><u>INTRODUCTION</u></b> .....	<b>12</b>
<u>FROM MANUSCRIPT TO PUBLICATION, 1718 - 1763</u> .....	14
<u>THE TURKISH EMBASSY LETTERS: LITERATURE REVIEW</u> .....	18
<u>CHAPTER OUTLINES</u> .....	24
<b><u>CHAPTER 1: THE FEMALE GRAND TOURIST</u></b> .....	<b>28</b>
<u>THE ‘ARISTOCRATIC’ GRAND TOUR: PHENOMENON AND DISCOURSE</u> .....	30
<u>‘MALE-TRAVELS...STUFF WITH THE SAME TRIFLES’: RICHARD LASSELS’ VOYAGE OF ITALY</u>	
<u>(1670) AND MONTAGU’S LETTER 46</u> .....	32
<u>‘I LIKE TRAVELLING EXTREMELY, AND HAVE HAD NO REASON TO COMPLAIN OF HAVING HAD TOO</u>	
<u>LITTLE OF IT’: MONTAGU’S JOURNEY NARRATIVES</u> .....	38
<u>MONTAGU’S JOURNEY NARRATIVES: LETTER 24’S EXEMPLIFICATION OF THE GRAND TOUR</u>	
<u>NARRATIVE</u> .....	40
<u>MONTAGU’S JOURNEY NARRATIVES: LETTER 45 INVERTING SANDYS’ JOURNEY THROUGH</u>	
<u>THE MEDITERRANEAN</u> .....	44
<u>CONCLUSION</u> .....	47
<b><u>CHAPTER 2: THE FEMALE SCHOLAR</u></b> .....	<b>49</b>
<u>THE ‘FAIR CONVERT’: MONTAGU AND THE EFFENDI, ACHMET BEG</u> .....	54
<u>MONTAGU’S SAPPIC RESPONSE TO POPE IN LETTER 31: THE FEMALE READER</u> .....	57
<u>MONTAGU’S SAPPIC RESPONSE TO POPE IN LETTER 31: THE POET-TRANSLATOR</u> .....	61
<u>THE DEIST SCHOLAR: LETTERS TO CONTI – A ‘KINDRED SPIRIT’</u> .....	65
<u>THE ORIENTAL SCHOLAR: ‘I WOULD RATHER BE A RICH EFFENDI WITH ALL HIS IGNORANCE,</u>	
<u>THAN SIR ISAAC NEWTON WITH ALL HIS KNOWLEDGE’</u> .....	67
<u>CONCLUSION</u> .....	71

<b><u>CHAPTER 3: ‘OUR GENERAL MOTHER’</u></b> .....	<b>72</b>
<u>CONTENDING CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL DISCOURSES AND REPRESENTATIONS OF MATERNITY</u> .....	73
<u>THE CIVIC MOTHER: CHILDBIRTH AND CHILDREARING</u> .....	75
<u>THE CIVIC MOTHER: ADVOCATING SMALLPOX INOCULATION</u> .....	78
<u>CONSTRUCTING TURKEY AS A MATERNAL ‘PARADISE FOUND’</u> .....	81
<u>LETTERS 34 AND 40: FATIMA, A TURKISH ‘EVE’</u> .....	82
<u>LETTERS 34, 40 AND 43: MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS</u> .....	84
<u>LETTERS 27 AND 34: MATERNAL SPACES</u> .....	86
<u>CONCLUSION</u> .....	88
<b><u>CONCLUSION</u></b> .....	<b>90</b>
<b><u>APPENDIX: POETRY REFERRED TO IN CHAPTER 2</u></b> .....	<b>94</b>
<b><u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u></b> .....	<b>98</b>

## **List of Illustrations**

Figure 1 Title page to 1763 edition, MHO, p.43 .....	15
Figure 2 Map showing Montagu's 'Grand Tour', 1716-18, MHO, p.45 .....	30
Figure 3 Rayhana, Daughter fo Ka'b ibn Malik, Neglected by her Husband, from the Life of the Prophet, 1594-95. MHO, p. 316 .....	52

*let men receive,  
From a second bright Eve,  
The knowledge of right and of wrong*

*But if the first Eve  
Hard doom did receive,  
When only one apple had she,  
What a punishment new  
Shall be found out for you,  
Who tasting, have robb'd the whole tree?*

*From 'To Lady Mary Wortley Montagu' (Pope, 1713-17)*

## Introduction

*I confess, I am malicious enough to desire that the World should see how much better purpose the LADIES travel than their LORDS; and that, whilst it [the world] is surfeited with Male-Travels, all in the same tone, and stult with the same trifles; a lady has the skill to strike out a new path, and to embellish a worn-out subject, with a variety of fresh and elegant entertainment.*

Mary Astell, 1724, 'Preface, by a Lady'<sup>1</sup>

In her 1724 Preface to Montagu's manuscript Letter-book, Mary Astell laments Montagu's refusal to publish it, 'condemn[ing] it to obscurity during her life' (MHO, 2013:221). Praising her friend for her 'skill to strike out a new path, and to embellish a worn-out subject' (ibid.), Astell appears to define not only the unique features of the text that will come to be published as *The Turkish Embassy Letters*<sup>2</sup>, but of women's travel writing itself. Herself a celebrated advocate for women's education, Astell was one of several early proto-feminists who entered the world of print and debated the role of women through the latter part of the seventeenth- and into the eighteenth century. Her seal of approval, effectively vindicating both women's agency as travellers but also their authority as writers, is an important acknowledgement of the *Letters*' participation within and contribution to the 'Woman Question', or the *querelle des femmes*.<sup>3</sup>

From its earliest reception to the last forty or so years of scholarly attention, the *Letters* have primarily been critiqued from a gendered perspective, with an emphasis on the representations of both the author and the foreign women she describes. A late-twentieth century critical preoccupation with orientalist tropes and ideas of sexual

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<sup>1</sup> Montagu, Heffernan and O'Quinn (hereafter abbreviated to MHO), Appendix A (2013:221)

<sup>2</sup> The original title of the published work: *Letters of the Right Honourable Lady M---y W---y M-----: Written during her Travels in Europe, Asia and Africa, To Persons of Distinction, Men of Letters, &c. in different Parts of Europe. Which contain, Among other Curious Relations, Accounts of the Policy and Manners of the Turks; Drawn from Sources that have been inaccessible to other Travellers. In Three Volumes. Vol. 1*, London. 1763.

<sup>3</sup> Defined by Rendall as the 'debate about the relative capacities of men and women' (2005:17)

agency will be precluded as I draw attention instead to what I consider to be Montagu's greater concerns: that of political and social agency for women, and the participation of women in public life. To that end, my thesis examines how Montagu's epistolary accounts of her travels construct a sustained and authoritative critique of Augustan social practices which restricted women's participation in intellectual and public life, her experiences and accounts both challenging and offering alternative norms for their lives.

The exceptionality of Montagu's experience and self-fashioning as both a female traveller and a scholar of Turkish culture and languages provides the focus for the first two chapters, and my analysis examines the author's use of manifold literary discourses that articulate authority through a simultaneous adoption and repudiation of conventionally male-voiced forms. The final chapter focuses on a little-noted fact of Montagu's travels<sup>4</sup>: she wrote as a mother of a young son, and then of a daughter born in Turkey in January 1718. While there are few references in the letters to either her children or to her own experience as a mother, an engagement with the narrative unity of the text exposes motherhood as a consistent motif. A nexus of medical, social, aesthetic and mythical discourses articulates both maternal hope and vulnerability – the 'feminotopian'<sup>5</sup> vision signalled quite compellingly through Montagu's portrayal of traveller and scholar falters in her attempt to fashion alternative maternal archetypes.

This introduction offers background to the publication of the *Letters* in 1763, noting its complex trajectory from conception to reception. Biographical information frames Montagu's authorial 'ambition' as well as her educative and civic agenda. My

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<sup>4</sup> Hall, Sagal and Zold observe this in their recent survey of Montagu scholarship (2017: 9)

<sup>5</sup> Coined by Mary Louise Pratt in her seminal *Imperial Eyes*; meaning 'episodes that present idealised worlds of female autonomy, empowerment, and pleasure'. Pratt offers Montagu's *Letters* to help exemplify the concept (1992:166-8).

literature review surveys almost forty years of influential Montagu scholarship, launched by the twin thrusts of the feminist retrieval of women's writing and non-canonical texts as well as by the critical field of post-colonial studies, instigated by Edward Said's seminal study of Western representations of the 'East': *Orientalism* (1978). However, genre studies of both travel writing and epistolarity, often intersecting with gender and cultural perspectives, are also important sources, and a current growth in academic digitisation of ephemeral and manuscript texts interacts illuminatingly with historical literary study of early travel and epistolary narratives. My thesis' approach to the *Letters* as a single, literary unit – rather than as separate, fragmentary and heterogeneous letters – entails analysis of many of the fifty-two missives, with an examination of patterns and motifs informing my reading.

### From Manuscript to Publication, 1718 - 1763

For almost forty years before its posthumous publication, Montagu's *Letters* circulated amongst her private, albeit extensive, literary and Court circles in manuscript or 'letter-book' form – 'two leather-bound volumes of continuous fair-copy text carefully written out by Lady Mary and an unknown copyist' (MHO, 2013 p. 13). This had been largely produced during the period after her return from Turkey late in 1718 until 1724 when Mary Astell, a regular companion of Montagu's during this time, wrote its Preface. What is uncertain, however, is the correlation between the letters of the manuscript and the actual letters that were sent to myriad friends and family members from her time abroad. The few extant letters from this period, including letters to her husband, Edward, do not appear in the letter-book.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, both Montagu and her daughter burned many of the journals, and early reception articulated disputes about authorship, arising either from the family's desire to disassociate itself particularly from the

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<sup>6</sup> Some are included, however, in Malcolm Jack's 1994 edition of *The Turkish Embassy Letters*

controversies attendant upon smallpox inoculation and Montagu's participation in public debate<sup>7</sup>, or from critics doubtful that a woman could have authored the work.<sup>8</sup>

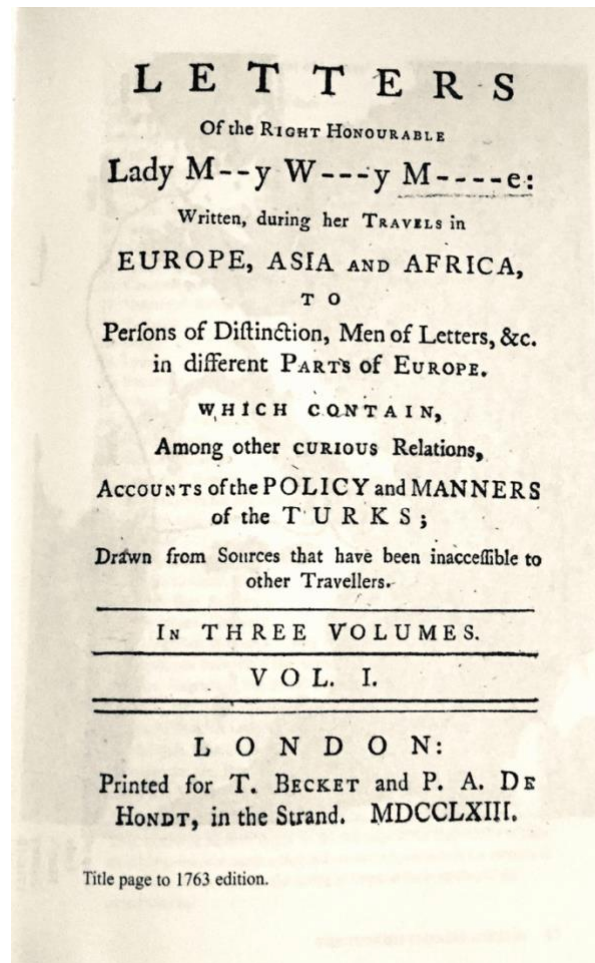


Figure 1 Title page to 1763 edition, MHO, p.43

Contextualising the letters within their precise moment of production is therefore problematized, but my thesis proposes that Montagu's work may be understood as emanating from and largely shaped by the writing and debates of the Restoration, an age that Doody describes as 'peculiarly gender-conscious' (1998, p.1), and one which witnessed an explosion in the production of print material by both men

<sup>7</sup> McQuigge (2014:182-3)

<sup>8</sup> *The Annual Register* (1763) refers to 'our pseudo lady traveller'. MHO, Appendix C, p. 246



and women.<sup>9</sup> Doody particularly notes the dominance and tone of debates about gender:

There is plenty of aggression in women's writings, and it emerges in relation to all sorts of topics. The point is to be able to keep anger under control, to make power-moves while looking cool. (p.70)

The strategies or 'power-moves' Montagu uses to critique gender inequality are often framed in the *Letters* by a recurring invocation of a 'womanly' or 'female spirit of contradiction' (MHO, p. 70; p. 171), ironically employed to suggest any inconsistencies are innate to her gender, rather than part of her grand design! Despite, and likely fueled by, the 'vigorous culture of letter writing and manuscript exchange in which women held a prominent place' (Schellenberg, 2015:41), evident tensions played out between their participation within these scribal cultures and those of literary publication, while the name of Sappho, Aristotle's 'Poetess', was used to signify wanton and transgressive sexuality.<sup>10</sup> The ambivalence here merely reflects the cultural double-standards women had to operate by, and Montagu's strategies of 'contradiction' can be seen as part of her literary armoury. Not only the woman writer but the often-attendant characteristic of female learnedness was vilified, too, even if rigorously resisted by some female authors. Montagu's engagement with debates around patriarchal determination of women as well as of female education drives her *Letters*, with the latter the focus of Chapter 2 'The Female Scholar, or Learned Lady'.

Montagu was a prodigious reader as a child, hiding in the family library to learn Latin, so the stories go<sup>11</sup>, and her *Letters* are replete with allusion and intertextuality, to contemporary works of associates including Pope and Addison, to the popular

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<sup>9</sup> Porter's chapter 'Print Culture' provides instructive detail on the impact of the lapse of the 1662 Print Act in 1695 (2001)

<sup>10</sup> For a detailed discussion of how Sappho was figured at this time, see Andreadis, H. in Greene, E. (ed.) (1996:105-183)

<sup>11</sup> Grundy (1999), p. 15

travellers' tales and oriental fables of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, as well as to the Classical Latin and Greek literature she revered. Before her 1716-18 travels, she had moved to London where she collaborated with Pope and Gay, writing the 'Town Eclogues' (1715), and her literary star seemed to be in the ascendant. Despite being a young wife and mother, neither of these roles presented much constraint. Her husband encouraged her talents – it was he who suggested she should read Addison's draft of *Cato* which she critiqued before its production in 1713 (Grundy 1999:63) - but disease and reputation would destabilise the privileged world she occupied. In December 1715 she fell victim to a near-fatal case of smallpox, which left the face for which she was so famed pock-marked, and the eyes that 'other beauties'<sup>12</sup> envied so tender that she could only venture into daylight with the protection of a veil. Montagu's passionate advocacy for smallpox inoculation on her return to England may be tied to this personal experience, but perhaps the ungenerous responses to her illness and recovery should also be acknowledged as a stimulus in the construction of a text that seeks to refashion and reinvent how a maternal, blemished woman might muster the esteem of her contemporaries as well as perform a more public function.

Grundy suggests that the *Letters* were intended as her 'legacy' text, locating her 'literary ambitions' from her juvenilia onwards, and she portrays Montagu in 1761, now sick with breast cancer, bestowing her precious letter-book upon the Reverend Benjamin Sowden: 'She inscribed them with her 'will and design' that they should be 'dispos'd of as [Sowden] thinks proper.' (1999, p. 19; p. 612). Nevertheless, while considered by genre scholars to be an inaugural text of the women's travel writing that sprang into existence from the second part of the eighteenth century, by the time of publication it was already rather outdated and nostalgic, a romanticized version of a

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<sup>12</sup> From Pope (1712) 'Epistle to Jervas': *And other beauties envy Worsley's eyes.* (l.60)

bygone age<sup>13</sup>. This perspective is often lost, and few studies have explicitly located the text as contemporaneous with the popular ‘aristocratic’ Grand Tour discourse, for example – my focus of Chapter 1 – nor have they examined its palimpsestic qualities impressed by her ‘live’ interactions with figures such as Astell and Addison, as well as her two male correspondents, Pope and Conti. The editing process of assembling, organizing and rewriting that generated the manuscript was conducted by the repatriated traveller, now a mother of two young children, disappointed by the family’s early return, and subjected to often hostile public scrutiny over her entrance into the medical and public world. Borbély remarks upon the fictionalizing process, widely observed by epistolary critics including Lowenthal (1994) and Brant (2006), as ‘remapping the outlines of the places she had visited via a dialogical entwinement of objective (re)presentation and imaginative transformation.’ (2014:5).

### *The Turkish Embassy Letters: Literature Review*

Scholarship of the *Turkish Embassy Letters* falls into three broad but inevitably intersecting approaches: feminism and women’s writing; post-colonial studies, and genre studies, notably in travel writing and epistolarity, with the latter enjoying a current boost from manuscript digitisation and thereby an engagement with the ‘Republic of Letters’<sup>14</sup> and ‘communication circuits’<sup>15</sup> within which men and women, private and public, exchanged letters throughout the Early Modern and Modern periods. The accessibility of digital databases such as EEBO, *ECCO* (*Eighteenth*

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<sup>13</sup> Lew, for eg., observes that ‘her *Letters* missed their historical moment.’ (1991:450)

<sup>14</sup> Described by A.C. Grayling (2016) as an informal yet often prestigious epistolary network of intellectuals and public figures whose letters worked simultaneously to articulate, share and debate ideas, but also to sustain reputations. pp.17, 123-4

<sup>15</sup> This phrase seems to have been coined by Robert Darnton, “What Is the History of Books?” *Daedalus*, 111.3 (1982), 65–83 cited Mark Towsey (2015:32)

*Century Collections Online*) and Archive.org are enhanced by more specialist collections such as Colbert's *DWTW: A Database of Women's Travel Writing, 1780 – 1840* (Thompson, 2017, p. 131) and the Culture of Knowledge project, *EMLO (Early Modern Letters Online)* which continue to encourage new ways of understanding writing as social exchange. The fabricated nature of Montagu's manuscript-to-print text means that the text itself sits outside of such databases, but their existence shines light on the world of social communications that the *Letters* both build and reflect, as my thesis seeks to show.

The presence of the *Letters* in literary studies today has been enabled by the biographical and editorial work of Robert Halsband in the mid-twentieth century, whose authoritative *Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (1965-7) informs all later research, and then that of Isobel Grundy, once taught by Halsband. Halsband's occasionally hagiographic biography, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (1956) is followed by Grundy's who recasts her *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: Comet of the Enlightenment* as very much part of the feminist project of reclamation of women's writing, defining Montagu herself as a 'feminist-in-training' (1999:19). The work of both scholars has been invaluable to this dissertation, alongside Broadview's 2013 academic edition of *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, edited by Teresa Heffernan and Daniel O'Quinn. Their introduction and appendices offer rich examples of a range of critical and contemporary materials including travel narratives. Heffernan has written specifically, too, on the orientalist tropes of the text, and particularly on notions of East/West hybridization (2000; 2016).

Heffernan's work synthesises these key approaches, and effectively updates some of the early post-colonialist analyses dominating 1990s' criticism. Aligning with

Aravamudan, she resists what he refers to as ‘the blunt accusation of orientalism’ (1995:92) levelled at the *Letters* in some early post-colonialist analyses. Drawing on the magisterial work of Israel’s *Radical Enlightenment* (2001), Aravamudan’s *Enlightenment Orientalism* (2012) counters Said’s notions of a ‘monolithic’ Orient or indeed Occident, and places an emphasis on the imaginative constructions of the ‘East’, arguing that the Enlightenment period offered transcultural ‘utopian aspirations’ (p.2). Aravamudan’s ‘Enlightenment orientalism’ is one that accommodates occidental adventure, open encounters with the ‘other’ and even attempts at assimilation in the Orient, and to Montagu he specifically ascribes a desire for a ‘post-classical synthesis’, suggesting that she ‘wanted full passage from Europe to the Orient, not just physically but in terms of cultural identity’ (p.6). His ideas have been valuable in signalling the myriad discourses and genres that characterise writing of the period, and which my thesis proposes are woven into Montagu’s *Letters*, precisely in an attempt to reconcile what she argues are false divisions – between the genders, between East and West, between Christianity and Islam.

Furthermore, in his 1995 essay on *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, Aravamudan’s concept of ‘levantinization’, not only punning on Montagu’s original nomenclature for Turkey, plays with a rather obscure idiom. ‘To run or throw a levant’, he explains, ‘was to make a bet with the intention of absconding if it was lost (p. 70). He thus foregrounds Montagu’s game-playing, the calculated risks she appears to take in her risqué descriptions and assertions which I argue her judicious invocation of her ‘female Spirit of Contradiction’ insures against punishment. For Montagu, freedom of speech for women runs the perennial gauntlet of punishment, so her observations and judgements are regularly shaped by satirical or allusive modes. It is in Chapter 2’s focus on her correspondence with the two ‘Men of Letters’ where she expounds upon

the scholarly subjects of literature, translation and religion where I aim to demonstrate just how subtle Montagu's strategies of 'levantinization' might be.

Aravamudan's scholarship itself negotiates the often tumultuous critical field populated by this period's twin thrusts of post-colonialism and feminism, perhaps best encapsulated by both Lisa Lowe's *Critical Terrains* (1991) where she identifies Montagu's 'rhetoric of identification' (p. 32) with the Turkish women she describes, and by Meyda Yegenoglu's targeted response in which she challenges Lowe's assertion of a transcultural feminism, arguing instead that Montagu's propagation of orientalist tropes makes her complicit in the '*masculinist and imperialist act of subject constitution* [author's italics]' (1998:82). Anna Secor's 'Orientalism, Gender and Class in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's Turkish Embassy Letters etc' (1999), meanwhile, draws attention to Montagu's overt emphasis on her rank as affording an authority that other (implicitly lower-ranked) travel writers cannot claim. Despite the ostensibly antagonistic positionings of these readings, all have influenced my own analyses and arguments.

Genre studies of women's travel writing inevitably intersects with these post-colonialist approaches and is exemplified by Pratt's seminal work *Imperial Eyes: Studies in Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992). Here Pratt establishes a wealth of tropes - including 'contact zones'; a cast of characters from the sea-farer to the conqueror, and the authorial perspective of 'the European who returned' (p. 87) – which effect an apparent prototype for later genre scholarship, including Rosemary Sweet's *Cities of the Grand Tour* (2012). While not focused on Montagu herself, Sweet's substantial collection of travel 'tropes' of women's writing could well be extracted from the *Letters*. She notes, for example, that 'the relative freedom extended

to women in Venice to appear in the coffee houses, albeit masked, was always remarked upon' and she is clear that the language employed by Grand Tourists was 'highly gendered' (2012:40; 24).

As is typical of travel writing studies, Pratt's work focuses on texts produced mostly after the publication of Montagu's *Letters*, but chapters in women's travel writing studies by Turner (1999) and O'Laughlin (2018) insist on their inauguration of the genre, while also observing their atypicality. O'Laughlin in *Women, Writing and Travel in the Eighteenth Century* proposes that the *Letters* 'inaugurate both a *belles lettres* and polemical genre of writing available to women from 1715, creating a new language of authority and subjectivity for women through travel' (p.15). As I do, O'Laughlin appraises the patterning of the text, noting for example how Montagu's account of the *bagnio*<sup>16</sup> in Letter 27 echoes the 'absurd' fashions recounted of the Viennese (p.52). O'Laughlin's emphasis, too, on their expression of eighteenth century polite sociability practised through 'conversation, amiability, clubbability, politeness, reading, writing and connoisseurship' (p.22) resonates with and helps to inform my own focus on Montagu's construction of both sociability and reciprocity as a means to authority.

One of the earliest, and still one of the few, book-length studies of Montagu's work is Cynthia Lowenthal's *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Familiar Letter*. Lowenthal's study is important for its recognition of *The Turkish Embassy Letters* as 'pseudo-letters' (1994, p. 82) and 'revised and polished' (p. 229) performances, evoking the lecture hall, rather than the writer's lonely study or the recipient's parlour. This sense of the letters' more public tenor is consistent with historical study of letter

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<sup>16</sup> Montagu's term for Turkish baths.

production and reception of the period, with even personal letters often shared more widely, and the phenomenon of the Republic of Letters important in promoting one's ideas but also oneself. Clare Brant's 2006 examination of not just the authorial construction of the epistolary persona but of the epistolary correspondent was instructive in my consideration of Montagu's multi-correspondent form as well as how her choices and configurations themselves shape the text. Contemporary scholars are increasingly drawing attention to the *Letters*' narrative 'cohesiveness', too, arguing that the letters form a literary unit, the tripartite structure of the text constructing a conventional journey narrative, whose 'story' – rather than simply its accounts of different 'adventures' – should not be overlooked.<sup>17</sup>

The public/private, imaginative/documentary terrain within which epistolary travel writing operates, let alone the sheer diversity of topics that Montagu treats, opens the door to a vast range of critical approaches, yet the prism of gender – however that may be gazed through – remains primary. Astell's Preface seems to set the tone not only for reception of the *Letters* but for critical approaches generally to women's travel writing which are often marked by an examination of *difference*<sup>18</sup>. My thesis has sought to critique this through a contextual engagement with the particularities of gender debates during the Restoration and early part of the eighteenth-century when notions of gender were, as noted, rather pliable. Such a focus, however, cannot ignore – and is certainly enriched by – Sara Mills' study of gendered language in women's travel writing in *Discourses of Difference* (1991). My own methodology has been informed by two key observations: that attention should be paid to 'The features which are

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<sup>17</sup> Borbély, for example, notes the text's 'triple-phased scaffold' (2014:233) but see McQuigge (2014), too, who cites Claudine Van Hensbergen's emphasis on the narrative patterning of the epistolary narrative form in 'Toward an Epistolary Discourse: Receiving the Eighteenth-Century Letter,' *Literature Compass* 7, no. 7 (2010:59).

<sup>18</sup> Thompson (2017:132).



shared with male writers [...] as well as those which constitute the difference of women's travel writing' (p. 29) and an understanding shown of how the written "experience" is channelled into and negotiates with pre-existent schemas which are discursive in nature' (p. 38). Further, Mills cites Schaffer (1989:103) who argues that 'To speak with authority she [the female travel writer] must wear a male disguise' (cited Mills, p. 44). Underlying my thesis are questions asking to what extent and to what purpose does Montagu ventriloquize men's voices? To construct authority? Champion agency? How audible is a distinctly female voice, and how would it be characterised? What part might silence and the allusive unsaid play? Furthermore, my thesis' attention to a substantial number of the text's letters in examining Montagu's construction of a participation in central debates and discourses of her day has required that my research mirrors their own vast sweep of subjects, as my chapter outlines indicate.

## Chapter Outlines

An observation of a critical tendency to treat the *Letters* as entirely 'new' and distinctively 'female' - when in fact, and of course, they did not arise in a vacuum but were closely interwoven with both the genre and the cultural phenomenon of the Grand Tour - is countered by my first chapter. This posits Montagu's self-fashioning as a 'Female Grand Tourist' through an analysis of the early aristocratic emanation of Grand Tour travel narratives. Editors have noted Montagu's prolific references to travel writers from George Sandys (1578 - 1644), whose *Relation of a Journey* (1615) was reprinted throughout the seventeenth century, through to contemporaries including Aaron Hill (1685-1744), who she mocked, and a family friend, Joseph Addison (1672 - 1719), whose presence in the text is palpable if rarely explicit. I set out to demonstrate how Montagu inscribes authority through the strategy identified by Mills of 'double-

voicing’ whereby male travellers are both repudiated and absorbed.<sup>19</sup> Through a comparative approach to the *Letters* and earlier Grand Tour narratives, I evidence how closely interwoven her writing was with that of her contemporaries and propose that her strategies of imitation, citation, and satirical comment were consistent with hetero-social intellectual exchange commonly presented as part of the phenomenon of the ‘Republic of Letters’.

My research for Chapter 1 ‘A Female Grand Tourist’ encompasses primary Grand Tour narratives by travellers, including Lassels’ 1670 *Voyage of Italy Or A Compleat Journey Through Italy. In Two Parts*, and Addison’s 1705 *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy*<sup>20</sup> as well as historical studies by Jeremy Black and Brian Dolan where Montagu is notable by her absence. *The British Abroad: The Grand Tour in the Eighteenth Century* (Black, 1992) mentions her only once, as an example of a tourist who hastily vacates Chambery in 1742 to evade the break-out of war. Dolan’s *Ladies of the Grand Tour* (2001) commences in 1763 but the date is chosen not to mark the publication of the *Letters* but instead the birth of one Mary Berry whose autobiographical writings would relay her travels as a young woman with her father. Dolan does, however, observe the ongoing dilemma which pertained to travel as education for women: ‘...how could women learn, but remain feminine? How were they to engage with men, but not be too ‘public’ or aggressive about it?’ (p. 43).

The over-arching subject of female education is brought to attention in Chapter 2, ‘The Female Scholar’. Here I examine Montagu’s negotiation of the highly-restricted

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<sup>19</sup> Thompson observes that this strategy, conventionally perceived as a ‘strategy of subterfuge and subversion’, might be re-evaluated for its ‘enabling aspects’ (2017:142). Mills uses it to express women’s use of ‘masculine constructions’ to represent the feminine (1991: 44, citing Schaffer, 1989:107).

<sup>20</sup> Hereafter abbreviated *Voyage of Italy* and *Remarks*

and socially-hazardous world of the Female Scholar in her correspondence with two notable Men of Letters: the poet, Alexander Pope, and the *philosophe*, Antonio Conti, referred to in the *Letters* as the Abbé Conti. The character of Achmet Beg is examined as a foil figure, whose relationship with Montagu effects her own transformation into the female ‘oriental scholar’ that Turkey revered.<sup>21</sup> Bowman’s 2013 essay, ‘The Poet as Translator’, provided scholarly detail of the Turkish love lyric Montagu purports to translate for England’s greatest poet-translator of the day in her letter to Pope, with Bowman observing Montagu’s strategic use of this poem/translation ‘to demonstrate explicitly her own authority as translator’ (p.259). Letter 31, I suggest, appears to offer imprints of Sappho’s Fragment 31 in this most layered of responses to Pope’s correspondence and contemporary poetic discourse.

Studies by both Jane Shaw and Humberto Garcia provide valuable contextual insight on contemporary Deist debates that Montagu invokes in her letters to Conti. Jane Shaw (1998) terms Montagu a ‘female deist’ and examines the theological aspects of her expression of Deist philosophy in relation to Islam, while Chapter 2 of Garcia’s *Islam and the English Enlightenment* (2011:60-92) observes Montagu’s imitation of popular Deist forms. The revelation of Conti’s production of an influential yet deeply misogynist letter in 1721, encountered in Messbarger’s chapter ‘The Very Fibre of Their Being: Antonio Conti’s Materialist Argument for Women’s Inferiority’ (2002: 49-68) forced a re-evaluation of the sympathetic relationship biographers construct, and contributed significantly to my thesis’ premise of the author’s satirical exchange with her male correspondents.

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<sup>21</sup> See MHO, Introduction pp.29-30

Finally, in a further departure from conventional critical focuses, and to conclude my thesis' examination of the generation of female authority and agency, I turn my attention in Chapter 3 to Montagu's participation in the still-fluid maternal discourses of the early eighteenth century, as well as to her attempted construction of Mother myths, whereby she seeks to synthesise the maternal archetype of the Magna Mater with an emerging socio-political role of Civic Mother, fashioning a new maternal figure from both Turkish female contemporaries and classical sources. As Hall et al observe (2017:9), motherhood is a neglected area of scholarship of the *Letters* and Chapter 3 considers both how Montagu self-fashions as mother as well as how she engages with social and cultural understandings of maternity. While feminist readings of the 'monstrous' mother by Susan Gubar (1977) and Marilyn Francus (1994) help to illuminate my analysis of Montagu's use of symbolism and allusive imagery in her depictions of Fatima and the homosocial female spaces of the harem and hammam, historical studies of maternity, reproduction and the politics of motherhood have all been important in shaping my analysis.<sup>22</sup> I argue that Montagu's resistance to the increasingly misogynistic representations of the mother by her contemporaries is wrought through fashioning a maternal archetype which navigates away from the mythic, impossible Eve/Magna Mater figure to the practical, politically-realizable Civic Mother.

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<sup>22</sup> For e.g. Mary Fissell (2002); Patricia Crawford (2004); Toni Bowers (2006)

## Chapter 1: The Female Grand Tourist

*'...there is sometimes greater judgment shown in deviating from the rules of art than in adhering to them.'* (Joseph Addison, *Spectator*, 592)

As wife of the Ambassador to the Ottoman Porte, Lady Mary travelled across Europe to Turkey and then home via the Mediterranean as a traveller 'by Necessity' (Bony, 2002:5), yet one who would, like many others before and after her, turn her experiences into a journey-narrative which plotted not only the travels themselves but a personal journey in a text she intended as her legacy. As Jean Viviès observes, the travel narrative is often seen as doubly configured in its plotting of both journey and narrative (2002:110); a tripling is possible in a plotting of self, too. The philosophical backdrop to such a notion of travel as a form of educational discovery not just of other places but of one's self might be found in Locke's 1689 'An Essay concerning Human Understanding' (Buzard, 2002:37), and the Grand Tour that emerged in the mid-seventeenth century as an aristocratic rite of passage, its purpose to finish the young nobleman's classical education and prepare him for leadership, steadily evolved into the more individualistic, subjective accounts we more commonly associate with narratives of the Grand Tour.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, by the end of the eighteenth century, the Tour itself had undergone significant *embourgeoisement*, with women regular participants as well as authors of travel accounts (Sweet 2012:27).

*The Turkish Embassy Letters* therefore occupies a unique position as the travel narrative of a female author during the aristocratic 'heyday' of the Tour<sup>24</sup>. This chapter considers how Montagu navigated the existing patriarchal discourse whilst also presenting a counter-narrative directed at and oriented around a predominantly female

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<sup>23</sup> See Thompson, 'Revealing the Self' (2011:96-129)

<sup>24</sup> Sweet suggests that this period ranged from the end of 17<sup>th</sup> century but had 'passed by 1760' referring in turn to Redford's *Venice and the Grand Tour*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996 (pp. 7, 15).

subject. I will consider, in particular, an unacknowledged presence in Montagu's text of Richard Lassels' founding 1670 Grand Tour narrative, *Voyage of Italy*, along with her use of an established rhetorical strategy of 'outstripping'<sup>25</sup> earlier writers of the genre, notably Sir Paul Rycaut, whose *Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (1668) was the authoritative text on Turkey at the time. While this strategy itself engineers a discourse that proposes challenges to prevailing knowledge and understanding in its purposeful pursuit of education, this chapter will consider the ways in which the *Letters* in fact inscribe an authority through harnessing the author's eye-witness experience to her book-learning and specifically to her reading of her (male) traveller forebears. On the other hand, imitation, riposte, parody and satire are narrative strategies that constitute the weft of this text and Montagu's repeated dismissals of previous '*Male-Travels*' (there were no published accounts by women) assert a narrative that Astell defines as distinctly female in her Preface. In effect, the chapter critically attends to the well-worn road of the aristocratic Grand Tour that Montagu found herself trespassing upon, and looks at how and where she stuck to its contours, and where she struck 'out a new path' – in other words, how she fashioned herself as a female Grand Tourist. The chapter's focus will be predominantly on her accounts of journeys and sightseeing for it is these that offer the most compelling demonstration of conventions of the Grand Tour narrative.

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<sup>25</sup> Heffernan notes "outstripping" as 'a trope [sic] of the genre' (2000:207) whereby writers countered or repudiated earlier travel accounts.

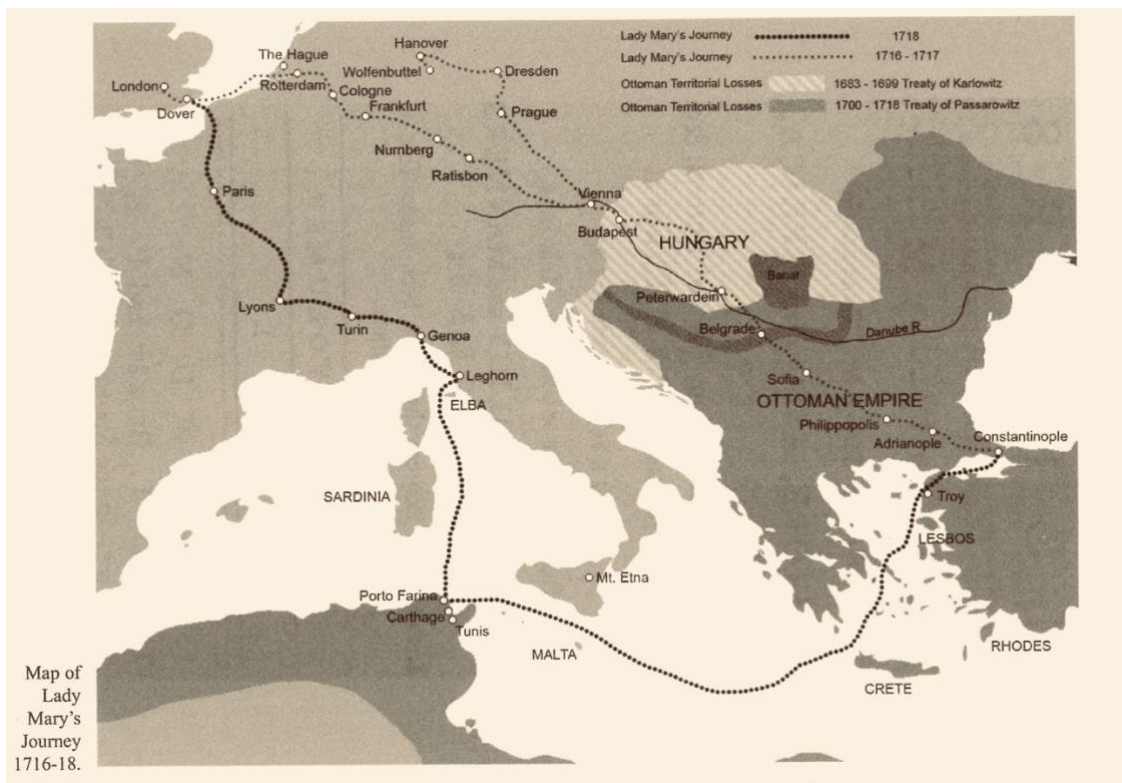


Figure 2 Map showing Montagu's 'Grand Tour', 1716-18, MHO, p.45

## The 'Aristocratic' Grand Tour: Phenomenon and Discourse

Grand Tour narratives enjoyed enormous popularity throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the Classic Grand Tour was initially characterised as an aristocratic young man's rite of passage as he travelled with a mentor-figure, known as a 'bear-leader' or 'Governor', along what were mainly the postal routes that crossed south from Northern Europe, either through France or the Low Countries, to end in Italy before following the alternative route home after two or three years.<sup>26</sup> Most critics consider Addison's *Remarks* (1705) the 'epochal' account of the Grand Tour (Bony, 2002:3) which Montagu's husband had in fact accompanied between 1702-3, with Addison performing the role of 'bear-leader' to Edward Wortley's youthful Grand Tourist. Both Wortley Montagus corresponded with Addison<sup>27</sup> throughout their time

<sup>26</sup> See, for e.g., Jeremy Black (1992) and Brian Dolan (2002)

<sup>27</sup> As well as being a family friend, between 1717-1718, Addison was Secretary of State for the Southern Department, which included oversight of diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire.

overseas, and Montagu's references to him and to other writers of the Grand Tour indicate direct engagement with the discourse, yet genre and historical studies have conventionally overlooked the *Letters*' participation here. Such occlusion is perhaps not unsurprising when the phenomenon itself was rendered a specifically *masculine* rite of passage, starring a male protagonist guided by male 'governors' with the intention of returning to paternalistic positions usually two or three years after foreign discoveries and the hardships of travel had polished the adolescent youth into a paragon of masculinity (Sweet, 2012:20). When Montagu set off on this first period of travel in her life she was hardly an adolescent, and clearly no male youth fresh out of university, and her destination was not Rome but Constantinople, yet the educative purpose of the Tour – its original primary purpose – is evident not only from the learning she acquires and displays but from that she distributes to her (mostly) female correspondents. In this key respect, she was undertaking and participating in the Grand Tour exactly as its proponents had advocated: she was not only acquiring an education for herself but, through her correspondence, bestowing it upon her female friends. The civic responsibility incumbent on the Grand Tourist is thereby fulfilled.

Throughout the *Letters* Montagu directly and indirectly refers to a body of Grand Tourists, including Joseph Addison (1672 – 1719), Jean Dumont (1667-1727), Giovanni Francesco Gemelli (1651-1725) and Aaron Hill (1685-1750), as well as earlier travellers 'of Necessity', including previous members of the British Embassy to the Ottoman Porte whose accounts of their travels to and within Turkey contributed greatly to popular knowledge and understanding of the Ottoman Empire. However, time after time, she challenges the authority of the Grand Tourists along with earlier embassies, historians and merchant travellers. For example, in their capacity as secretary to former British Ambassadors of the Porte, Robert Withers and Sir Paul



Rycaut described how the Sultan chose which woman from the harem he would sleep with that night by ‘throwing a handkerchief’<sup>28</sup> – an act which Montagu proclaims to Lady Mar in Letter 40 as ‘altogether fabulous’ (p. 156). In Letter 38, too, to an anonymous Lady, she insists that her correspondent’s ‘letter is full of mistakes from one end to the other. I see you have taken your ideas of Turkey from that worthy author Dumont, who has writ with equal ignorance and confidence’ (p. 148). The outstripping here is indicative of a deliberate strategy of confrontation and subversion, to effect the promulgation of new and reliable knowledge, yet this was not, as I have suggested, completely original in itself.

*‘Male-Travels...stuft with the same trifles’: Richard Lassels’ Voyage of Italy (1670) and Montagu’s Letter 46*

It is Richard Lassels who introduced the term ‘the Grand Tour’ (1670:27) in his posthumously published travel narrative, itself conventionally considered the first guidebook.<sup>29</sup> Addison pays the Catholic priest and early ‘bear-leader’ a cursory acknowledgment in his Preface to *Remarks*: ‘Lassels may be useful in giving us the names of such writers as have treated of the several states through which he passed’ (1705:2). However, as I will suggest, he served a greater purpose to Montagu and her formulation of her letters, although she does not once mention him.

Lassels’ Preface, for example, signals several stylistic features that are present in the *Letters* as well as other examples of the genre. Written initially as a form of

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<sup>28</sup> Robert Withers’ translation of Ottaviano Bon’s *A Description of the Grand Signor’s Seraglio or Turkish Emperor’s Court* (London, 1650) was the result of his discovery of the text while serving Sir Paul Pindar, British Ambassador to the Porte (1611-20). See MHO, p. 268

<sup>29</sup> Chaney footnotes (1982:557n9) Claire Howard *English Travellers of the Renaissance*, New York, 1914:194

aporia, Lassels heads off accusations of repetition of other narrative accounts by

declaring:

...if others have written upon this subject, why may not I? They did the best they could, I beleeve [sic]; but they drew not up the ladder after them. (Preface, paragraph 9<sup>30</sup>)

He goes on to argue that different travellers will necessarily write differently about different things while implying that *his* accounts will be better by offering more and, implicitly, complete detail:

...if these ingenious gentlemen have painted out Italy in bust only, and profile; why may not I paint her out at full face, and at her full length? If they, like ancient Statuaries, have represented Italy unto us like a naked statue; I have set her out in all her best Attire, and Jewels. (ibid.)<sup>31</sup>

However, while Lassels contests, perhaps a little disingenuously, that he does this for his 'owne sake', Montagu insinuates her purpose in reappraising and correcting previous accounts as overtly educative, rather than for her correspondent's amusement or personal glory. She chides one poor female correspondent<sup>32</sup>, for example, for being disappointed with her tales so far:

...'tis my regard to truth and not laziness that I do not entertain you, with as many prodigies as other travellers use to divert their readers with [...] Would you have me write novels like the Countess of D'Aunois? And is it not better to tell you a plain truth... (Letter 20, p. 83)

Asserting that her purpose is distinct from that of her predecessors, who she implies have designs only to entertain their readers, Montagu pronounces here not merely the authority of the eye-witness but that of the moral high ground, where truth cannot be sacrificed merely to please. As Astell implied in her Preface, it is this notion of 'truth' that distinguishes between the feminized gaze and the normative male gaze, affording

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<sup>30</sup> Preface is unpaginated.

<sup>31</sup> Spelling and punctuation standardised here and in further examples from this text

<sup>32</sup> Unidentifiable from "Heads of Lady Mary's Letter's from Turkey", although Wharnccliffe attributes to Lady Rich – see MHO p. 82n1)

Montagu's writing an educative and moral value while male accounts are 'stuffed with trifles', a phrase that neatly inverts the norms for gender-marked knowledge and intelligence of the time. Furthermore, Montagu's 'truth' is frequently defined in distinctly Protestant terms, and her refusal to relay a 'long series of Popish miracles' (L20:83) might imply a rebuke to the Catholic Lassels' exhaustive itinerary of Italian churches and chapels – a focus the Protestant Montagu scorns repeatedly, ridiculing, for example, the numerous Catholic relics she is obliged to visit. This does not, however, seem to restrict her use of Lassels as a source for her account of the churches of Genoa in Letter 46, as I will now outline.

As Montagu travels home through Italy after the residency in Turkey, she embarks on her account of Genoa, its landscape and landmarks with the observation to her sister, Lady Mar, that while it is 'situate[d] in a very fine bay' 'and beautified with the most excellent architecture' 'it lost much of its beauty in my eyes, having been accustomed to that of Constantinople' (L46:195). Her *ennui*<sup>33</sup> is effected further through her descriptions of the churches which are typically brief, disinterested yet indebted to those of Lassels, despite a lack of any acknowledgement of him as her likely source. Even her order mirrors his, as if his original 'guide-book'<sup>34</sup> established the very itinerary: first, the Church of St. Lawrence, then on to the Church of the Annunciata, and then to St. Ambrose. Lassels' *Voyage* is not merely alluded to, then, but distilled, his detail summarized albeit somewhat cursorily. Where Lassels' account of Genoa offers a detailed description of the Church of St. Lawrence which 'presents itself to my sight' and 'is of a noble structure, all of black and white marble intermingled, and all massive square stones' (p. 86), Montagu introduces St. Lawrence

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<sup>33</sup> Sweet identifies *ennui* as a theme of later women's travel writing (2012:33).

<sup>34</sup> See fn.29

to head up her single paragraph account of *all* the churches, remarking only on it being ‘all black and white marble’ before going on to write about the one thing that holds any interest for her – its ‘famous plate of a single emerald’ (L46:197). Lassels presents a history of the emerald as a relic, his Catholicism likely infusing an admiration, while Montagu appears interested only in the fact it can no longer be handled (ibid:197-8). A multiple-sentence, extended paragraph is offered by Lassels to describe The Church of the Annunciata, claiming for it that it ‘draweth up the Ladder after it for neatness’ (p. 87). In contrast, Montagu’s single sentence merely notes that it is ‘finely lined with marble, the pillars are of red and white marble’ (L46:198), a feature also noted by Lassels:

The two rows of *Vast Pillars*, which hold up the roof of the Church, are so beautiful, being of a *red* and *white marble*, that they look like jasper, and ravish the beholder: they are curiously wrought and channelled. (p. 87)

It is not just that Montagu’s *ennui* might implicitly counter the more enthusiastic accounts of the Catholic priest, nor, I would suggest, is it ‘in the face of relentless antiquarianism in order to demonstrate her femininity’ (Sweet, 2012:33) but instead arises from her previous observation of greater splendours:

I confess all the churches appeared so mean to me, after that of Sancta Sophia, I can hardly do them the honour of writing them down. (L46:198)

It is a marker of Montagu’s counter-discourse that she self-fashions her subject position in this way here, her *ennui* far from an indicator of ‘femininity’ but instead of a perspective that has been expanded and transformed by her experience of Turkey. Unsurprisingly, it rejects the Catholic eulogies of earlier travellers, and perhaps particularly of Lassels, the reputation of whose *Voyage* jostled uncomfortably with that of the accounts of Montagu’s one-time tutor, Bishop Burnet<sup>35</sup>. However, authority is

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<sup>35</sup> Burnet, Gilbert (1688) *Some Letters, Containing An Account Of What Seemed Most Remarkable In Switzerland, Italy, Some Parts Of Germany, &c. In The Years 1685 And 1686*.

elicited by dint of her having *seen* not only these sites, but others that are infinitely more impressive. The traveller's *ennui*, one might argue, transmutes here into the prestigious taste and connoisseurship<sup>36</sup> of the aristocratic adventurer.

Montagu 'strikes out' upon this 'new path' through her consistent celebration of Turkish culture which is suggested not only by her preference for 'Sancta Sofia' over the Genoese Catholic churches but also by her earlier use in the letter of the phrase '*tetis beys*' (L46:195) which appears to be a Turkish approximation<sup>37</sup> for the Italian *cicisbeismo*, a word referring to the practice of the Italian upper-class wife taking a male lover with her husband's consent. It has been suggested that Montagu's 1718 letter is the 'first English account of *cicisbeismo*' (Pfister, 1996:500) although the text's patterning provides a clear narrative route between the equivalent practice of 'sub-marriages' in Vienna (L10:65), which she earlier describes as the 'real foundation of so many wonderful instances of constancy', and the 'freedom' she suggests Turkish women have to choose lovers, undetected because veiled (*ibid.*). Here, her Turkish-styled phrasing overlays the celebrated freedoms of Montagu's Turkish women onto their Italian counterparts whose custom ensures 'peace and good humour amongst them' (L46:195). Later North Europeans would present *cicisbeismo* as evidence of the weakness of Italian men and the sexual promiscuity of their women. Montagu's pragmatic approach, seeing the positives for all concerned, is symptomatic of her interest in alternatives to what she perceived were the restrictions of British marriage laws, and offers a gendered sympathy with customs that are tolerant of women's sexuality. Her discussion of these practices is certainly far more nuanced than Lassels'

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<sup>36</sup> Katrina O'Laughlin observes the 'reification of the viewer as connoisseur' as a 'feature of eighteenth-century aesthetic discourses' (2018:40)

<sup>37</sup> *Bey* is Turkish for 'squire' or 'sir' from the Ottoman period. *Tetis*, however, cannot be sourced, although Bizzocchi suggests Montagu's coinage is 'an imaginative etymological explanation of the word [*cicisbeismo*]' (2014:128)

recurring, repetitive focus on ‘penitent whores’ and fallen women. In Corso, for example, he compares the Convent which homes the former with ‘the house in *Amsterdam*, where ‘whores are clapt [sic] up.’ (198):

Here a Vail hides these poor womens faces: there I saw divers with black patches on their faces. Here all signes of true repentance are seen, there none. (199)

This tired double-standard is confronted throughout the *Letters* and characterises Montagu’s feminised gaze. Her approval of *tetis beys* encountered in Genoa affirms her earlier endorsement of the Viennese sub-marriages, the patterned construction of the text enhancing an authority shown to be rooted in rational, pluralistic and consistent responses to customs repeated in different countries. Compared to Italy and Austria, the customs of England are ‘barbarous’<sup>38</sup>.

Letter 46 is typical in its demonstration of Montagu’s recurring strategies of allusion to and even distillation of male-authored travel accounts, her use of the convention of outstripping fortifying authority built from both a knowledge of sources (here, Lassels’ descriptions of the churches) but also that of the eye-witness. Lassels, Addison and Misson, whose Grand Tour narrative also took epistolary form<sup>39</sup>, all imputed weight to the subjectivity of their accounts: they acknowledged that there was an array of different ways to recount the Tour; that these accounts would intersect to a degree with earlier traveller accounts, but that each brought something new to the telling. Lassels suggested that his use of humour was designed to bring cheer to arduous journeys (Preface, para.3). Addison, on the other hand, signalled his classical orientation, and his consideration of the accounts of a region’s identity by ‘ancient poets’ (Preface, p.3), while Misson emphasised that in editing his letters he had not

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<sup>38</sup> See L10:64 where Montagu declaims the English practice of consigning the older woman to romantic inconsequentiality

<sup>39</sup> *A New Voyage To Italy*. 1691. First translated into English from French 1695.

excluded what might be considered ‘some mean and seemingly trifling Things, which, for all their meanness, are yet very pleasant and diverting.’ (Preface, n.p., para.8).

Montagu’s originality and innovation arises in part from her gendered position, and from her determination to challenge conventional models of female representation from these accounts. However, unlike Misson’s letters, but akin to Addison’s, hers do rely quite heavily on sources which both provide authority for her accounts and represent the very discourse she claims to repudiate. One infers that without knowledge, at least, of her (male) predecessors, Montagu’s claim on authority would be diminished.

*‘I like travelling extremely, and have had no reason to complain of having had too little of it’<sup>40</sup>: Montagu’s journey narratives*

A staple of the Grand Tour narrative included accounts of the journeys undertaken, often to show the hardships endured and the stamina displayed. Before the account of the Wortley Montagus’ extraordinary traversal to Turkey in January 1717 across Hungary and the recent battlefields of Carlowitz, Montagu typically configured her traveller-persona against mythic and fabulous characters in what reads on occasion as self-parody. Pratt’s archetypal ‘sea-farer’ (1992:27) might be seen immediately in the opening lines of Letter 1<sup>st</sup> written to Lady Mar when Montagu’s recounting of the effects of the storm at sea simultaneously ridicules the captain’s fear while her ensuing parodic invocation of the Odyssean epithet of ‘luck’ and bathetic hendiadys seems to direct irony homewards, too: ‘For my part I have been so lucky neither to suffer from fear or sea-sickness’(L1:47). Her humorous telling invokes the kind of escapade common to travellers’ tales.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Letter to Frances Hewet, April 1<sup>st</sup> 1717, Adrianople. One of few extant letters. (MHO, p. 225)

<sup>41</sup> E.g. Addison, Letter No.101 Tuesday July 7<sup>th</sup> [1713]. He offers an anecdote from a gentleman who had ‘encountered as many misfortunes as a knight-errant. I had a fall into the water at Calais, and since that several bruises upon land...’ (Works, 1804, p.36)

Montagu's use of humour and irony is evident in Letter 15, too, as she recounts a terrifying journey in a coach from Prague to Leipzig along 'frightful precipices' (p. 74), and insinuates superior female fortitude in the face of danger. However, rather than self-fashioning in 'male' guise as she seems to do in Letter 1<sup>st</sup>, her courage here is framed as borne out of the female virtue of self-sacrifice: she 'was so good a wife' she chose not to wake her husband and scare him (ibid). This letter, which the reader understands to be written by the traveller 'who returned' on the one hand accords with survival literature's notions of transgression (Pratt, 1992:87) but its mock-heroic account is also characteristically satirical.

However, Letter 15 is interesting, too, for its allusion to Edward Wortley's previous travels as a Grand Tourist – the extremity of the experience is verified by his affirmation that 'he had passed the Alps five times in different places without ever having done a road so dangerous' (p.74). Wortley had 'made the Grand Tour between 1700 and 1703' (ibid.n3) and his rare appearances in the *Letters* are reserved for the 'journey' letters. As the remainder of the chapter will suggest, Montagu's later journey narratives, recounting both travel into Turkey and the journey home, effectively cast Wortley as 'Governor' with his wife the 'Grand Tourist', yet at this point the author playfully inverts the normative husband-wife relationship with herself as the guiding 'governor' and her sleeping husband the protected Grand Tourist. By contrast, the heavily-sourced, imitative Grand Tour narrative account of their journey from Vienna to Peterwaradin (Petrovardin) presents the author not only physically but intellectually and perhaps emotionally, too, travelling beyond her known world and consequently reliant upon pre-existing discourse. Letter 24, written again to Lady Mar, recounting this journey in January 1717, is arguably her most paradigmatic of the Grand Tour genre.



## Montagu's Journey narratives: Letter 24's Exemplification of the Grand Tour narrative

Montagu's journey from Vienna to Peterwaradin (Petrovardin) was a remarkable journey for the time, not least for the fact that she travelled across a region which had recently been the site of a huge battle where the Ottomans had been defeated by the Austrians.<sup>42</sup> In terms of the narrative arc of the text it presents the liminal space between the relative familiarity of European convention and the strangeness that is to come of the oriental 'other'; geopolitically, of course, it was a conflict zone between the Ottoman and Holy Roman Empires, over-run by bandits, and rarely traversed by British travellers. Montagu's letter merits close attention as a travel account for these reasons, but also because it demonstrates how she sought to self-fashion within the mould of the Grand Tourist as well as to re-shape it both as female and authoritative.

In organising her account of her journey, Montagu adheres closely to Grand Tour conventions with their observations on topography, history, political reports and the delineation of an itinerary. Montagu details each of the Hungarian and Serbian towns the Embassy passes through - Raab, Buda, Adam, Fodowar, Mohatch, Esseek and Bocowar<sup>43</sup> – with none part of the Classic Grand Tour and rarely visited by north Europeans<sup>44</sup>. She describes Raab, for example, as:

... a strong town, well garrisoned and fortified, and was a long time the frontier town between the Turkish and German empires. It has its name from the river Raab, on which it is situated just on its meeting with the Danube, in an open champion [sic] country. (p.88)

Addison and Lassels both organised their accounts similarly, with the names of each place visited presented in a title or a margin sub-title, effecting a guide-book for future

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<sup>42</sup> 5<sup>th</sup> August 1716

<sup>43</sup> These places are in modern-day Hungary and Croatia.

<sup>44</sup> Black, for example, notes that 'In the first half of the century travellers [to the Ottoman Empire] were so rare that their return to Britain merited a mention in the British press' (p.72).

travellers<sup>45</sup>, before describing a town's geography, history and topography. While Montagu does not offer such text features, each place is clearly located to open a new paragraph. In her history of Raab, she draws on Rycaut, too, distilling his vivid account of a bloody massacre – featuring dismemberment, torture, and the plucking out of eyes (*History*, 1679:139) – into a single sentence of citation, another key convention of the genre: 'The Governor being supposed to have betrayed it, was afterwards beheaded by the Emperor's command' (p.89). Her neutral style contrasts quite notably with Rycaut's more emotive narrative, where the Vizier is described as having 'violent Ambition and Desire to become Master of *Rab* [sic]' and that 'he could not rest satisfied in this Counsel before he had consulted with *Ali* Pasha, and other Pashaws of the Frontier Countries...' (*History*, 1679:136). This is consistent with her repeated refusal to glorify war and violence, an instance of which she expresses in the following Letter 25 to Pope. Here she relays her experience of the battlefield of Carlowitz, saying that:

I could not look without horror on such numbers of mangled human bodies, and reflect on the injustice of war, that makes murder not only necessary but meritorious (p. 95).

An aversion to war might be framed as a conventionally 'feminine' position, yet Montagu's ensuing reference to Hobbes clearly locates her response within humanist philosophical thought – her subject position as female Grand Tourist does not shy away from war simply due to its masculinity but, as she implies here, its lack of rationality: 'I conclude human nature not rational, if the word reason means common sense, as I suppose it does.' (L25:95). However, Montagu's more neutral style also evinces precisely the 'plain truth' she insists her accounts convey, in contrast with the 'novels' she insinuates 'other travellers use to divert their readers with.' (L20:83).

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<sup>45</sup> See, for eg, Lassels' Preface

Nevertheless, despite adhering very closely to the structural and narrative conventions of the Grand Tour to present her journey through Hungary, Montagu does not overlook opportunities to provide her sister with accounts of local women and their attire: her account of Bocowar conflates all conventional description as ‘all built after the manner I have described to you’ (p. 93) so that she can focus, as if with a sigh of relief, on the gown of the Colonel’s lady:

This lady was in a gown of scarlet velvet, lined and faced with sables, made exact to her shape and the skirt falling to her feet. The sleeves are strait [sic] to their arms, and the stays buttoned before two rows of little buttons of gold, pearl, or diamonds. (ibid.)

This is a clear digression, however, as Montagu moves to conclude her letter.

Nevertheless, neither accounts of clothing nor of women are unique to Montagu as a Grand Tourist although perhaps her descriptions are more attentive to detail than most.

The letter, despite its own announcement of a departure from convention in offering ‘a short journal of my journey’ (p. 88), is in many ways perfectly consistent with the range and complexity of writing she does in fact address to her sister, as well as indicating a closer alignment with the genre of Grand Tour narratives. The scholarly commonplace that holds that Montagu tailored her writing to each of her correspondents rather disparagingly simplifies her correspondence with her sister as ‘detailed accounts of exotic costume’ while suggesting her more erudite letters were reserved for her two male correspondents (Grundy 1999:199). Instead, as this letter shows, Montagu made use of both a purpose and convention of epistolary writing to relay details to family members of journeys with their dangers faced and overcome, but not without – in her case – taking an opportunity to inform her sister of the history, politics and culture of the terrain the Embassy traversed.

Furthermore, this letter is just one of an original ‘duet’<sup>46</sup>, the second being Letter 45, which presented Lady Mar with detailed accounts of places, their histories and politics, both of which relied upon the well-known written accounts of earlier writers. A clear implication of shared knowledge between author and correspondent should not be overlooked as part of Montagu’s educative vision for her text. Her conventional double-voiced<sup>47</sup> apology reflects the ambivalent position of the ‘learned lady’<sup>48</sup>, as she seeks to deny any ‘affectation’ of her reading:

I’m afraid you’ll think, a tedious account of this part of my travels. It was not an affectation of showing my reading that has made me tell you some little scraps of history of the towns I have passed through. I have always avoided anything of that kind, when I spoke of places that I believe you knew the story of as well as myself, but Hungary being a part of the world that I believe quite new to you, I thought you might read with some pleasure an account of it, which I have been very solicitous to get from the best hands. (p. 94)

Montagu clearly has read – widely – and she assures her sister that she has done so ‘from the best hands’. Halsband suggests her sources for this letter were likely Knolles’ *Turkish History* (1687) and Edward Brown’s *Brief Account of some Travels in Hungaria* (1673), but also Rycaut’s *History of the Turks*.<sup>49</sup> In her description of Raab, for example, as ‘a frontier town’, she directly borrows his phrase to describe its position as ‘in an open champian [sic] country.’ (p. 88). Rycaut had written that the town was ‘situated in a plain, level, and Champian Country.’ (*History*, 1679:136). The author she elsewhere vilifies – telling Conti, for example, that if he wants ‘lists’ he can look up Rycaut<sup>50</sup> - is relied upon here, and quietly absorbed.

As such, from the intimacy of her correspondence with her sister, one may infer their shared reading or at least discussions of such figures. She asserts, after all, that she

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<sup>46</sup> The Letter-book reassigns this letter to the Abbe Conti, discussed pp.32-5

<sup>47</sup> See Introduction, n19.

<sup>48</sup> See Chapter 2 for development of this vilified stereotype

<sup>49</sup> See MHO, fn.4, p.89; fn.1, p.94

<sup>50</sup> Letter 44, p.177

avoided writing of places ‘that I believe you knew the story of as well as myself’ (L24:94). Montagu is here abiding by the codes expected of the Grand Tourist, who learns from the Governor, and shares their learning for the benefit of their nation, yet in this instance her ‘governor’ takes the form of earlier histories by male writers. The authority of her account is therefore buttressed by her ‘reading’; the anxiety of being branded ‘affect[ed]’ is made plain but throughout her correspondence with Lady Mar there are regular references and allusions to a wealth of writers and literature, indicating that both women were well- and widely-read.

### Montagu’s Journey narratives: Letter 45 Inverting Sandys’ Journey through the Mediterranean

It is noteworthy, then, that the second part of the ‘duet’ of journey narratives was originally addressed, again, to Lady Mar, but the letter-book shows that her name was crossed out and replaced with the Abbe Conti’s, and all references throughout to “My dear Sister” removed.<sup>51</sup> Although I suggest reasons for Montagu’s later allocation of this letter to Conti in Chapter 2, her original address of this most scholarly of her letters to her sister reinforces an argument that her project was driven by an advocacy for female education. Just as the young male Grand Tourist would return with greater learning for the benefit of his peers at home, so might we see Montagu’s epistolary project as more than merely sharing news and passing on reassurances. Instead, its scholarly, educative content offers a female-voiced alternative to the histories, the essays and travel narratives her correspondents could only largely access from male authors.

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<sup>51</sup> See MHO, fn.2, p.180

Letter 45 describes her journey back through the Mediterranean and sites of classical Greek antiquity in what is often noted as a ‘reverse performance’<sup>52</sup> of George Sandys’ account in his *Travels* (originally published 1615). Montagu explicitly cites Sandys in this letter:

One of my countrymen, Mr. Sands [sic], (whose book I do not doubt you have read as one of the best of its kind) speaking of these ruins supposes them to have been the foundation of a city begun by Constantine, before his building at Byzantium, but I see no good reason for that imagination, and am apt to believe them much more ancient. (p. 184)

While ‘best of its kind’ on the one hand evokes the earlier ‘best of hands’ signalled in Letter 24, its parenthetical placement here seems to indicate there is still space and scope for other books to offer their knowledge. This is then exemplified by her challenge to Sandys’ judgment that Sigeum was ‘the foundation of a city built by Constantine’ concluding from the stela’s ‘too ancient’ Greek, instead, that the ruins themselves must be ‘much more ancient’ (ibid.). The reader finds herself (or himself, if referring to Conti) presented with Lady Mary pursuing the antiquarian pursuits of the Grand Tourist, although her partnership here with her husband, ‘Mr. W\_’, is worth noting. As previously observed, Wortley’s appearances in the *Letters* are reserved primarily for the journey accounts, where his former experience as a Grand Tourist is evoked. For his wife, there must have been some sense of following in the footsteps of one of the Tour’s figureheads, with her husband now acting as an effective ‘bear-leader’ himself to her ‘Grand Tourist’. Wortley’s knowledge of Ancient Greek is presented to authorise a recent revision of the site’s date, after William Sherard<sup>53</sup> found the stele in 1716:

This is certainly part of a very ancient tomb, but I dare not pretend to give the true explanation of it. On the stone, on the left side, is a very fair inscription,

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<sup>52</sup> MHO, Introduction, p. 30

<sup>53</sup> British Consul in Smyrna (1703-1716)

which I am sure I took off very exactly, but the Greek is too ancient for Mr. W's interpretation. (p. 183)

The ideology of improvement and enlightenment of both the self and of one's compatriots through a return home with new knowledge and ideas was central to the Grand Tour's purpose, and Montagu's engagement with the sites of classical antiquity during her journey home display a clear intention to revise prevailing understandings. Sweet's observation that female Grand Tourists would refrain from comment on antiquities (p. 32) would appear not to apply to Lady Mary, yet it is interesting that in her observations on one that was enjoying notable discussion at the time of her travels she enjoins the authority and status of her husband.<sup>54</sup>

However, what makes this letter so significant as the swansong, perhaps, of a 'female' Grand Tourist is, I suggest, its insistent feminocentric citations. While Letter 24 draws to a close with a relieved brief mention of the Colonel's lady, Letter 45 is launched by the 'Muse' and sings throughout of the women of Greece, ancient and modern, mythical and breathing. Each site is defined now not only by its classical origin or recent history, but by the stories of its women. Montagu tells the tale of a daughter who admitted her Turkish lover to her father's castle, resulting in its destruction and her father's imprisonment (p. 181-2); of the 'poor Greek peasants' whose women's 'neat shoes and stockings' (p. 184) correspond to Montagu's schema<sup>55</sup> of civilised virtue. She links antiquities to female figures of myth, and muses:

that 'tis impossible to imagine anything more agreeable than this journey would have been between two and three thousand years since, when after drinking a dish of tea with Sappho, I might have gone the same evening to visit the temple of Homer in Chios... (p. 190)

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<sup>54</sup> Thomasson (2010) notes that its 'exceptionality was immediately recognised' and that 'Few such inscriptions were known at the time and any specimen greatly sought after' (p. 494). Inscription published by Chishull in 1721.

<sup>55</sup> Established through early references to the 'neat' towns and clothing of the protestant Low Countries (Letters 1-5)

Importantly, Montagu makes it clear that she is not (any longer, perhaps, as she heads for home) arguing for the homosocial spaces of the harem and hammam whose charms, as Chapter 3 will suggest, begin to lose their allure. Instead, this is a world where men and women may co-exist, both equally revered.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to show first and foremost how consideration of *The Turkish Embassy Letters*' own discursive interplay with the Grand Tour narrative genre indicates Montagu's indebtedness to the genre and its writers, despite her established strategy of repudiating earlier travel accounts. The prefaces of Lassels, Addison and Misson suggest the malleability of the genre, as well as its subjectivity, both of which Montagu wields to deliver her own version of the Grand Tour's educative project, while nevertheless co-opting these very writers as part of the fabric of her own authority. Considered already nostalgic by the time of their publication,<sup>56</sup> the *Letters* might be understood as providing a bridge from the exclusivity of the masculinist and aristocratic early Grand Tour to the form it would take henceforward: as the touristic expression of the burgeoning middle-class seeking leisure.

Montagu's *Letters*, as those of a *female* Grand Tourist, are therefore at once innovative yet clearly rooted in the Grand Tour narrative discourse. They are innovative in their preoccupation with the lives of women and in their support for female freedom, including their sexual freedom in marriage. They are innovative, too, in their use of multiple epistolary correspondents, each of whom is effectively characterised by the author, unlike the generic 'Sir' of, for example, Misson's epistolary account. Montagu's use of eight female correspondents, with her sister

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<sup>56</sup> See, for e.g, Turner, Katherine S.H., 1999:126



receiving some of her most instructive accounts of the journeys and places she visited, present a text which is an overtly feminised counter to the masculinist Grand Tour.

Yet throughout she is able, too, to conjoin earlier writing to enforce her own authority – her wide reading evidences the scale of her learning, and implicitly gives her the *right* to forge her own narrative. While a reader today may rely on Montagu's editors to identify her sources, her nods and allusions to her correspondent – who, in the letters looked at in this chapter, is usually her sister – indicate that these writings were a shared reference and thereby present intelligent, educated while still sociable and personal exchange between two women. Thus, a genre which offered itself as a 'stage for the performance of elite masculinity' (Sweet 2012:20) is translated in Montagu's hands into one that offers an alternatively feminized performance which nevertheless adheres to the educative purpose of the Tour.

## Chapter 2: The Female Scholar

*I question not but here is very many faults, but if any reasonable person considers three things they will forgive them.*

1. *I am a Woman*
  2. *without any advantage of Education*
  3. *all these was wrote by me at the age of 14*
- (Lady Mary Pierrepont, cited Grundy 1999:20)

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's ambitions as a writer were evident from an early age, as was her recognition of the disadvantages faced even by women of her status who set out on such a path. As an aristocrat, Montagu's education had been at the hands of a governess, her mother's nurse, while her brother was sent off to Cambridge to enjoy the Classical university schooling bestowed upon young gentlemen (Grundy 1999: 9-16). Scholarly education for women was the exception, with girls from the middle and higher social ranks invited to learn from their mothers a curriculum involving 'various needlecraft skills, the art of polite conversation, dancing, music, drawing, painting, French, perhaps Italian, and subjects such as history, geography, and astronomy, with which to make polite conversation' (Simonton, 2005:44-45). Indeed, noblewomen were commonly afforded the role of educating the daughters of local families, even boarding them from around the age of six or seven, so that they could learn the skills and manners required of the nobility (Anderson and Zinsser, 1998:293-4). Only a few women, predominantly aristocratic, learned from a private tutor – the younger Mary complained to hers not only at the failure to educate women through any 'books but such as tend to the weakening and effeminating of the mind' but remarked with some bitterness to Bishop Burnet that:

There is hardly a character in the world more despicable, or more liable to universal ridicule, than that of a learned woman; those words imply, according to the received sense, a talking, impertinent, vain and conceited creature. (To Burnet, 10 July 1710)<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Montagu and Halsband (1965-67), p. 45

Steering a course through the hazards of being such a ‘learned woman’ sets the tenor of her later correspondence with other eminent male figures, as this chapter will demonstrate.

Nevertheless, despite the challenges women faced in accessing learning, genealogies of literary women evidence that several attained a scholarly status during this period<sup>58</sup>, including Mary Astell, and others who participated in a print industry that was significantly less-regulated following a series of lapses of the renewal of the 1662 Printing Act<sup>59</sup>. Education was itself a key topic of pedagogical enquiry and debate, intersecting scientific, political, religious and moral realms. In France and Sweden, at the end of the seventeenth century, there were royal decrees which stipulated education for both girls and boys (Anderson and Zinsser, 1998:443). The ideas of John Locke and Francois Fénelon would later inform the works of Rousseau and educationalists of the mid-eighteenth century, but they also found themselves subject to interrogation and critique by their proto-feminist peers. As Rebecca M. Mills notes, despite women’s exclusion from formal scholarship or politics, they ‘were deeply involved in gender debates over their right to intellectual and spiritual autonomy’ (cited in Schillace, 2013). Damaris Masham’s *Thoughts on Education* (1675) had ‘castigated those English gentlemen, who, destitute of knowledge themselves, derived a sense of superiority from depriving women of knowledge’.<sup>60</sup> In *A Serious Proposal* (1694/1697), Astell addressed Locke’s theory of the impressionability of the child’s mind proposed in his 1690 *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. She argued that women, too, must be offered an education to develop their intellect. Not only were they, she insisted, ‘as

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<sup>58</sup> See for e.g. George Ballard (1752) *Memoirs of several ladies of Great Britain: who have been celebrated for their writings or skill in the learned languages, arts, and sciences*

<sup>59</sup> See n9

<sup>60</sup> Butler, M.A. (1978), ‘Early Roots of Feminism: John Locke and the Attack on Patriarchy’, *The American Political Science Review*, v.72, March, pp.135-150

capable of learning as a man' (p.56), they were, by Locke's own reasoning, responsible for the early development of *all*, and she confronts his position boldly:

But the men if they rightly understand their own interest, have no reason to oppose the ingenious Education of the Women, since 'twou'd go a great way towards reclaiming the men, great is the influence we have over them in their Childhood. (p. 99)

However, while Locke was not unsympathetic to such argument, Fénelon's *Instructions for the Education of a Daughter* (1708) insisted upon training women in habits that would ensure compliance and mitigate their lack of reason, as he saw it (Schillace 2013, p.63). And in 1721, just two years after publishing one of her Turkish letters,<sup>61</sup> Antonio Conti, to whom her most overtly philosophical letters of *The Turkish Embassy Letters* are addressed, would himself step into the *querelle des femmes* and try to bring it to a close once and for all with a letter Guerci describes as the 'summa of eighteenth-century misogyny' (1987:125).<sup>62</sup>

It was through such communication circuits that women were able to enter the world of intellectual exchange with men, using 'networking' letters with eminent individuals to exert power and influence (Daybell 2009:187), and Montagu's choice of Pope and Conti as correspondents signals her participation in a flourishing Republic of Letters (Grayling 2016:123-4). Montagu wrote to several other male correspondents, including Congreve and her father, yet she selected just Alexander Pope – the pre-eminent Augustan poet and translator of Classical poetry – and Antonio Conti, a lapsed Catholic, Newtonian, self-proclaimed *virtuoso* who was patron to several young philosophers and scholars. In this chapter, I will consider how each of these men serve as foils to her own self-fashioning as a female scholar engaged in poetry, translation

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<sup>61</sup> *The Genuine Copy of a Letter Written from Constantinople by an English Lady, Who Was Lately in Turkey, and Who Is No Less Distinguish'd by Her Wit Than by Her Quality etc.*, 1719. Cited MHO, pp. 228-231

<sup>62</sup> *La Discussione sulla donna nell'Italia del Settecento*, cited Messbarger, 2002:51

and ethnographical commentary. To Pope she describes an idyllic, semi-monastic life in Letter 37, where she claims she is ‘already very learned’ ‘in the Turkish language’, and figures herself as an amalgamation of the English Enlightenment gentlewoman with the Oriental female scholar, whose pursuit of study is familiar from Renaissance depictions.<sup>63</sup>

Monday setting of partridges, Tuesday reading English, Wednesday studying in the Turkish language (in which by the way, I am already very learned), Thursday classical authors; Friday spent in writing... (p. 147)

The East/West hybrid figure of an orientalised female scholar is, I suggest, initiated by the *effendi* Achmet Beg. The question of Beg’s historicity is not disputed by biographers, but Garcia (2012) is one of few critics to insist on his narrative invention. As such, both her portrayal of Beg and the role that he plays in her narrative as a foil inaugurates an oriental paradigm of female scholarship modelled on Turkish cultural stereotypes familiar from Renaissance art which will persist throughout the remaining letters, as she studies Turkish, translates its poetry, provides ethnographic accounts of its women and their lives, and learns about Islam from the central characters of Beg and Fatima<sup>64</sup>.

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<sup>63</sup> See MHO, pp. 29-30

<sup>64</sup> Heffernan and O’Quinn refer to an image from a manuscript, “Rayhana, Daughter of Ka ’b ibn Malik, Neglected by her Husband” (1594-5) which shows a woman in a room with desk, inkpot and two manuscripts (MHO p. 30).



Figure 3 "Rayhana, Daughter of Ka 'b ibn Malik, Neglected by her Husband" (1594-5). MHO, p.316

### The 'fair convert'<sup>65</sup>: Montagu and the Effendi, Achmet Beg

Before arriving in Turkey itself, Montagu's first encounter with the 'Orient' and with Islam takes place over three weeks in February 1717 when lodged with Achmet Beg in the garrison town of Belgrade – itself located on the violently-shifting fault-lines of the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires. Beg and her conversations with him are conveyed to both Pope and Conti, but they differ in quite significant ways. While Letter 28 to Conti presents a serious examination of the deism of the *effendi* class, and the figure of Beg is lightly drawn and representational, Letter 25 to Pope offers a more detailed portrayal of the scholar as a figure of both Ottoman and personal importance. Montagu's depiction of their intimate evening discussions shows the reciprocity of their respect: 'You cannot imagine how delighted he is with the liberty of conversing with me' (p. 96).

One might argue that the Western Montagu is appropriating her new guru, reconfiguring him as an English Enlightenment gentleman to afford him both status and palatability for her correspondent. She bestows upon him conventional markers of gentlemanly civility: he has 'accomplishment', is 'perfectly skilled', 'spends the greatest part of his life' in his 'very good library', but still enjoys her conversation and 'drinks wine very freely' (p. 97). He might very well be an orientalised version of Pope himself, with Garcia suggesting that as such Pope is 'her main satiric target' (2012:68), an idea which gathers pace when seen in the shadow of Pope's own correspondence with Montagu during this period. Characterised by his rather *ungentlemanly*, eroticised imaginings of the woman he had dubbed his 'Sappho'<sup>66</sup>, in a letter sent in November 1716, he imagined, for example, how he would:

...hear at Belgrade, how the good Basha received the fair convert with tears of joy; how he was charmed with her pretty manner of pronouncing the words Allah and Muhammed; and how earnestly you joined him in exhorting Mr.

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<sup>65</sup> Pope to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Nov. 1716. From *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, ed. George Sherburn, vol. 1, Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1956. Cited MHO, p. 235

<sup>66</sup> Grundy's PhD thesis (1971) documents the connection between Pope, Montagu and her popular nomination as 'Sappho'



Wortley to be circumcised. (Pope to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Nov. 1716)<sup>67</sup>

Montagu's introduction to Beg declares that 'His father was a great Bassa' (p. 97), her lexis ironically matching her figure to Pope's. His simpering 'fair convert' undergoes a conversion of Montagu's own - into a woman who discourses with Beg on the shared qualities of English and Arabian poetry 'which I observed are in numbers not unlike ours, generally alternate verse, and of a very musical sound' (ibid.). Far beyond merely 'pronouncing the words Allah and Muhammed', she declares that her admiration for Arabian poetry leaves her 'so very pleased with them, I really believe I should learn to read Arabic if I was to stay here a few months', and indeed that her knowledge of the 'Persian tales' led Beg to believe that she 'understood Persian' (ibid.) Perhaps unsurprisingly, Pope's suggestion regarding her husband is ignored, although her portrayal of Beg is sealed with a barb: 'He has wit and is more polite than many Christian men of quality' (p. 98). Thus Montagu counters Pope's rather scandalous yet stereotypical fetishisation of her oriental conversion to wanton lasciviousness with a vision begotten from her long-held dream of being a 'learned woman', and effectively delivered by the respect won from Beg.

As this chapter will show, this is just one example of Montagu engaging in a response to a male correspondent to wrestle his depiction of her (and implicitly of all women) out of his hands and to re-fashion it to produce a figure who not only enjoys equality with her male peers but garners their respect for her learnedness and intellect. The conversion, she insinuates, is not from one patriarchal stereotype to another but to

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid. footnote 73; pp. 236-8



a proto-feminist self-realisation as a scholar which, nevertheless, arises from the very sociability that her Augustan peers prided themselves on cultivating.<sup>68</sup>

From the frontier town of Belgrade, which itself would be razed just six months later in August 1717, Montagu's letter strongly suggests, therefore, that civilisations come and go, and that social norms are not fixed. Both her transformation of the oriental scholar into a westernised Enlightenment gentleman, along with her inversion of prevailing stereotypes of confined Turkish women, developed in ensuing letters, signal what Heffernan has referred to as a 'dismantl[ing of] the East/West divide just as it was emerging' (2016:23). Turkey is modelled as an alternatively enlightened civilization, whose 'long tradition of science and rationalism' (ibid., p.29) is invoked through her characterization of Beg. While the 'learned woman' might be a figure of scorn in England, in Turkey she is revered. Significantly, Beg's mistaken belief that Montagu's knowledge of the 'Persian Tales' derives from knowing their original language – thus rendering her a 'great scholar' – only seems to empower her to, indeed, take up the study of Turkish and Arabic, encouraged by him that she might learn Arabic in order to read the Q'ran in its original language, rather than via the 'corrupt' translations of the Greek priests (Letter 28, to Conti, Adrianople, April 1<sup>st</sup> 1717). Beg assures her:

that if I understood Arabic I should be very well pleased with reading the Alcoran, which is so far from the nonsense we charge it with, 'tis the purest morality delivered in the very best language. (Letter 28, 106)

On a journey during which Montagu has repeatedly used her own first-hand experiences in Europe to challenge accounts by male travel writers, her extension now to learn the language(s) of her host country to uncover its truths chimes particularly

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<sup>68</sup> see, for e.g., Jane Rendall, 'Women and the Enlightenment in Britain c.1690-1800' (9-32) in ed. Barker and Chalus (2005)

with a distinctly proto-feminist quest to confront prevailing beliefs about women through access to their source. The very practice of translation, in Montagu's hands, mirrors this journey to an alternative, feminocentric ideology which not only counters contemporary Augustan ideals of the passive, submissive female but, as my analysis of Letter 31 will suggest, provides classical authorisation through the reclamation of Sappho as an emblem of female agency.

### Montagu's Sapphic Response to Pope in Letter 31: The Female Reader

In a letter which inspired Pope to write his 'Elegy To the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady' (1717)<sup>69</sup> Montagu presents a bravura scholarly performance as both critical commentator and poet-translator in which she not only offers two translations of a Turkish love lyric, supposedly written by (or at least, for) Ibrahim Bassa<sup>70</sup>, but an authoritative commentary on topical ideas of poetry, translation and the sublime. As such, Letter 31 effects a participation within the intellectual exchange of the Republic of Letters, with its author asserting her claim to parity with the lauded Pope but also engaging in the wider debates that filled the pages of the *Spectator*, edited by her friend, Joseph Addison. She tells Pope that she is reading 'your Homer with an infinite pleasure' (p. 119), referring to his translation of the *Iliad* (1715), and her own letter presents a kaleidoscopic response not only to its content but to ideas on the art of poetry and translation that constituted much of its Preface. Joseph Addison, too, was shaping contemporary aesthetic debate, notably through certain *Spectator* essays which would together become known as 'The Pleasures of the Imagination' (1711-12).

Montagu shifts leisurely but purposefully through the ideas of both eminent literary

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<sup>69</sup> See Tillotson, (1936:401-412)

<sup>70</sup> A patron of poets, Ibrahim Pasha was contracted to marry the Sultan's daughter who he could not be with until she came of age. He would soon become the Grand Vizier. (MHO, p.120)

influencers before delivering her own product in the guise of a Turkish love lyric she claims to render ‘into the style of English poetry’ (p. 123).

Montagu was working here in a long-held tradition of European women scholars, often aristocrats or nuns (or both), who wrote poetry and translated (Bowman, 2013:249), and the first half of her letter offers literary discussion conventional to that which circulated between writers of the day. The role most commonly afforded to the scholarly woman as ‘reader’<sup>71</sup> is dutifully enacted at first by the author as she builds her letter on Classical citations before corresponding directly with Pope’s own ideas. Nevertheless, her focuses destabilise their original Classical narratives. Her initial Latin inscription of Virgil’s *Georgics* presenting Orpheus’ severed head as it rolled down the Hebrus, crying Eurydice’s name, comically invokes ‘the most remarkable accident that happened to me [...] being very near overturned into the Hebrus’ (p. 117). Pope had regularly expressed alarm for Montagu’s safety, and her ironic self-casting as Ovid’s poet-hero not only offers a playful response but masculinises her. Aligning herself with the poet-musician, whose head, according to the myth, was torn off by Maenads and left to float off down the river until it arrived at its resting place of Lesbos, Montagu inverts her gender just as Pope himself was wont to do, as in ‘Eloise to Abelard’, a poem often understood as a lover’s address to her.<sup>72</sup> Montagu also likely had a recent poem by Anne Finch in mind whose ‘In Answer to Mr. Pope’ (1714) recalls Orpheus to warn Pope against further insults against female authors. Montagu’s ‘borrowed’ reference from a female contemporary proposes the solidarity of women authors against such attacks.

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<sup>71</sup> Towsey (2015:21-36)

<sup>72</sup> For an excellent critique of gender ideology in Pope’s poetry, see Fabricant (1997)

Furthermore, like any stage whisper, Montagu's closing aside - 'I despair of ever hearing so many fine things said of me as so extraordinary a death would have given occasion for' (p. 117) - is designed as much to reveal its speaker as address its audience. Yet her use of the Latin poet's rendition of this Homeric myth also positions the very concepts of legacy and translation at the heart of the letter, and initiates the substantive question both letter and its female poet-author pose: whose voices are accorded value and perpetuated? Her citation establishes the letter's dominant tropes – of passion leading to violence and death; of the silencing of the poet, and of the idea of legacy. Bowman, in her illuminating article, 'The Poet as Translator', comments on Montagu's intertextuality here, suggesting that:

With this reference and with her choice of quote from the ending of a classic lyric that voices a sorrowful farewell, Montagu indicates her interest in revising the conventions, beginning a new lyric to take up where this one has concluded. (2013:254)

However, in order to do so, Montagu must first demonstrate both her scholarly and poetic credentials, which the letter offers through her polite, sociable engagement with her correspondent's own ideas first.

Embarking upon a discussion of her translation of the Bassa's love lyric, Montagu cites Nicolas Boileau- Despréaux<sup>73</sup>, invoking his authority in acknowledging that translation may not always convey 'the elevation of an expression in an ancient author by the sound it carries with us' (p. 122), yet it is Pope, clearly, that she is demonstrating an affiliation with. His Preface posited that Latin did not convey either the 'vulgar' nor the 'sublime' of Homer's work, and referred to Greek as having 'some advantages both from the natural sound of its words, and the turn and cadence of its

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<sup>73</sup> French poet and critic (1636-1711). Gelmi notes that it was his first translation of Sappho's Fragment 31 into French in 1674 that brought it to prominence (2014:n12, p.156)

verse, which agree with the genius of no other language' (2011:16). Montagu in implicit response notes the 'music of the [lyric's] verses' in an effective continuation of a discourse on Arabian poetry started in her previous letter to him where she had observed from her discussions with Beg 'its very musical sound' (L25:97). Her persistent focus on her use of the Homeric epithet – 'stag-eyed' which 'pleases extremely' (p. 122) – might exhibit the credentials of the poet-scholar (Pope dedicates significant attention to the epithet in his Preface) but equally her emphasis might encode perhaps a more private joke with the admirer who had singled out 'Worsley's eyes' for praise.<sup>74</sup>

While Pope considers the complex triple-translation undertaken in his work – from Homer's Greek via Latin to English – so does Montagu appear to *blend* the three languages she is working with – Ovid's Latin, Turkish and English – to produce, in Aravamudan's phrase, a 'post-classical synthesis' (2012:6), using shared symbols of nightingales and roses:

The first verse is a description of the season of the year, all the country now being full of nightingales, whose amours with roses is an Arabian fable as well known here as any part of Ovid amongst us... (L31:122-3)

Her synthesis of the 'Arabian fable' with the Classical Ovid presents a transculturalism, of an 'East' blended with the 'West', yet her reference to 'roses' – with evident romantic but also national symbolism - might co-opt a third frame of reference: that of the English identity of author and correspondent, with its distinct codes of social and, perhaps, romantic etiquette suggested. The stereoscopic vision of the traveller may require a further lens, but underlying all Montagu's 'utopian projection[s]' (Aravamudan 1999:69) the reader may see one eye is always firmly looking back to England, and its projection of her. In effect, Montagu's claims for Turkish – a language

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<sup>74</sup> See n12.

Pope does not know – align it clearly with the Greek he does know. The letter so far has offered Montagu enacting the permitted role of female reader, and her ‘scholarship’ is apparently evinced conventionally as affirmation of his proffered work.

### Montagu’s Sapphic Response to Pope in Letter 31: The Poet-translator

However, it is the act, more so than the analysis, of translation which Montagu uses to challenge literary authority, specifically through her evocation of Sappho in a letter whose very enumeration – 31 – appears to encode several allusions to both the Greek ‘Poetess’ and to her celebrated Fragment 31, hinting at a riposte, perhaps playfully, to Pope’s work as a poet-translator of Homer but more seriously to male appropriation or even stifling of female voices. While her ‘literal translation’ (p. 122) begins with ‘The Nightingale’, a symbol often used synonymously with Sappho, Montagu’s second version presents Ovid’s Philomel herself, a figure long-associated with Sappho. Backscheider notes the commonplace of Sappho’s name to refer to women poets both to laud and to vilify them at this time, but she observes, too, that:

In their hands the nightingale became a powerful symbol of freedom and musicality and, of course, of the woman who cannot be silenced. (2008:108)

The initial allusions to Sappho at the beginning of each of Montagu’s ‘translations’, I suggest, construct a provocative insertion of the Greek female poet into the established ‘triumvirate’ of classical poets: Virgil, Homer and Ovid. What follows in her translation ‘in the style of English poetry’ (p. 123) is not only an invocation of the Greek poet, but arguably a reclamation of Sappho’s celebrated Fragment 31, whose recent translation by the poet, Ambrose Philips, ‘Ode to a Loved One’, in 1711, had been widely admired.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Montagu’s translations, Philips’ ‘Ode’ and Sappho’s ‘Fragment 31’ may all be found in the Appendix

Addison himself had praised Philips' poem as 'written in the very Spirit of *Sappho*, and as near the *Greek* as the Genius of our Language will possibly suffer' (*Spectator* No. 229, 1711), suggesting that its fragmented form was instrumental in engendering the sublime, a debate Montagu contributes to in the letter itself. According to Addison's account of Longinus' view of the poem, Sappho's Fragment 31 was in its 'Description of Love [...] an exact Copy of Nature', and the 'sublime' is here exemplified through the analogy with the form of the poem and the Belvidere Torso:

A Fragment of *Sappho*, which I design for the Subject of this Paper, is in as great Reputation among the Poets and Criticks, as the mutilated Figure above mentioned is among the Statuaries and Painters. (*Spectator*, No.229)

This notion of a 'mutilated Figure' seems to play ironically through each of Montagu's translations, where the eyes are extracted from both the persona and the desired – 'My eyes are without sleep', 'One dart from your eyes' – while the delightfully elliptical and fragmented second stanza of the second translation ends only in 'Those Eyes like etc.' On the one hand, one might see Montagu effecting Sapphic tropes – Philips' poem, for example, offers 'my dim eyes', 'my blood', 'my feeble pulse'<sup>76</sup> – but, as previously suggested, her attention to 'eyes' seems teasingly coded when addressed to the poet who eulogised hers.<sup>77</sup> Even so, in contrast to the imaged dismemberment of the persona which threads through Sappho's original, Montagu's 'I' has an agency of sorts expressed by her use of pronoun-verb phrases – 'I sought', 'I wait', 'I dare not', 'I loath', 'I rave'. This compares with the stasis and disembodiment of Philips' noun-phrases: 'My breath', 'my voice', 'my bosom', 'my vital frame', 'my dim eyes'. The female scholar here is drawing on her permissible tools of translation and poetry to insist upon female agency.

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<sup>76</sup> Ambrose Philips, 'Ode to a Loved One', 1711. See Appendix A

<sup>77</sup> See n12

Furthermore, while Philips' poem offers a very tidy, enclosed and concluded translation of the Fragment – his four quatrains build on rhyming couplets ending with the persona's definitive death – 'I fainted, sunk and died away' – Montagu's is arguably a little closer to the 'Spirit' of Sappho's original, without anywhere purporting to be any kind of imitation. Sappho's Fragment 31 was understood to be incomplete, and with a last line that could be rendered, according to a recent translator, either as 'Yet all must be endured since...' or as 'Yet all must be dared since...', (ed. Raynor and Lardinois, 2014:21). Montagu seems to opt for the more empowered version, with a final octet that breaks with the preceding sestets in a plea for revival, inspired by the woman herself:

Call me, my Goddess and my Life renew.  
My Queen! My Angel! my fond Heart's desire  
I rave – my bosom burns with Heavenly fire.  
Pity that Passion which thy charms inspire. (pp.123-4)

Montagu's tropes of a lover's desire, too, evoke familiar characterisations of Sappho's persona – Addison's footnote to his commentary on Philips' *Ode* in *Spectator* No.229 describes 'the faltering voice, the burning blush, the languid eye, the tumultuous pulse; and at length, the passion overcoming his [sic] spirits, a swoon and mortal paleness.' While Philips' male rendition of the Sapphic voice is felled by his unfulfilled desire, Montagu proposes a more powerful alternative who might be redeemed by 'Pity'.

Philips' rather effeminate male persona also occludes the established homo-eroticism of Fragment 31. Montagu's 'translation' effectively restores this through both her own female voice and the establishing presence of Philomel, alongside the ambiguity constructed by her imitative use of Sappho's first, second and third pronouns which seem to blur the identities of the persona and of the 'Lover':

Your wretched Lover in these lines complains  
From those dear Beauties rise his killing pains.  
When will the Hour of wished-for Bliss arrive?  
Must I wait longer? Can I wait and live? (Stanza 3, p.123)



Montagu's translations, offered as 'a faithful copy of the verses that Ibrahim Bassa [...] has made for the young Princess, his contracted wife, whom he is not yet permitted to visit without witnesses' (p. 120), might present – at first glance – the persona of the Bassa, yet her adoption of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person in stanza 3 in both versions evoke the ambiguity that Sappho's fragment is well-known for. Either the Bassa or Montagu or another still might be insinuated as the figure who jealously watches while the persona and the woman make love. Montagu's female voice and use of mixed first, second and third person pronouns thus produce a Sapphic confusion in keeping with the original, which one may argue is compounded by her earlier homoerotic descriptions of the naked women in the bagnio (Letter 27) and later of the 'beauteous Fatima' herself in Letter 34. Offered to the amorous Pope, this is a provocative strategy.

Her letter is concluded with a remark which presents her as 'pretty far gone in oriental learning, and to say truth I study very hard.' (p. 124). As such, Letter 31 can be seen as a demonstration of Montagu's scholarly credentials, acquired through both study and practice, to help inform the influential aesthetic judgements that these two figures were significant in shaping, and she did so by co-opting *oriental* literature and language as living expressions which both reinforced and arguably enhanced the antiquities. Finally, the establishing figure of Philomel not only moves her 'English' poem away from the oriental symbolism of the transliteration's 'nightingale' but asserts an overseeing presence of the *silenced* female poet, whose tongue – so Ovid's story went – was cut out by her rapist, King Tereus, before being turned into a nightingale to escape murder at his hands. As such, the reader is invited to see Montagu's assertion not only of her own role as a writer and poet within the formulation of literary aesthetics, but that of *all* female writers whose voices too often, as the symbol of Philomel suggests, are violently stolen from them by lustful men.

### The Deist Scholar: Letters to Conti – a ‘kindred spirit’<sup>78</sup>

Just as Montagu seeks to align Ottoman Turkey with Ancient Greece, ‘dismantl[ing] East/West divisions’ – to reuse Heffernan’s phrase<sup>79</sup> so in her correspondence – with Conti does she insist on dismantling religious division, with Deism offered as the embodiment of tolerant, reasonable and just faith whose expression unites both the Islam as practised by the effendi class in Turkey and the Deism of its English and European followers, who included in its number John Toland but also Conti himself.

Uniquely, Conti’s first letter (28) from Montagu is not sent until after her arrival in Adrianople where she recaps her earlier introduction to Beg and sharpens her critique of translation, redirecting the earlier aesthetic argument she had shared with Pope to one that is here distinctly politicised. She insists to Conti that, from her conversations with Achmet Beg, she has learned that the Quran ‘is so far from the nonsense we charge it with that ‘tis the purest morality delivered in the very best language’ (p. 106). While her critiques of male travel writers are by now an established convention in the *Letters*, her vilification of the corruption of the Islamic Holy text in the hands of the Greek priests articulates a notably political challenge to male reconfiguration of ‘truth’. Montagu is even more vituperative in the one ‘Embassy Letter’ which found its way into contemporary publication at the hands of Conti himself in 1719, after her return to England:

the Greek priests [...] have invented out of their own heads a thousand ridiculous stories in order to decry the law of Mohammed; to run it down, I say, without any examination, or as much as letting the people read it, being afraid that if once they begun to sift the defects of the Alcoran they might not stop there but proceed to make use of their judgement about their own legends and fictions. (MHO, p. 229)<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Grundy (1999:134)

<sup>79</sup> 2016:23

<sup>80</sup> *Genuine Copy etc.* See n61

While her argument is levelled explicitly here at the ‘corrupt’ Greek translation of the Koran, it speaks to Montagu’s consistent demand that ‘truth’ should be rendered ‘plain’<sup>81</sup> and disseminated widely to sustain its integrity. Her schematic alliance of Islam with Deism – itself consistent with Deist discourse – proposes a wider critique of patriarchal definition and determination of women’s lives, with the Greek priests’ translations of the Prophet’s word paradigmatic of patriarchal theft of female voices. Conti’s unpermitted publication ironically appears to demonstrate exactly that of which she accuses men: of stealing women’s/’other’ voices and reconfiguring their truths.

Montagu’s correspondence with the Abbé has conventionally been considered to reflect the beginnings of an enduring friendship commenced during his visit to London in 1715 where he expounded at Court upon the theories of Sir Isaac Newton. Grundy describes him as a ‘kindred spirit’ (1999:134) who later translated some of Montagu’s poems into Italian while she was in self-exile. After her sister, it is Conti who is the addressee of more letters than anyone else and he who receives what are usually considered her most erudite and ‘philosophical’ observations,<sup>82</sup> yet question upon question is provoked, not least by the fact of the *virtuoso*’s publication of one of Montagu’s Embassy letters in 1719. Garcia identifies that this letter emulates a popular deist epistolary form (2012:62) and as such this might exemplify Montagu’s participation as a proto-feminist *philosophe* within a dominant progressive communications circuit. However, to overlook the very betrayal effected by Conti’s publication denies not only her practice as an author who chose *not* to publish but the consistent argument waged throughout the *Letters*: of her right to voice herself.

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<sup>81</sup> Ref

<sup>82</sup> See, for e.g., Grundy (1999:144)

Furthermore, in the light of a letter Conti would write to a friend in 1721,<sup>83</sup> during the time that Montagu was constructing her letter-book, the suggestion of a completely amiable friendship seems unlikely, and it is Letter 44, written just before her departure from Turkey, which hints at a riposte, however repressed.

The Oriental Scholar: 'I would rather be a rich effendi with all his ignorance, than Sir Isaac Newton with all his knowledge'<sup>84</sup>

In a widely-circulated letter arguing women's intellectual inferiority, Conti offered his French friend, André-Robert Pérole, the 'proof' of the 'material inferiority' of women's intellects, inferring 'from the inferior arterial pulsations [in women], that the heart thrusts the blood with less impetus into the arteries; therefore the blood rises more slowly to women's brains'.<sup>85</sup> It is hard to imagine Montagu overlooking such a pronouncement during the very period when she was not only writing up the letter-book from her journals but publicly advocating for the practice of smallpox inoculation. My reading of Letter 44 proposes a retrospective satirical self-fashioning which appears to lend further proof to Conti's argument; it does, of course, subvert it entirely.

For much of Letter 44, her self-fashioning is therefore at odds with her previous 'scholarly' persona. The reader finds a female epistolary persona defined by negatives, by what she *can't* do, whose purported incapability 'of answering' (p. 177) Conti's questions moves beyond the politeness convention of the self-denigrating epistolary address and is a dominant motif in her self-characterisation here. Her insistence on authority is present but somewhat qualified. She parenthetically concedes that she

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<sup>83</sup> See L20:83

<sup>84</sup> Letter 44, p.80

<sup>85</sup> From his letter to Pérole, 1721, cited Messbarger 2002:62

‘...honour[s]’ Gemelli<sup>86</sup> ‘in a much higher degree than any other voyage-writers’ (p. 178) but observes he is mistaken in his judgement that there are ‘no remains of Calcedon’. However, in offering her counter-argument, Montagu presents her own memory as somewhat deficient in recalling Calcedonia’s Turkish name – ‘the Turks give it a name I forgot’ (ibid.). On the one hand, this may invoke a strategy she has used elsewhere when signalling that her superior experience as a traveller does not depend on simply listing names and dates; on the other hand, in **this** letter it seems to bleed into recurring suggestions that her skills fall short of what is required of a reliable ethnographer or antiquarian. Yet, in a rather brilliant sleight of hand, Montagu shifts from a weary-sounding profession of empirical deficiency to an ostensible traveller’s description of a ‘magnificent’ Turkish palace which is framed through the aesthetic of the sublime. In one lengthy paragraph of cultural and ethnographic commentary, she suggests:

I have a great mind to describe it to you, but I check that inclination, knowing very well that I cannot give you, with my best description, such an idea of it as I ought. (p. 178)

Later in the same paragraph this idea is reiterated:

I should go on and let you into some of the other apartments, (all worthy of your curiosity) but ‘tis yet harder to describe a Turkish palace than any other, being built entirely irregular [...] though such a confusion is (I think) pleasing to the sight, yet it would be very unintelligible in a letter. (179)

There are echoes here throughout of Addison’s ‘Pleasures of the Imagination’ (1712) with its early expression of the aesthetics of the sublime. It is Addison, too, that she seems to have recycled in her rejection of ‘tormenting’ her brain as a scholar:

We might here add, that the pleasures of the fancy are more conducive to health, than those of the understanding, which are worked out by dint of thinking, and attended with too violent a labour of the brain.  
(‘Pleasures of Imagination’ *Spectator*. No. 411, June 21, 1712)

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<sup>86</sup> 1651-1725, traveller and author of *Giro del Mondo* (1699). MHO, n2, p.178

As if nourished by Addisonian discourse, Montagu's 'anti-scholar' - who cannot remember details, and who would prefer to spend their time eating and drinking and enjoying music instead of 'tormenting our brains' 'or studying some science to which we can never attain' (p. 179) – seems to confront not only Conti's rationalist Newtonianism but his misogynist letter to Pérelle.

The *denouement* of her time in Turkey concludes in an effective homage to Epicureanism which proposes that the Turks 'have a right notion of life, while they consume it in music, gardens, wine, and delicate eating, while we are tormenting our brains with some scheme of politics' (p. 179). Her rejection of 'Sir Isaac Newton with all his knowledge' is patently satirical but its target ambivalent in a letter addressed to a philosopher famed for his celebration of Newton's ideas. In one of her starkest acts of 'levantinization'<sup>87</sup>, her purported preference dismantles the very fabric that Conti's civilisation is based upon: his Newton is traded for her effendi; the notion of masculinised, scientific genius exchanged for a feminised, Eastern 'ignorance', which the author has already demonstrated to be entirely fallacious. Her heretofore consistent portrayal to Conti of the *effendi* class as having 'engrossed all the learning and almost all the wealth of the Empire' (Letter 28, 105) is married with her consistent delivery of herself as scholar. In her preference to be 'a rich effendi with all his ignorance', the orientalisised female scholar offers her most subversive act of all: rejecting Newton, Conti and the Western scientific Enlightenment that they signify, and championing what has been proffered as the more egalitarian intellectual traditions of Ottoman and Arabic societies<sup>88</sup>.

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<sup>87</sup> Aravamudan, 1999:69

<sup>88</sup> See, for e.g., García, 2012:1-29

In a final act of ‘show, don’t tell’, Montagu’s editorial decision to re-consign Letter 45, arguably her most scholarly of all, away from her sister to Conti offers a conclusive riposte in her demonstration of the expansiveness of the intellectual capacity of this particular woman, at least. Both letters, I suggest, mark a deliberate intervention in Conti’s contribution to the *querelle des femmes*, with Letter 45 synthesising her ‘oriental’ scholar with one equally conversant in Classicism. Just as in Letter 31 where Montagu presents Pope with a Sapphic response to his Homer, so, I suggest, she compounds her proto-feminist assertion of her intellectual authority to Conti by reversing Sandys’ journey<sup>89</sup>, relaying stories of female loss and suffering during war, and proposing poetry, rather than empirical documentation, as the medium best suited to encapsulate the experience, ‘where every scene presents me some poetical idea’ (p. 180).

Conti’s publication of the 1718 letter, while purporting to compliment her as a ‘woman of wit’, was nevertheless a theft of sorts, an appropriation of her voice without consent. Furthermore, its association with Toland and seditious ideas connected with the ‘Socinian controversy’ – of a syncretism between Islam and the deist Unitarians<sup>90</sup> – arguably endangered her by being made public, when her correspondence with him had articulated trust. It might even be that the published letter was itself a concoction from more than one of the letters she actually sent him – it includes content that occurs in the Letter-book correspondence – and not in fact entirely as Montagu crafted it. Heffernan and O’Quinn note that it is ‘likely based on an actual piece of correspondence but there is no trace of the original’ (p. 228). Its formal emulation of Toland’s *Letter from an Arabian Physician* (1706?)<sup>91</sup> as a dramatic epistolary tract, however, would be in

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<sup>89</sup> HOQ, p.30; see Chapter 1, too, for further analysis of this letter

<sup>90</sup> J.A.I. Champion, 1992:111

<sup>91</sup> See Garcia, 2012:120

keeping with her intricate use of imitation and intertextuality seen elsewhere, which strategies appear to demonstrate a scholarly authority through her intimate knowledge and application of contemporary religious, philosophical and literary discourse. Nevertheless, Conti's 'theft' of this letter might well have encouraged the rather more skeptical correspondence suggested by Letter 44, with Letter 45's authority and scholarship a glorious proto-feminist riposte to a self-acclaimed *virtuoso* whose celebrity was founded on other people's ideas.

## Conclusion

Montagu's complex and nuanced use of the epistolary form articulates her participation as an authoritative, learned and intellectual voice engaging in key debates of the day. Both Pope and Conti were loci at the heart of their own distinct but overlapping communication circuits, and it is Montagu's epistolary enactment of participation in dialogue with eminent men through the 'Republic of Letters' that frames a recognisable proto-feminist scholarly guise. The conventional epistolary adoption of politeness forms masks a more satirical response to each figure. As she would write in a later riposte to Pope:

Satire shou'd like a polish'd Razor keen,  
Wound with a Touch, that's scarcely felt or seen...  
from 'First Satire of the Second Book of Horace' (1733)

She constructs them, just as she does all her correspondents, as characters playing a part in the text's proto-feminist contribution to the 'Woman Question', and the roles she invests them with seem to slip between homage and mockery.



### Chapter 3: 'Our General Mother'

*'In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children. And thy desire shall be to thy husband. And he shall rule over thee.'* Genesis 3:16

Neither agency nor authority are readily associated with motherhood, and at face-value Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters* does not suggest that either her role as mother nor contemporary debates around maternity were a notable focus in her epistolary account of her travels. Indeed, the editorial construction of the letter-book indicates that Montagu *excluded* letters written to her husband about their son's smallpox inoculation, as well as one to Madame de Bonniac in which she bemoaned an implied obligation to reproduce. Meanwhile, the imminent birth of her daughter in Turkey (January 1718) is presented in a single letter after a six-month hiatus in correspondence. Such narrative silencing of her pregnancy is, I suggest, indicative of the occlusive and allusive approach to maternity that the *Letters* offer yet the topic provides a powerful undercurrent to the text's narrative arc. In her study of maternal voices of this period, Bowers similarly observes that 'Though silenced, mothers remain authoritative; though complicit, resistant; though co-opted, outside' (1996:25). As has been argued throughout, Montagu challenges dominant male discourses often through an expression of conformity, with the consequence often of finding herself within a liminal space. Equally, her resistance is fuelled primarily by her feminotopian representation of Turkey, from which she wrestles empowered paradigms for womanhood and for motherhood.

In her instigating portrayal of Turkish women in Letter 27<sup>92</sup>, without distinguishing between mistress and slave, she refers to the naked women of the *bagnio* as moving ‘with the same majestic grace which Milton describes of our General Mother’ (101-2), and so with one brush-stroke erases the wantonness so popularly associated not only with Turkish women but with Eve, the Magna Mater, herself.<sup>93</sup> As I will argue, it is the incompatibility of Augustan notions of ‘virtuous motherhood and public authority’ (Bowers 1999:30) that Montagu seeks to reconcile through both her own self-fashioning as Civic Mother and the idealisation of Fatima as an emblem of maternity. However, despite her persistent strategies of riposte and transformation to proffer these alternative maternal archetypes, this chapter will suggest that her articulation falters most notably after the birth of her daughter. Unlike the traveller and scholar selves, Montagu appears unable to write her maternal self into existence. Whereas in the previous chapters, despite often striking ‘out a new path’, Montagu’s writing was clearly shaped and enriched by correspondence in every sense, in her depiction of motherhood I suggest we find Montagu walking a far lonelier route.

### Contending contemporary cultural discourses and representations of maternity

While the earlier chapters argue that Montagu sought to carve out a space of agency for women in roles traditionally held by men in the West, here her feminotopian project advances by confronting not only woman’s socially but biologically-determined role: as mother. The early eighteenth century was a period of contending social and cultural inscriptions of maternity, with the maternal ideal still ‘philosophically undetermined’ (Davis, 2014:23). Montagu’s experience as a mother coincided with a period of

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<sup>92</sup> This is the ‘establishing’ Turkish letter, in which Montagu offers the Anonymous Lady a first account of a visit to the *bagnio* or *hammam*, and challenges conventional orientalist depictions.

<sup>93</sup> The sensuality, deception and sexual insatiability of Turkish women was an established trope in literature of the time. Robert Withers (Ottavo Bon), for example, declared that they were all ‘young, lusty, and lascivious wenches’. See MHO, p.270

significant social shift, which witnessed the masculinisation of medical involvement in areas of maternity and child health that were once the sole preserve of women. Until this time, European women ‘had always taken primary responsibility for medical care of their families and had the monopoly in matters of childbirth’ (Anderson and Zinsser, 1998:416), and this was as true for aristocratic mothers as it was for all classes.

However, the professionalization of medical practice during the seventeenth century saw regulations for licensing and practice drawn up by universities and their graduates, which excluded female members, until even the traditional female role of midwife was usurped by forceps-wielding male midwives and surgeons (ibid., pp. 418-9). In courts across Europe, maternal monarchs and nobility were increasingly tended by male physicians. The masculinised medicalisation of these areas so long associated with the private sphere of women’s lives, where knowledge of pregnancy, childbirth and a child’s education had been shared primarily by female midwives and a maternal oral culture, helped to reframe reproduction and production as ‘mutually exclusive activities’ and that even for aristocratic mothers ‘successful motherhood was coming to mean retreat into a world apart not only from politics and large-scale economics, but also, for the time, from productive work.’ (Bowers, 1996, p. 72). Bowers observes, too, the effective homogenisation of the motherhood ideal where cultural demands of class for both middle- and upper-class women ‘dictated maternal behavior [sic] across class lines (though according to an invisible middle-class rubric)’ (ibid., p. 166).

Yet, as noted in Chapter 2, there were ongoing arguments being made amongst Montagu’s own peers for women to be afforded an education that in turn would enable them to train the nation’s future citizens. The notion of ‘civic motherhood’ is one that is more commonly located in post-revolution France and the newly-independent and Republican nation of America, both from the end of the eighteenth century, yet the

germs of this concept were sown in the debates articulated by figures like John Locke and Mary Astell. In seeking to conform to a version of motherhood that encompassed ideals of virtue and duty while legitimising access to the public space, it is the model of a ‘civic mother’ that I will suggest Montagu moulds in her own maternal self-fashioning, most notably in her account of the Turkish matriarchal practice of smallpox inoculation in Letter 32. However, conjoined to her production of such an archetype is her idealisation of the ‘beauteous Fatima’ (Letter 34:134) as a maternal muse, whereby the sensual beauty of the oriental woman is blended with a Classical aestheticization along with both Christian virtue and Augustan sociability which powerfully confronts the increasingly vitriolic, misogynist renditions of maternity that circulated in Montagu’s Britain. As Marilyn Francus has demonstrated, canonical texts from Spenser’s *The Fairie Queene* and Milton’s *Paradise Lost* offer maternal figures who ‘constitute a pattern of maternal misogyny that becomes encoded in English culture in an attempt to exorcise anxieties regarding desire, power, and chaos’ (1994:89). Pope’s 1728 *Dunciad* notably presents ‘Dulness’ as an apotheosis of ‘monstrous’ maternity in her crawling realm of maggots, spawn and mobs.<sup>94</sup> Montagu seeks solutions in ‘Mahomet’s Paradise’, while never forgetful that Paradise is for the dead.

### The Civic Mother: childbirth and childrearing

It is through the prism of health that Montagu grants her readers rare access to her children and in doing so proffers an orthodox model, regardless of class, of maternity: as a mother whose primary concern is her child’s health. Before her arrival in Turkey, only two of the published letters mention her son, both addressed to her sister, Lady Mar. While expressed through the traveller’s formulaic reference to safe passage, maternal devotion has a parenthetical and secondary appearance:

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<sup>94</sup> From Pope, 1728, *Dunciad*, ll.159-167

I am now, my dear sister, safely arrived in Vienna, and I thank God, have not at all suffered in my health, nor (what is dearer to me) in that of my child.' (p. 55)

In the second instance, where Montagu is anticipating her departure from Vienna to travel through battle-scarred Hungary, this is amplified through the familiar trope of maternal self-sacrifice:

I have long learnt to hold myself at nothing, but when I think of the fatigue my poor infant must suffer, I have all a mother's fondness in my eyes, and all her tender passions in my heart. (p. 86)

In each, Montagu provides her sister with requisite information about the family's safety and health as they travelled, but the dominance of the narrator in the subject-position seems to counterweigh imagery of self-sacrifice, with the 'mother' alternatively eulogised for her 'fondness' and her 'tender passions'. The endurance of these references in the letter-book signal Montagu's desire to present herself in a maternal mode that might rebuke gender criticisms levelled at her for undertaking such a journey, as well as to preserve the reputation of her family.

Nevertheless, Montagu does not shy away from levelling criticism at other mothers for what she considered to be their negligence, even where that mother was a woman of superior rank to her own. Claiming an authority that would behove the 'civic mother', the reader (in a letter addressed as Lady Rich) finds the author casting blame for the recent death of the infant heir to the Holy Roman Empire at his mother's door. Montagu's depiction of the Empress Elizabeth Christine in Letter 18 is offered with apparent sympathy for the newly-pregnant Empress whose plight, she insists, she would pity regardless of rank and title. On the one hand, Montagu fashions here a maternal kinship, but her conclusion that the baby was 'killed by want of good management, weaning him in the beginning of the winter' (p. 80) asserts an expertise incumbent upon her role as aristocratic mother whose duty lies in ensuring the health of

her child, and particularly a male heir. The failure of the Empress to do so is clearly implied. However, Montagu's specific advice also suggests a familiarity with the authority distilled through popular health manuals such as Culpeper's *A Directory of Midwives: Or, a Guide for Women in Their Conception, Bearing and Suckling Their Children* (1651) and Jane Sharp's *The Midwives' Book* (1671). Montagu's judgment that the baby died because weaned in the winter is consistent with such material which cautioned that 'the best time to wean a child is either the Spring or the Fall of the Leaf, the Moon increasing.' (Sharp, p. 274). Significantly, however, such advice was itself founded in traditional practices and matriarchal lore, and Montagu's inclusion of such a detail might well be an implicit allusion to the dangers of erasing such knowledge.

Later, recounting the details of the birth of her daughter to the childless Mrs Thistlethwayte, Montagu revels in the lack of confinement of the post-natal experience for mothers in Turkey, confessing that childbirth and the lying-in period 'is not half so mortifying here as in England' (L39:152). Instead of being confined to the darkened space of the birthing room, Montagu describes how 'They see all company on the day of their delivery, and at the fortnight's end return visits, set out in their jewels and new clothes' (ibid.). In the following letter, she tells her sister how she, too, adopts this practice, with just a slight compromise of 'three weeks' before she returned visits (p. 154). While disdainful of the Turkish expectation for women to produce multiple children, suggesting she herself is forced to 'comply with' this 'fashion' (p. 152) to enjoy 'the glory that accrues to me from it' (ibid.) rather than endure the 'contempt' her lack of fruitfulness would induce, this is one practice of which she does approve. In Turkey, she makes clear, women control both the social and medical customs associated with maternity and children's health, effecting experiences for women that ensure not only agency but even pleasure. To that end, tropes of darkness and

confinement contrasted with light and liberation are regularly invoked to posit the contrasting experiences of women and mothers in England against those of their Turkish counterparts.

### The Civic Mother: advocating smallpox inoculation

It is Montagu's account of the Turkish practice of engrafting to effect smallpox inoculation that presents a synthesis of both the acts and inscription of seemingly conflicting medical and social discourses to assert a role as civic mother whose roots are, controversially, located in matriarchal practices. Her children were central to this venture – her advocacy of smallpox inoculation entailed its practice on her young son, Edward, while still in Turkey, and then her three-year old daughter in 1721 during an outbreak of the disease in England. While her private letters to Wortley in 1718 refer with increasing irritation at his lack of response to 'the boy' and 'your son' who 'is as well as can be' (MHO, p. 227) after being engrafted, the practice of smallpox inoculation is recounted to her childhood friend, Sarah Chiswell, in Letter 32, and her choice of correspondent installs a female frame for the dissemination of information of such ground-breaking medical importance. In advocating this practice, she was positioning herself against the medical establishment at home, including some of the doctors who had treated her when she was herself sick with the disease.<sup>95</sup>

It is believed that Montagu would have known about engrafting from one of the doctors who attended her during her illness<sup>96</sup> but her account to Sarah Chiswell, a childhood friend, of the practice in Turkey is still remarkable, with the extraordinary being presented not just as commonplace but as practical, with both the procedure and the effects of the engrafting detailed as if in a health manual:

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<sup>95</sup> See, for example, Diana Barnes, 2012:330- 362

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

The children or young patients play together all the rest of the day and are in perfect health til [sic] the eighth. Then the fever begins to seize them, and they keep their beds two days, very seldom three. They have very rarely above twenty or thirty in their faces, which never mark, and in eight days time they are as well as before their illness. (p. 126)

Her recurring formula of ‘plain truth’ is wielded to preface this account - ‘Those dreadful stories you have heard of the plague have very little foundation in truth’ (p. 125) – yet it serves to permit a description coloured here as if from Galland’s *Mille et Une Nuits*<sup>97</sup> itself:

...the old woman comes with a nutshell full of the matter of the best sort of smallpox and asks what vein you please to have opened. She immediately rips open that you offer her with a large needle (which gives no more pain than a common scratch) and puts the needle into the vein as much venom as can lie upon the head of her needle... (p. 125-6).

The fable-like ‘old woman’ ripping open the proffered vein is in distinct contrast to Montagu’s more overtly medicalised rendition in her 1722 pamphlet (written as a ‘Turkey Merchant’)<sup>98</sup> designed to persuade both the medical authorities and wider British public of the efficacy of the practice. Here, the ‘old woman’ is promoted to ‘The old Nurse who is the General surgeon’, allocating an authority which conflates the gendered roles of ‘Nurse’ and ‘General Surgeon’ (p. 256). The ‘nutshell’ is also transfigured into a vessel of status – a ‘Nut Shell’ – and rather than ‘rip[ping] open’ the veins, the Nurse’s action is presented much less emotively as she ‘opens the Arms...with a small rip of a Needle’(ibid.). Montagu’s capitalisation of ‘Nut Shell’ and ‘Needle’, along with ‘Patient’ and their various body parts, effects a kind of medicalised document, the instruments and actors all formally nominated as if with specialised terms. Conversely, the letter fuses conventionally masculine and feminine discourses (of the medical manual with the oriental fable) in its account of her daring

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<sup>97</sup> Published between 1704-1717; Montagu is understood to have owned copies in French (Grundy 1999: n3, p. 135)

<sup>98</sup> See MHO, “A Plain Account of the Inoculating of the Small Pox by a Turkey Merchant”, pp. 256-7



inoculation of her own young son, and her advocacy as a ‘patriot’ for its adoption in England continues a familiar strategy through which she proposes female innovation and resistance to the norms of Augustan society, her radical scientific promotion wrapped in language more familiar from the popular yet often subversive fable.<sup>99</sup>

Furthermore, her desire to protect her own child is framed through her patriotic intention ‘to bring this useful invention into fashion in England’ (L39:126): in this we find Montagu simultaneously performing a requirement of the Grand Tourist to return home with something of benefit to the nation, while successfully inhabiting her guise as Civic Mother. It is in the letter’s conclusion that she informs Chiswell, in a seeming assumption of medical authority, that she is ‘well satisfied of the safety of the experiment’ (p. 126), so much so that she ‘intend[s] to try it on my dear little son’ (ibid.). This breath-taking confidence articulates an authority which confronts contemporary medical expertise in England with what were traditional matriarchal practices in Turkey. Displaying the Enlightenment’s privileging of observational knowledge, Montagu’s statement provides evidence enough of the safety of the practice - ‘There is no example of any one that has died in it’ (p.126) - and the efficacy of the inoculation itself is similarly asserted, with the disease in Turkey being ‘entirely harmless by the invention of engrafting’ (p. 125). Consistent with her erasure of her most personal experiences, Montagu does not refer to her own near-fatal encounter with smallpox just a few months before setting off on her travels. Instead, she fashions herself as a ‘civic mother’ whose duty is to both her own children and to the children and welfare of the nation. As her letter concludes, she announces her intention to ‘bring this useful invention into fashion in England’ (p. 126) as the ‘patriot’ who has

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<sup>99</sup> For authoritative discussion of the subversive potential of the oriental fable, see Ballaster’s *Fabulous Orient* (2009)

‘heroism’ enough to ‘war’ (ibid.) with the doctors she expects will resist and ridicule her, and by addressing her letter to Sarah Chiswell, and invoking a counter-discourse of fable through which to colour her account, Montagu seems to insist upon an authority rested upon an alternative matriarchal and homosocial practice.

### Constructing Turkey as a Maternal ‘Paradise Found’

Montagu’s account of smallpox inoculation and her eulogistic description of Fatima just two letters later are unlikely bedfellows yet both epistolary accounts are situated within the April 1<sup>st</sup> 1717 Adrianople letters which construct Turkey as a kind of Paradise Found, and their shared location embeds them at the apex of Montagu’s narrative arc with the subject of maternity presented through a combination of her pseudo-ethnographic and social observations alongside a literary, sensual aesthetics and symbolism of motherhood. Numerically situated at the half way point of her epistolary travel account, the ten letters launch her arrival in Turkey as the high-water mark of her journey to female agency and authority. Her first impressions thrill to what she perceives as the freedoms of the Turkish women, with social practices, Islamic doctrine and cultural inscriptions pertaining to women all appearing to work in harmony to facilitate their freedom and status. The veil, so long a trope in male travel accounts for the thin disguise of a woman’s sensual beauty, is reconfigured throughout these letters as liberating.<sup>100</sup> In a time and culture when the dominant discourse held that ‘Women who seem spiritual, beautiful, and healthy are shown to be physical, ugly, and diseased’ and that ‘Female sexuality is equated with degeneration, disease, and death’ (Gubar, 1977, p. 388), Montagu finds in Turkey and its women the *potentiality* of sensual and sexual experience which she endeavours to link explicitly to motherhood. Later letters

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<sup>100</sup> This has been widely explored by critics in relation to this text, but see, for e.g., Felicity Nussbaum, ‘The Empire of Love: The Veil and the Blush’ pp114-34, in *Torrid Zones*, 1995

suggest a re-evaluation of this Paradise Found – as my analysis of her account of a murdered young woman in Letter 43 will suggest - but at this point, at least, Turkey offers a prototype for her ‘utopian’<sup>101</sup> project of agency. As such, the *Letters* entail the challenging of traditional (Western) discourse of and around the role and representation of motherhood. While there has been much critical examination of Montagu’s orientalist accounts of Fatima, along with the Turkish bathing beauties of the *bagnio*, none to my knowledge have examined the significance of her maternal status.

### Letters 34 and 40: Fatima, a Turkish ‘Eve’

It is, I suggest, central to *The Turkish Embassy Letter’s* narrative arc and thereby to Montagu’s design, that the woman whose beauty ‘effaced everything’ she had ever seen ‘in England or Germany’ (L34:133), is a mother. Fatima, sharing her name with the Prophet Muhammed’s daughter, may be considered an ‘exemplar’ of ‘modesty and maternity’ (Kashani-Sabet 2010:197), akin to Christianity’s Virgin Mary. However, Fatima’s maternal status is not indicated until late into an extended eulogy which synthesises her orientalised setting with a Classically-inflected beauty. The kaftan-clad beauty - whose features leave Montagu claiming to be speechless while drawing on a series of exclamatives to convey ‘that charming result of the whole! That exact proportion of body!’ (L34:133) - is approached via ‘jessamins and honey-suckles’, and found sitting ‘on a sofa raised three steps and covered with fine Persian carpets...leaning on cushions of white satin embroidered’ (L34:132). The ‘two young girls’ sat ‘at her feet’, ‘the eldest about twelve year old, lovely as angels’ (ibid.) are revealed to be Fatima’s daughters only at the end of the letter. Montagu’s voyeuristic gaze has been much commented upon in her account of Fatima, with an attention often

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<sup>101</sup> Aravamudan’s work on ‘Enlightenment Orientalism’ in the book of the same name and in *Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency, 1688 – 1804*, (1999) proposes Montagu’s writing about Turkey as participating in a more widespread orientalist utopian discourse of the East and Islam.

paid to what is seen as an inscription of self in other or indeed other in self.<sup>102</sup> Her greatest admiration is reserved for the feature for which she herself had been so celebrated, describing Fatima's eyes as 'Large and black, with all the soft languishment of the bleu [sic]!' (L34:133). A further invocation of Pope's allusion<sup>103</sup> seems confirmed by her faux-humble concession that 'our most celebrated English beauties would vanish near her,' (L34:133) yet the analogous description of Fatima-as-Muse and Montagu-as-Artist constructs an aesthetic kinship which aligns them not only as female beauties but as the mothers they also are.

Furthermore, Montagu's depiction of Fatima recalls an earlier account of the women of the *bagnio*. Like them, compared as they are to Milton's Eve, 'our General Mother', who 'walked and moved with the same majestic grace' (L27:101), Fatima is bestowed with 'a behaviour so full of grace and sweetness, such easy motions with an air so majestic yet free from stiffness or affectation' (L34:133). The lexical repetitions of 'grace' and 'majestic' construct a symmetry between the bathers and Fatima, merging their shared sensual beauty with the status of the Mother of humankind herself. This is compounded by the author's ongoing trope of artistic representation: while the bathers are described as if depictions of goddesses or the 'Graces' by an artist like Guido or Titian (L27:102), Fatima's beauty is a work of 'Nature' herself, surpassing even that of Apelles, considered to be the greatest painter of ancient Greece.<sup>104</sup>

Nature having done for her, with more success, what Apelles is said to have essayed by a collection of the most exact features to form a perfect face, and to that a behaviour so full of grace and sweetness, such easy motions [...] that I am persuaded could she be suddenly transported upon the most polite throne of Europe, nobody would think her other than born and bred to be a queen, though educated in a country we call barbarous. (L34:133)

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<sup>102</sup> Articles by Lew (1991) and Kietzman (1998) are especially rewarding here, with Kietzman observing a decentring and dislocation of the gendered gaze (p. 541).

<sup>103</sup> See n12

<sup>104</sup> See MHO, f.n.1, p.133

Montagu's variation on the original conceit of the women's beauty as akin to that of Classical paintings of goddesses undergoes a further development with the beautiful woman imaginatively 'transported' away from myth to European queen in a bold and provocative rhetorical act. Her transfiguration of the wanton 'Oriental' of European travellers' tales posits a similar challenge to Western tropes associated with Eve, and locates the 'General Mother' not only in a position of religious reverence but of political power. Montagu reconfigures myth through her writer's art to effect political transformation, and in Letter 40 the reader finds the 'beauteous Fatima' now 'handsome', a term more redolent of the matron, with the 'good breeding' and 'wit' that Montagu approves as a model of civility. The modifiers here also recall her first encounter with the Ottoman Empire in the form of Achmet Beg, and both figures serve as idealised constructs of enlightened sociability.

### Letters 34, 40 and 43: Mothers and Daughters

The textual alignment of the two mothers, along with a deployment of a specific theme of mothers and daughters, is secured by Fatima's reappearance in Letter 40 where Montagu tells her sister of the birth of her daughter. This detail is offered cursorily – 'I wish you joy of your niece, for I was brought to bed of a daughter five weeks ago' (L40:154) – and the experience of her childbirth in Turkey analogised as a 'little cold in the head' compared to the 'consumptive coughs so common in London' (ibid), but the letter is notable for its recurring references to mothers and daughters, notably as young women. In a symmetry that mirrors Letter 34 and her first meeting with Fatima which was preceded by a visit to 'dine with the Grand Vizier's lady' (L34:131), Montagu relays her visit to the Sultana Hafise, a re-married widow with just one surviving daughter out of the five princes she had otherwise borne, who tells how:

I would not survive him if I was not passionately fond of the Princess my daughter, yet all my tenderness for her was hardly enough to make me preserve my life when I lost him. I passed a whole twelvemonth without seeing the light. (L40:157)

Daughters, in Montagu's schema, may bring some light but they are commonly, it seems, associated with darkness. Even Fatima's own mother is found to be a Polish woman enslaved 'at the siege of Caminiec', a Polish town conquered in 1672 by Mehmed IV<sup>105</sup>. The 'maternal body is situated in darkness' (Francus 1994: 832) and Hafise might even evoke Spenser's Errour who, as Francus tells, 'lives in a darkened cave (itself a metaphorical womb) and shuns the light' (ibid).

Furthermore, it is in Montagu's last 'Turkish' letter to the Unknown Lady that her preoccupation with the fate of young women is rather unsettlingly concluded in a series of anecdotes and observations that includes the disturbing story of a young woman whose murdered body was found 'not very far from my house':

...the bleeding body of a young woman, naked, only wrapped in a coarse sheet, with two wound with a knife, one in her side, and another in her breast. She was not quite cold, and was so surprisingly beautiful that there were very few men in Pera that did not go to look upon her... (L43:173)

This gruesome description offers an alternative female spectacle, one which Montagu shows may be aestheticized just as living beauty is. Christ-like imagery of the young woman's body wrapped in a sheet like a shroud and with wounds in the flesh define a sacrificial victim. Because the veil hides her identity from the public, the woman's murderers are never found; her family, Montagu suggests, 'like better to compound the matter for money' (L43:173). The veil that she had earlier heralded as liberating now serves only to remind her female reader that women, be they English or Turkish, are the property of men, and therefore ultimately not only not free but vulnerable. Underlying

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<sup>105</sup> HOQ, p.159

Montagu's account and presentation of the birth of her daughter, one detects unresolved textual anxieties for women and their chances of agency, or even survival.

### Letters 27 and 34: Maternal spaces

Moreover, the ambivalence of Montagu's maternal focus, notably accentuated after the birth of her daughter, is schematized in her accounts of the homosocial spaces of the harems and *hammams*. While Fatima's beauty is set within a harem which is styled as an orientalist Eden, abundant with sweet-smelling flowers, fountains, and trees shading 'beautiful young girls' (L34:132) from the sun, these images of fertility are preceded by the claustrophobic and austere home of the elderly wife of the Grand Vizier. The Grand Vizier's harem is dark, enclosed, leading more narrowly to the Grand Vizier's wife at its epicentre, in the 'innermost' room – on the one hand evoking the Hadeian dark den of the 'monstrous mothers' of Augustan satire while also suggestive of the barrenness of the menopausal womb. No children, daughters or otherwise, are mentioned: instead the only other females figured are the 'she-slaves', describing them as 'ranged' as if mere furniture, while the entrance to Fatima's enclave is a 'gallery between two ranks of beautiful young girls' (ibid.). The women here are given 'rank' and placed in a space where the gaze is paramount. In the first harem, 'I was surprised to observe so little magnificence in her house'; in the second it is not just the room that demands Montagu's attention but the 'girls' themselves: 'I was sorry that decency did not permit me to stop to consider them nearer.' (ibid.). Their presence in a 'gallery' effectively frames them for the reader as if paintings on the walls that Montagu is led between. The sensuality of this moment is amplified by her synaesthetic imagery of the pavilion and the trees that jessamine and honeysuckle have twisted themselves around, their perfume filling the air, while water from a fountain is imagined as if music – 'a white marble fountain playing sweet water' (ibid.). The

transfer from the older woman's Hadeian enclosure to the perfumed airs of Fatima's Eden is stark, and the asymmetrical patterning of the two harems destabilises any feminotopian depiction: Montagu's affirmation through Fatima of female fertility and beauty as sources of life and light cannot entirely escape the dark barrenness of the older woman's home. An impression of looming death, germane to the Augustan paradox of the womb as a site of production and destruction, thwarts her efforts to reconcile misogynist double-binds.

Montagu's uterine depiction of the harems has arguably been anticipated in her rendition of the baths or *hammams* in Letter 27. Aravamudan remarks that:

the enclosed *hammams*, unlike the open Roman *balnae*, served as complex sites for the staging and regulation of sexual desire, as well as more generalized allegories for psychosexual interiors within Islamic cultures (1999:181)

He observes that 'The dreamscape of the bathhouse may suggest a uterine memory of the mother – of the figure of "our General Mother" ' (ibid.), illuminating a further thread in Montagu's symbolic construction of an idealised, orientalist Magna Mater whose very environment is imbued with the symbolism of fertility, life and union. 'Our General Mother' is a nomination Milton uses for Eve once only in *Paradise Lost*, just before she and Adam make love in the Garden of Eden<sup>106</sup>, and before the Temptation. Montagu builds her metaphor quite subtly, noting with mock-innocence the bathers 'being all in the state of nature, that is, in plain English, stark naked' (L27:101). Her language directly echoes Milton's account of Eve as seen by Satan before the Fall – 'without any beauty or defect concealed<sup>107</sup>'; 'there was not the least wanton<sup>108</sup> smile' –

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<sup>106</sup> PL, 4.490-3 'So spake our general mother, and with eyes/Of conjugal attraction unreproved/And meek surrender, half-embracing leaned/On our first father

<sup>107</sup> Milton: 'Nor those mysterious parts were then conceal'd' (PL,4.312, cited MHO, p102)

<sup>108</sup> Eve's hair is described in PL as 'in wanton ringlets wav'd' (PL,4.306, cited MHO, p102)



yet in doing so overturns his post-lapsarian lament at Eve's responsibility for the unhappiness of mankind:

Honour dishonourable,  
Sin-bred, how have ye troubl'd mankind  
With shows instead, mere shows of seeming pure (Milton, *Paradise Lost*  
4.314-16)

Montagu's alignment of the Turkish bathers with Milton's Eve here subversively transforms both from the sexually-unconstrained, immoral yet erotically-thrilling women of patriarchal accounts, restoring their nudity as a marker of purity and innocence. Her symmetrical representation of the bathers and Fatima, as already discussed, momentarily, then, secures her maternal archetype but ultimately her pragmatism and, perhaps, a real sense of maternal vulnerability struggle to destabilize the iconography which holds beauty and virtue incompatible with sensuality and fertility.

## Conclusion

Despite an apparent disengagement with the theme of Montagu's own maternal status, the *Letters* present a continued attention to both the experience and representation of motherhood. Where Montagu may be seen to self-fashion as a mother, she does so primarily as a Civic Mother, the 'patriot' who shows her love for and duty towards her nation by inoculating her own children to prove the efficacy of the Turkish practice of smallpox engrafting. Her fleeting maternal expressions otherwise offer little more than a formulaic articulation of maternal devotion to her child; her rare judgements on maternal matters comply with the 'middling' mores of the day while not inconsistent with her aristocratic status. However, Montagu's ongoing commentary on the experience of mothers, daughters and widows coupled with her infusion of maternal myth and symbolism into the homosocial spaces of Adrianople serve to rebut the dominance of the misogynist tropes circulating in Augustan Britain. Through her

symbolic construction of Turkey as Edenic, and Fatima as its Magna Mater, Montagu's utopian project is one of restoration, a return to origins, and thereby the potentiality of new beginnings, with a celebration of the matriarchal practices she encounters in Turkey.

However, while I should conclude that she inevitably fails to reconcile the Western Madonna/Whore paradox, an alternative maternal archetype does seem to peep from the latticework of Montagu's letters: that of the Athenian Civic Protector, Cybele. It is her temple Montagu alludes to as 'the temple of Homer in Chios'<sup>109</sup> which she rather whimsically imagines she might have visited 'after drinking a dish of tea with Sappho' (L45:190). Not only a Civic Protector but associated with spring fertility rites and birth, Cybele heralded from Anatolia, and was forged from both Hellenistic and Asian figures – an East/West hybrid, the mother of the gods. She is often shown arriving in a chariot, to great fanfare, a self-image that Montagu repeatedly offers her readers as she travels through Europe as well as within Turkey. Bereft of viable maternal figures in English discourse of the time, I suggest that it is in the *Turkish Embassy Letters* that Montagu laboured to construct one not only from the Turkish women themselves but from their living and mythical landscapes which might permit the paradox of an authoritative, respected, life-giving and life-affirming, free and beautiful mother.

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<sup>109</sup> Heffernan and O'Quinn note that Halsband suggests this temple is 'a sanctuary of Cybele commonly called the School of Homer', fn.1, p.190

## Conclusion

Montagu's final letter, addressed to Pope from Dover in November 1718, perfectly concludes her sequence of letters, their concern for legacy and their romantic scepticism delivered in a poem comprising caustic, bathetic couplets which refuse to show regret for a tale told her by Pope of the untimely death of two rural lovers, struck by lightning as they sat under a tree<sup>110</sup>. She even muses:

Who knows if 'twas not kindly done?  
For had they seen the next Year's Sun,  
A Beaten Wife and Cuckold Swain  
Had jointly cursed the marriage chain.  
(L53:216)

A 'travel-weariness' might be detected in her final letters, although Kietzman suggests that 'The letters written on her homebound journey register a keenly felt loss of agency' (1998:548). Similarly, I would suggest that they evoke disappointment at her return which marks not only departure from the Edenic *space* of Turkey, but from its *time* which she depicts as merging its 'oriental' present with a Classical past. Her fifty-two letters might even effect an ironic allusion to Aristotle's precept of tragedy which, unlike epic poetry, has 'no fixed limit of time', but 'endeavours to keep as far as possible within a single circuit of the sun.'<sup>111</sup> Her narrative binds both time and space, the journey narrative's conclusion effecting not only the traveller's demise but, within the terms of this thesis, that of the Female Scholar and of a revered, active Mother-figure.

As such, the thesis has demonstrated the significance of Montagu's strategies of synthesis: it offers, I believe, a nuanced examination of gendered notions of difference,

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<sup>110</sup> MHO, n4, pp214-5

<sup>111</sup> *Art of Poetry*, Cited Chung, R. (2016), p. 123

and suggests that the triumph of Montagu's letters lies in their synthesis of discourses marked variously as 'masculine' or 'feminine', as 'Western' or 'Oriental'.

Strengthened by the author's agile navigation between Classical and contemporary philosophical and cultural paradigms, her letters offer up alternative potentialities for both men and women and the relationships between them, exemplified by her friendships with Achmet Beg and Fatima. As such, she attempts to reconcile what she proposes are false divisions and, in the process, destabilises conventional binaries, offering alternative paradigms for Enlightenment expressions of equality, reciprocity and sociability.

Through a close examination of contemporary travelogues, I have shown how Montagu capitalised on their protean forms, adapting them to articulate a feminised account of her travels, and to evidence female capacity for travel, commentary and for social encounters beyond the drawing-room. The authority she displays is one that negotiates male-generated texts and discourse, as shown by my examination of her strategies of distillation, citation, allusion but also of satire which is often conveyed through literary modes traditionally adopted by women authors - of translation and imitation. My thesis challenges a common critical viewpoint that female authors may only express authority in 'male disguise'<sup>112</sup>, showing instead how Montagu's various 'costume changes' – as Grand Tourist and Scholar, but also as a Civic Mother – enable her to articulate a feminised authority shaped by contending discourses surrounding female learning and the power of production/reproduction.

Furthermore, her fabricated epistolary narrative effects the intellectual exchange of the Republic of Letters as one between women, as well as between men. She

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<sup>112</sup> Schaffer (1989:103), cited Mills (1992:38)

demonstrates through her responses and arguments presented in letters to Pope and Conti that she is their intellectual match, her letters displaying the reciprocity upon which equality necessarily relies<sup>113</sup>, but the breadth of her letters' content proposes a pluralism that surpasses the range of these *philosophes*. By offering a sequence of narratives which are largely dispersed amongst her *female* peers, again she is asserting a feminocentric authority founded on absolute rebuttal of misogynist claims of female inferiority, as well as confronting an emerging trope of the domesticated female ideal. Montagu's woman is one who is free to move, to speak, to argue and to campaign.

In addition, my thesis challenges certain prevailing critical assumptions, particularly surrounding her relationship with Conti which is conventionally depicted as one of reverence for the Italian *philosophe*. Halsband's suggestion that the 'brilliant virtuoso performances' (1956:59) are indicative of 'her attempt to retain his admiration' (ibid.) have helped shape a critical consensus, but my thesis' consideration of Conti's letter to Pérelle suggests a rather more ambivalent interaction might be inferred. The fluidity and hybridity of the *Letters* gather a coherence when looked at through a wide-angle lens that frames these fifty-two letters as a single text, as well as part of a greater body of writing preceding and succeeding its original production. Unless we do her the credit of reviewing *The Turkish Embassy Letters* in its totality, the scale and scope of this extraordinary text is lost.

Montagu's accounts of her actions and observations in her various guises – as Grand Tourist, Female Scholar and as a Civic Mother – as well as of the actions and stories of the women she encounters during her travels, therefore champion

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<sup>113</sup> Goodman, for example, notes that 'The reciprocity of correspondence both reflected and strengthened the sense of equality that structured relations among citizens of the Republic of Letters.' (1996:18)

contemporary proto-feminist advocacy for female equality and agency, and as such mark her significant participation within the *querelle des femmes*. While Grundy writes of Montagu's wish for these letters to be her 'legacy', my thesis suggests that her wish is one that goes far beyond a desire for personal fame. Through its articulation of three distinct but conjoined female 'characters', each one of whom Montagu inhabits, the *Letters* offer a vindication of women's capacity for authority and agency, the only obstacle to this being the customs and prejudices of men.

In 1739, the pseudonymous 'Sophia' published a tract entitled *Woman not Inferior to Man: or, a Short and Modest Vindication of the Natural Right of the Fair-Sex to a Perfect Equality of Power, Dignity and Esteem with the Men*. Her argument mirrors much that we find in the *Turkish Embassy Letters*. It is not Nature, Sophia argues, but 'custom' that defines such inequality; science only 'proves' female inferiority because wielded by men. In a further echo of the 'plain truth' of Montagu's letters, she goes on to insist that 'All the *witness* we desire to be allow'd, is plain, *undisguised* truth' (Chapter 1, para.9). Although unattributed, it has long been suggested that the author was Montagu herself;<sup>114</sup> regardless, her arguments for female agency and equality that drive her *Embassy Letters* have continued to be waged ever since. As such, I would suggest that she was successful in her resistance to both the patriarchal theft and silencing of female voices.

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<sup>114</sup> Lady Sophia Fermor (1724 – 1745) is another suggestion, but Spender presumes Montagu is the author, making *Woman not Inferior to Man* her focal text for critiquing Montagu as a proto-feminist (1982:68-85)

## Appendix: Poetry referred to in Chapter 2

- I. *'Turkish verses addressed to the Sultana, eldest daughter of Sultan Achmet 3rd'*  
– Montagu's 'literal translation' of a Turkish lyric (Letter 31, MHO, pp. 121-2)

### Stanza 1st

1. The Nightingale now wanders in the Vines  
Her Passion is to seek Roses.
2. I went down to admire the beauty of the Vines  
The sweetness of your charms has ravish'd my Soul.
3. Your Eyes are black and Lovely  
But wild and disdainful as those of a Stag.

### Stanza 2nd

1. The wished possession is delayed from day to day  
The cruel Sultan Achmet will not permit me to see those cheeks, more  
vermillion than roses.
2. I dare not snatch one of your kisses  
The sweetness of your charms has ravish'd my Soul.
3. Your Eyes are black and Lovely  
But wild and disdainful as those of a Stag.

### Stanza 3<sup>rd</sup>

1. The wretched Bassa Ibrahim sighs in these verses,  
One Dart from your Eyes has pierc'd through my Heart.
2. Ah when will the Hour of possession arrive?  
Must I yet wait a long time  
The sweetness of your charms has ravish'd my soul,
3. Ah Sultana stag-ey'd, an Angel amongst angels,  
I desire and my desire remains unsatisfied,  
Can you take delight to prey upon my heart?

### Stanza 4<sup>th</sup>

1. My cries pierce the Heavens,  
My Eyes are without sleep  
Turn to me, Sultana, let me gaze on thy beauty.
2. Adieu I go down to the Grave  
If you call me I return  
My Heart is hot as Sulphur, sigh and it will flame.
3. Crown of my Life, fair light of my Eyes, my Sultana, my Princess,  
I rub my face against the Earth, I am drown'd in scalding Tears – I rave!  
Have you no Compassion? Will you not turn to look upon me?

II. *'Now Philomela renews her tender strain': Montagu's poem in 'the style of English poetry' (Letter 31, MHO, pp. 123-4)*

Stanza 1

Now Philomel renews her tender strain,  
Indulging all the night her pleasing Pain  
I sought the Groves to hear the Wanton sing,  
There saw a face more beauteous than the Spring  
Your large stag's-eyes where 1,000 glories play,  
As bright, as Lively, but as wild as they.

2

In vain I'm promised such a heavenly prize,  
Ah, Cruel Sultan who delays my Joys!  
While piercing charms transfix my amorous Heart  
I dare not snatch one kiss to ease the smart  
Those Eyes are like etc.

3

Your wretched Lover in these lines complains  
From those dear Beauties rise his killing pains.  
When will the Hour of wished-for Bliss arrive?  
Must I wait longer? Can I wait and live?  
Ah bright Sultana! Maid divinely fair!  
Can you unpitying see the pain I bear?

4

The Heavens relenting hear my piercing Cries  
I loath the Light, and Sleep forsake my Eyes.  
Turn thee Sultana ere thy Lover dies.  
Sinking to Earth, I sigh the last Adieu –  
Call me, my Goddess and my Life renew.  
My Queen! My Angel! my fond Heart's desire  
I rave – my bosom burns with Heavenly fire.  
Pity that Passion which thy charms inspire.



III. Ambrose Philips, *Ode to a Loved One*, 1711<sup>115</sup>

BLEST as the immortal gods is he,  
The youth who fondly sits by thee,  
And hears and sees thee, all the while,  
Softly speaks and sweetly smile.

‘Twas this deprived my soul of rest,  
And raised such tumults in my breast;  
For, while I gazed, in transport tossed,  
My breath was gone, my voice was lost;

My bosom glowed; the subtle flame  
Ran quick through all my vital flame;  
O’er my dim eyes a darkness hung;  
My ears with hollow murmurs rung;

In dewy damps my limbs were chilled;  
My blood with gentle horrors thrilled:  
My feeble pulse forgot to play;  
I fainted, sunk, and died away.

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<sup>115</sup> Translation of Sappho’s ‘Fragment 31’ from ed. William Hyde Appleton, 1893, *Greek Poets in English Verse*. Cambridge: The Riverside Press. via Poetry-archive.com. (2019). *Ode To a Loved One*, by Sappho. [online] Available at: [http://www.poetry-archive.com/s/ode\\_to\\_a\\_loved\\_one.html](http://www.poetry-archive.com/s/ode_to_a_loved_one.html) [Accessed 16 Jan. 2019].

IV. Sappho, *Fragment 31*, trans. Diane Rayor (2014)

To me it seems that man has the fortune  
of gods, whoever sits beside you  
and close, who listens to you  
sweetly speaking

and laughing temptingly. My heart  
flutters in my breast whenever  
I quickly glance at you –  
I can say nothing,

my tongue is broken. A delicate fire  
runs under my skin, my eyes  
see nothing, my ears roar,  
cold sweat

rushes down me, trembling seizes me,  
I am greener than grass.  
To myself I seem  
needing but little to die.

Yet all must be endured, since...

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