

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Sublime Porte

by

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A thesis presented for the B.A. degree

with Honors in

The Department of English

The University of Michigan

Winter 2012



## Acknowledgements

I wish to express my gratitude to my advisor Clement Hawes for his generous help, guidance, editing and interest throughout the project, his deep knowledge and invaluable recommendations of source material, his infectious enthusiasm for the eighteenth century and for encouraging me to choose the topic that I wanted to work on the most when I presented him with so many other alternatives.

I owe more gratitude than I can express to Jennifer Wenzel for her knowledge, direction, genuine and unflagging interest and encouragement, much needed writing advice, painstaking editing notes that enlightened more with each rereading, and overall careful oversight of each stage of the paper. I appreciate all of her extra efforts.

I am very grateful to Kader Konuk for her inspired teaching of *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, her conviction of its importance, and for rekindling my fascination with Ottoman history.

I am very appreciative of Lucy Hartley's considered advice, direction in writing and assistance in the assessment of thesis topics.

I am so grateful to James Cody Walker for his guidance in writing, wise counsel and for encouraging me to apply to the Honors Program.

I would like to thank Theophilus C. Prousis for his generous, thoughtful and instantaneous help with questions and sources. I was so fortunate that *Lord Strangford at the Sublime Porte (1821): The Eastern Question* was published just at the moment when I needed to know how diplomats write.

I had the good fortune years ago of having a conversation with the late Isobel Grundy who introduced me to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and to have learned Ottoman history from Bruce McGowan and the late James Stewart Robinson.

## Abstract

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's writings known as the 'Turkish Embassy Letters' have traditionally been classified in the genres of travel narrative and the familiar letter; this thesis proposes that a third literary genre can be identified: the "unofficial diplomatic dispatch." The terms "unofficial diplomatic discourse" and "literary imitation of diplomatic discourse" will be used throughout the thesis to define and describe the writings within Montagu's letters that reveal instances of her informal diplomacy, in which she reports, analyzes and emulates many of the kinds of information traditionally contained in ambassadorial correspondence to the Foreign Office. Though Montagu does not participate in the highest diplomatic functions of statecraft and governmental and military negotiations, she is a keen observer, analyst and chronicler of trade, infrastructure, religion, law, culture, customs, manners, gender, and the dynamics and representations of power in the Ottoman Empire. As an auxiliary traveler attached to her husband Edward Wortley's official diplomatic assignment to the Ottoman Empire, Montagu's access provides her with eyewitness testimony that establishes her expert authority as she crafts narrative that embodies and portrays diplomatic concerns.

The term "literary imitation of diplomatic discourse" mediates Montagu's construction of a diplomatic narrative through literary techniques such as storytelling, metaphor, and allusion. She critically analyzes the literary authority and gendered assumptions of earlier male writers of travel narratives on the Middle East.

The thesis is modeled on the journey of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu to the Ottoman Empire in 1716-1717, tracing the geographical land route taken from Rotterdam to Constantinople, ending with her residence there through 1718, the end of Edward Wortley's embassy. Conventions of travel narrative will be seen to combine with unofficial diplomatic discourse and practice.

Chapter One covers the journey through Western Europe to Vienna with emphasis on Holy Roman/Hapsburg Court.

Chapter Two follows the remainder of the journey through the Austro-Ottoman Frontier: Hungary and the Balkans. It is a contested war zone.

Chapter Three compares the diplomatic correspondence of two Ambassadors from Great Britain to the Sublime Porte (the Court of the Ottoman Empire) to the writings of Montagu in order to explicate the similarities and differences in content and narrative between official and "unofficial" diplomatic discourse. The dispatches from 1710-1714 of Sir Robert Sutton, immediate predecessor to Edward Wortley, and the 1821 dispatches of the Viscount Strangford are examined.

Chapter Four examines Montagu's role as British Ambassadors and her examination of the interaction of women and Ottoman institutions in Constantinople.

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## INTRODUCTION

When Lady Mary Wortley Montagu passes through Vienna on her way to Constantinople, she reports the tale of two coaches that meet in a narrow street; the aristocratic ladies inside the coaches vow to die rather than yield precedence to each other. The interminable standoff ends only when the Holy Roman Emperor dispatches his guards to negotiate: first, for the women's simultaneous removal to sedan chairs, then, with the equally uncompromising coachmen, "no lesse tenacious of their Rank than the Ladys" (26 Sep. 1716; 1: 273). Montagu's wry comments on station, status and intransigence at the Viennese Court underscore her understanding of the practice of diplomacy. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, author of the 'Turkish Embassy Letters'—her correspondence as the wife of Edward Wortley, the British Ambassador to the Sublime Porte, the synecdoche of the Court of the Ottoman Empire, from late 1716 to 1718—was the first secular, modern woman travel writer on the Middle East (Melman 2). Best known for initiating a discourse within the travel genre narrative incorporating eyewitness accounts of the feminine space and the domestic lives of Ottoman women, this thesis claims she is also responsible for the construction and dissemination of another mode which will be called "unofficial diplomatic discourse." It is found in the 'Turkish Embassy Letters,' partially written as a literary imitation of ambassadorial dispatches and developed through various literary styles. This discourse is most pronounced in her letters on the contested and volatile frontier between the Holy Roman Empire ruled by the Hapsburg dynasty and the Ottoman Empire, a borderland seen as the barrier between Christendom and the Islamic world. Placing her travel writings in the context of the dynamic and evolving Anglo-Ottoman relationship allows an analysis of Montagu's choice of narrative strategies to complement the geographical loci of her journey. In his biography of Montagu, Robert Halsband, the editor of her correspondence, states: "In the western European courts she was able to impress diplomats and courtiers because women mixed

freely with them; but at the Ottoman Court, where women were confined to the harem, they played no part in politics or formal court life” (Halsband 71). Katherine H.S. Turner claims that “[t]his exclusion partly explains the absence of political and diplomatic material” in Montagu’s letters, focusing “instead on the status of Turkish women” (Clark 119). In Halsband’s opinion, “[h]er comments on statecraft and politics were probably limited by her own ignorance as well as the indifference of her correspondents” (71). But ample evidence of political and diplomatic material can be found in the ‘Turkish Embassy Letters,’ both before and after Lady Mary’s arrival in the Ottoman Empire, and she tailored each letter to its recipient. Comparing the diplomatic elements within her letters, not to other travel writing, but to the content, narrative and source material of diplomatic dispatches reveals key similarities between the genres, strengthening Montagu’s authority beyond the role of travel writer.

*The Oxford English Dictionary* credits Montagu with the first recorded usage of the term “ambadress,” to whom the title could have been intended as an honorific as well as a description of her role, though she does not indicate if this title is publicly used or acknowledged. Lady Mary’s status evolves from the wife of the British Ambassador to that of an acting quasi-official diplomat, adopting the authority and title of British Ambadress because of the substance and later scribal circulation and critical reception of her letters. Montagu is an “auxiliary” traveler; officially, she plays a supporting role to her husband, Edward Wortley (Melman 34). She was the fifth English ambassadorial spouse to accompany her husband to the Ottoman Empire (Laidlaw 174-7). The first, Lady Glover, is remembered only for the curious aftermath of her unexpected death in Constantinople in 1608 (*Rise* 222). Unable to return her corpse to England, her husband buried her body in bran in the buttry of the ambassador’s residence for three and a half years before he allowed her final interment (ibid). In marked contrast, the elevated level of Montagu’s profile and accomplishment in the role of the wife of



the British Ambassador was groundbreaking. Though slated for a five year term, Edward Wortley's embassy collapses, and he was recalled from Constantinople within a year of his arrival, while Montagu's 'Turkish Embassy Letters,' becomes the authoritative reference work on the Middle East for the next century, first in manuscript, much later in print (Melman 82).

The 'Turkish Embassy Letters' falls into two distinct established genres: the travel narrative and the eighteenth century familiar letter. The gendered version of each category is transformed by innovations that Montagu institutes through her epistolary discourse. By virtue of her class, her gender, and her husband's position, which allows her unprecedented access to Royal Courts, high officials and harems, Montagu is able to adapt elements of both genres to create a literary imitation of a proposed third genre, the unofficial diplomatic dispatch. The expression of literariness varies throughout the letters; based upon the needs of her narrative, she employs elements of storytelling, literary and historical analysis, and criticism of the travel writings of her predecessors. The inclusion of the 'Turkish Embassy Letters' in each major genre requires examination.

The 'Turkish Embassy Letters' breaks precedent in the history of travel narrative. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was the first female English writer to chronicle a "non-Christian, non-European culture" east of Britain (Grundy xvii). Her travel narrative follows only two previous women's travelogues; both are accounts of pilgrimages (Melman 10). Montagu reorients the Middle Eastern travel narrative from a male to a female perspective by creating an entirely new parallel discourse focused on women's actual as opposed to fantasized experiences (Melman 2). Billie Melman sees the impact of Montagu's alternative discourse as having been so influential, that even during the nineteenth century her interpretation and framework are present in many published analyses of the Middle East (82). Lady Mary is quite conversant with the "texts of reference" that had defined the Middle East for travelers and readers, including the

*Thousand and One Nights, or the Arabian Nights* (Melman 63). Translated into French by Antoine Galland beginning in 1704, the *Arabian Nights* found a popular readership and was widely taken to be a literary marvel, but also an authoritative source on customs and manners on the Middle East (ibid). Oriental and philosophical tales featuring fantasy, the supernatural, and the harem reinforced the European perception of the Middle East, especially in the masculine view, as an exotic, eroticized, and feminized locus (Melman 68). Montagu brought a skeptical eye to most previous authoritative western texts on the Middle East, with the exception of the classics, in which she is a well educated autodidact (Grundy 15). She eschews literal interpretations of literary works, is familiar with the Qu‘ran, learns to read literature in Turkish, and critically analyzes previous travelers’ accounts of their journeys (Melman 82-3). Montagu earns authority through the depth and breadth of her preparation for her journey, her eagerness to confront the shortcomings of her predecessors, and the open-mindedness and relativism with which she approaches the Islamic world. Despite Montagu’s anti-Catholicism, her general tolerance is the result of her belief in empiricism; personal experience is her gauge to measure the authenticity of the traveler’s findings. Much of her unofficial diplomatic discourse pertains to issues of male concern; Melman’s belief that women’s travel writing in the Orient “was private rather than ‘civic’ or public, individual rather than institutionalised and finally it was a-political,” cannot encapsulate Montagu, who plays a significant civic and institutional role within a political sphere (12). Her parallel discourse does not negate traditional masculine discourse so much as hold it up to a higher standard of accountability. Montagu reports from the battlefield as well as the harem, but she is able to provide authentic descriptions of the haremluk (the living quarters of Ottoman women) that men cannot, because her gender and connection to the British Embassy grants her the access to gather firsthand knowledge; her gaze is directed toward an open encounter rather than a fantasy. Lady Mary identifies herself as a travel writer

in the framing of her letters, yet distances herself from the credibility issues that she sees as inherent to the entire travel genre. Writing to the anonymous, even fictive Lady—, Montagu refuses to “entertain you with as many prodigys as other Travellers use to divert their Readers with. I might easily pick up wonders in every Town I pass through, or tell you a long series of Popish miracles”; she then asks: “is it not better to tell you a plain Truth...” (1 Jan. 1717; 1:292-3). By writing to an unspecified recipient, Montagu indicates that her letter is meant for a larger audience, to be circulated in the practice of scribal publication, employed in the dissemination of literature, political tracts and letters in manuscript to a “closed community” (Love 44).

The eighteenth century aristocratic woman’s familiar letter was a private mode of discourse, usually focusing on lighter affairs and domestic issues, which provided an opportunity for a woman to develop her own literary expression (Lowenthal 2). The familiar letter was frequently deemed a conversational vehicle (Spacks 77). Writers of either gender could allow their letters or other literary writings to be shared with a wider audience by creating “limited editions” of them to be circulated to a self-selected audience, while still retaining their somewhat fictive status as private correspondence (Lowenthal 3). Montagu objected to what she considered the tradition of women devoting most of their written correspondence to inconsequential matters. The letters of the witty French aristocrat, Madame de Sévigné, had been lauded as the pinnacle of excellence in female epistolary achievement during the late seventeenth century, but Montagu felt that the Marquise’s discourse too often was “the tittle tattle of a fine Lady,” even if charmingly told (Lowenthal 1-2). Montagu much preferred “good Sense” (ibid). She initiated an alternative model in which the meaningful content of a woman’s letter becomes its overriding concern (Lowenthal 2). This model is most in evidence in her literary imitation of diplomatic discourse, because its authenticity earns authority for the writer. Halsband sees a stylistic shift in the ‘Turkish Embassy Letters’ from her previous familiar letters, becoming less personal, and

trading informality for formality (Halsband 65) Montagu, connected to social, political and literary circles at the highest levels, has a ready, influential readership for her writings, but actual publication, unthinkable for a woman of her class, would have exposed her to severe personal attack as well as violating aristocratic practice. Harold Love attests that “the stigma of print bore particularly hard on women writers” (54). The early eighteenth century found the Wortley Montagus balancing the demands of aristocratic tradition, along with the responsibility of advocating for and acting upon the social, economic and political ideology of the Whig party (Lowenthal 10). Privately circulated unofficial diplomatic discourse in the form of familiar letters empowers Montagu, who has a role as both observer and participant in ambassadorial duties, to comment on such crucial issues, a previously all male preserve.

With Edward Wortley’s appointment as the Ambassador Extraordinary to the Sublime Porte, Montagu places her correspondence under greater self-scrutiny. According to Cynthia Lowenthal, Lady Mary already assumes that her letters to public figures, such as Alexander Pope and even her own husband, might be circulated without her permission (79). Committed to the recording of her journey to Constantinople for scribal publication, circulation in manuscript from within a group of selected individuals, and later to posthumous publication for the public, Montagu composes fifty-two letters—several more letters will be added at a later date—that will become known both as the ‘Turkish Embassy Letters’ and the ‘Embassy Letters’ (Lowenthal 82). She sends letters to friends and relatives in England and France with detailed descriptions of her travels to the Ottoman Empire, analyzing the journey and what takes place during the period of her husband’s embassy. The letters as originally written were not published verbatim in the ‘Turkish Embassy’ correspondence; only a few of the actual letters, or comprehensive summaries of them, are extant (Mon xvi). Montagu kept two albums into which the substance of the original letters were copied, from which she created the “pseudo-letters”

that became the text of the ‘Turkish Embassy Letters’ (Mon xiv). The exact correlation of the original letters to the pseudo-letters is unknown; Robert Halsband, the editor of *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, refers to the process of shaping the letters into a stylized, unified work as a “compilation” (ibid). He judges the pseudo-letters as “clearly an accurate record of her experiences and observations during her two-year sojourn abroad,” but their reconstruction gives Montagu the opportunity to rewrite her thoughts and opinions, and redesignate the content sent to the various, in selected cases fictive, correspondents (Mon xv). Srinivas Aravamudan proposes that by mingling anonymous recipients in a collection in which the majority who receive the letters are known, “the single, unidentified and mysterious addressee becomes a metafictional referent that collapses author, reader, and mode” (n.p.). As a scribal author, her selection of recipients, matched in most cases by gender, class and taste to the subject matter of the pseudo-letters, reinforces the authority of the unofficial diplomatic discourse she produces (Love 53). The albums containing the ‘Turkish Embassy Letters’ were supplemented with a preface by her friend, the feminist writer and activist, Mary Astell, in 1724 before a wider private circulation (Mon xvi).

The ‘Turkish Embassy Letters’ was not officially published until 1763, the year after Montagu’s death, under the title *Letters of the Right Honourable Lady M—y W-----y M-----e: 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 Turks; Drawn from Sources that have been inaccessible to other Travellers.* (Mon xvii). Turner writes that ‘The *Embassy Letters*’ emerged into the literary world like the elegant ghost of their recently deceased author, appearing in 1763 in three small octavo volumes” (Clark, 116). Montagu had deposited the albums with an English cleric before returning to London from a two decades long self-imposed exile in Italy and France. The

process of author publication was authorized when a signed declaration allowed a designated person to generate and distribute printed books (Love 47). Lady Mary's inscription read: "These 2 volumes are given to the R[everen]d Snowden, minister at Rotterdam, to be dispos'd of as he thinks proper. This is the will and design of M. Wortley Montagu, Dec. 11, 1716," which sanctioned the publishing of the scribal manuscript (Mon xvi). Unable to prevent publication, Montagu's only daughter and literary executor, the Countess of Bute, burned the original albums used as the source for the epistolary collection years after her mother's death (Grundy 626). Posthumous publication during the final year of Lord Bute's tenure as Prime Minister may have caused discomfort for Montagu's family, but nonetheless led to the recognition of Lady Mary as an authority on the Ottoman Empire, for having written a work of acknowledged literary and historical value that became a canonical study for traditional and gendered versions of all three aforementioned genres: the travel narrative, the woman's eighteenth century familiar letter, and even the unofficial diplomatic dispatch within her correspondence. The book's original title indicates that part of the proposed readership should be "Men of Letters," and announces that Montagu would be commenting not just on the "Manners," but on the "Policy" of the Turks, thereby conferring expert authority on Lady Mary, while accepting and approving her assumption of masculine concerns in the writing of it. The prominent inclusion of her title, the "Right Honourable Lady M—y W-----y M-----e," uses her aristocratic status to bolster her authority.

Official diplomatic dispatches are confidential memoranda written by the ambassador to the Secretary of State, or later, the Foreign Minister. Some of the essential elements of the dispatch are inappropriate or unavailable for Montagu's unofficial diplomatic discourse, while other of its attributes parallel her writings closely. The ambassador's primary duties are statecraft, military and treaty mediation and negotiation, and facilitating trade. An ambassador's

diplomatic dispatch assesses the actions, policies, stances, aims, reactions, and character of the government and officials to which he is assigned, as well as those of other ambassadors and their governments, particularly major regional powers and his country's rivals. The diplomatic dispatch contains extensive descriptions of protocol, military planning, analysis and treaty negotiations with assessment of and speculation about the intentions and motivations of all interested parties. There are inventories of troop movements, munitions, trade items and the comings and goings of various dignitaries and officials. Diplomatic dispatches include separate written reports from consuls and various outside sources, as well as official documents from other governments. Some dispatches contain short coded messages (Kurat). The ambassador is assisted by dragomans (translators), secretaries and copy clerks. The ambassador may have written his own dispatches, or his "rough drafts" or "oral comments" may have been copied by secretaries or clerks (Prousis *Lord*). The finished dispatches from the ambassadors cited in this thesis are not all written in the same handwriting throughout (*ibid*). The dispatches of Ambassador Strangford have a consistent voice "thrust and tone" whether "authored" or "narrated" by him (*ibid*). The tone of Ambassador Sutton's dispatches noticeably varies in instances in which anecdotes appear to have been contributed by different sources. The timely transmission of a dispatch is vital; the British ambassador's dispatches are expected to reach his superior within six weeks (Kurat 12). Montagu warns a correspondent that her letters would not arrive for six months.

Montagu's unofficial diplomatic discourse does not report on military negotiations or on statecraft at the level of individual rulers, but she examines issues that embody state interest and are among the overall responsibilities of an ambassador: governance, national character, court protocol, civic institutions, infrastructure, and trade. Her writings provide ancillary and auxiliary analysis to support issues of diplomatic concern. Due to her unique access, Montagu was

certainly privy to information that she would not include in her letters. It is not known how much intelligence Wortley shares with her, or how much influence she wields, though there is speculation that she is responsible for his reported lenient stance towards the Ottomans during treaty negotiations (Grundy 156). She does not directly comment on Wortley's role or performance as ambassador. She often expresses more candor than would be politic in official diplomatic correspondence, though ambassadors are opinionated, but is adamant about her "veracity" in reporting her findings and investing them with the authority she earns through her detailed reportage (22 Aug. 1716;1:256).

To fully illustrate the extent to which Montagu's letters serve as unofficial diplomatic correspondence requires examining the content and sources of dispatches of actual British ambassadors and the methodology used to create their official reports. They were equally responsible for enforcing their country's foreign policy and overseeing its trade with the Ottoman Empire. Sir Robert Sutton was Wortley's predecessor and successor as Ambassador to the Sublime Porte. According to Akdes Numet Kurat, the editor of Sutton's diplomatic correspondence, his dispatches contain little information on the state of economic and social policy, and he virtually ignores reporting on trade issues in the Levant during his embassy (Kurat 10). Kurat reports that Sutton "only goes into detail when matters interest him personally, as for example, in the despatches concerning Russo-Turkish negotiations" (ibid). Sutton provides his dispatches with exactly the foreign policy and military matters that Lady Mary is barred from covering, while she explores the field, making assessments in the areas that he ignores. Montagu touches on more of the overall range of diplomatic concerns in her letters than the previous ambassador had done in his official dispatches; his reports are targeted and detailed assessments of the chief ambassadorial responsibilities.

Percy Smythe, the sixth Viscount Strangford, was the British Ambassador during the



Eastern Crisis of 1821, the initial stage of Greek resistance against Ottoman rule, led by Alexander Ypsilanti. Within a fortnight of Strangford's arrival in Constantinople, Moldavia and Wallachia were plunged into rebellion leading to widespread bloody ethnic strife between the Greeks and Turks (Brewer 2). Seeking strategic information, Strangford "relied on a circle of sources, gleaned intelligence from merchants, travelers, protégés, consuls and *dragomans* (translators); from local and regional Ottoman authorities, including pashas and custom officers...and from other European envoys" (L S 44). As the British Ambassador's wife, Montagu had access to most of these sources: European ambassadors and envoys, merchants and consuls from the Levant Company, which funded the operation of the embassy, and the translators who teach her Turkish and Arabic. She does not speak directly to most Ottoman officials, but she intimately knows their wives. Theophilus C. Prousis, the editor of Strangford's diplomatic correspondence, published in 2010, states that "[b]y relating specific incidents and anecdotes, eyewitness communiques offer insight into the dynamics of European rivalry in the Ottoman Empire during a turbulent time" (L S 12). Lady Mary has privileged access to European Courts; the Holy Roman Emperor pays her particular attention, and she prides herself on her first-hand access to Turkish harems, homes and baths. While Montagu, at times, views her journey as a series of operatic scenes, Prousis states that Lord Strangford produces "rich snapshots...[that] resonate with topical import" (ibid). Montagu's unofficial diplomatic discourse often buttresses the issues of concern to diplomats because they utilize similar sources and methodology. Strangford was an experienced diplomat who had served in four previous embassies. He was a minor literary figure, known for his translation of poetry by Camões, and for being lampooned by Byron in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (Millar 17-8).

The Anglo-Ottoman relationship, developed throughout the Early Modern Period, was formally acknowledged in 1580 (Dimmock 3). The Ottomans provided a needed strategic

balance for the rising English against the more formidable Spanish Catholics (ibid). English merchants were eager to expand trading opportunities, attracted by the tremendous riches and luxury of Ottoman civilization (*Rise* xiv). Though England could lay claim to only a few overseas possessions, the example of the great empire to the East made the possibility of becoming an imperial power a tantalizing idea (ibid). But as attractive as the Ottoman Empire appeared to advocates of the expansion of trade, there were other factions unalterably opposed to its lure. Writers and religious leaders condemned the Ottomans, the embodiment of the Islamic world (*Islam* 19). Nabil Matar states that “in the imaginatively-controlled environment of the theatre and the pulpit, the Britons converted the unbelievers, punished renegades and condemned the Saracens” (*Islam* 20). The character of the renegade, the Christian convert to Islam, became a staple as a villain in sermons and in plays where he “turned Turke” (*Islam* 21). The irony was that renegades in the Middle East and North Africa could find prosperity and social mobility unknown in England (*Islam* 43). Matar traces how the binary opposition of Christianity and Islam in England began to abate in the mid-seventeenth century during the English Civil Wars. When the Catholic became the Other to Protestants, the Muslim was no longer the only heretic (*Islam* 78). Catholics could consider the Protestant sin of regicide as more egregious violation than that of faithfully following Islam (*Islam* 80). Interest in Islam grew when the first English publication of the Qu‘ran in 1649 sold swiftly enough to merit consecutive printings, followed by a second translation printed as the Alcoran in 1688 (*Islam* 80-1). The Ottoman Empire, with its protected status and semi-autonomy for Christians and Jews, could serve as a model for a tolerant and diverse society compared to the fractious relationship between Catholics and Protestants in Europe, while simultaneously attracting envy for its expansive territory (*Islam* 107). Montagu was fiercely English and Anglican; her strong anti-papist sentiments informed her deistic respect for and comfort with Islam. Her writings made her both an interpreter of and an

advocate for Ottoman culture. The scribal circulation and publication of 'Turkish Embassy Letters' represent key developments in the Anglo-Ottoman encounter.

CHAPTER ONE  
WESTERN EUROPE

The journey of the Wortley Montagus through Europe to Constantinople begins with a landing in Brill in Holland, continues to Rotterdam and the Hague, through major German cities to Vienna, where Edward Wortley is tasked to open peace negotiations between the Hapsburgs and the Ottomans (Grundy 122). They travel to Hanover to present Wortley's diplomatic credentials, then return to the Viennese Court before embarking for the Hungarian and Balkan frontiers, including areas that have been newly liberated from Ottoman control. This leg of their travels is chronicled in the first twenty-two letters of the 'Turkish Embassy Letters.'

Montagu begins her unofficial diplomatic assessment of local conditions the very day that she arrives in Holland. In her initial written communication of the 'Turkish Embassy Letters,' Montagu writes from Rotterdam that she is "charm'd with the neatness of this little Town (3 Aug. 1716; 1: 249). She finds pleasure in walking "almost all over the Town...incognito, in [her] slippers, without receiving one spot of Dirt..." (ibid). Although she is not disguised in a veil and local dress, as she will be months later in Constantinople, she considers her walk incognita because she would rather be seen as a strolling shopper than be recognized as the wife of a British ambassador while making an unofficial diplomatic evaluation and trade appraisal of the resources of the city. Edward Wortley's official treaty mediation duties would not begin until they reach Vienna, but Montagu considers herself already on duty, contradicting Isobel Grundy's contention that "Lady Mary had to drop the role of the traveler for that of ambassador's wife, only when she reaches Vienna" (Grundy 122). Wortley's position as ambassador is funded by the Levant Company, a trading company that covered the costs of the embassy in Constantinople and the consuls stationed all through the Ottoman Empire (Laidlaw 1). He reports to both the Secretary of State and the Levant Company and is equally responsible for guiding Britain's

diplomatic and commercial interests in the Ottoman Empire. Lady Mary's letters from Rotterdam begin to evaluate these intertwined ambassadorial issues, stating: "'Tis certain that no Town can be more advantageously situated for Commerce" (3 Aug. 1716; 1: 249). Her list of Rotterdam's trade advantages includes:

7 large Canals on which the merchant ships come up to the very doors of their houses...[and] the shops are warehouses are of a surprizing neatness and Magnificence, fill'd with an incredible Quantity of fine Merchandize, and so much cheaper than we see in England. (ibid)

She notes the busyness, hard work, and cleanliness of the townspeople, contrasting the Dutch national character with the "idle Fellows and Wenches who chuse to be nasty and lazy" in England (ibid). Missing is a description of any scenic highlights of the city typical of a travel narrative; when she uses the word "magnificence," it is to describe the contents of the commercial buildings. In the Hague, "one of the finest Villages in the World," she is impressed by the famous gardens, but fixes her attention on the system of transport and the consumer products for sale, including "the large Canals full of Boats, passing and repassing...the shops for Wafers, cool Liquors, etc.," and the inexpensive "Indian Goods" (5 Aug. 1716; 1: 250-1). The highlight of Nijmegen is the innovative moving bridge that is "large enough to hold hundreds of Men with Horses and Carriages," taking them from one side of the river to the other (13 Aug [1716];1:252). Grundy calls "modern improvements" among "favourite traveller's themes," but infrastructure is also a key component in the regional economic analysis that a diplomat performs (Grundy 119).

Montagu hones her diplomatic perspective at each stop of her journey. By the time Montagu reaches Nuremberg, she has traveled through most of Holland and Germany, having by

then visited Cologne, Frankfurt, and Wurtzberg (22 Aug. 1716;1: 254). She formulates a political theory based on her assessment of the two models of government that she has encountered. “[F]ree Towns,’ self-governing societies of traders,” were well planned, built and maintained (Grundy 121). The cities are prosperous; the stores are filled with abundant wares, and the populace is content. Those cities under the sovereignty of “absolute Princes” are, by contrast, ill-planned, in a state of disrepair, containing as many paupers as citizens; even the elite are gaudy and unkempt (22 Aug. 1716; 1: 254-5). Free towns promote inclusive republican governances; autocratic principalities cater to the aristocracy.

Departing from the parlance of her unofficial diplomatic discourse, Montagu’s literary discourse translates her Whiggish slant on the contrasting governing systems into a feminine metaphor. She imagines two cities:

one under the figure of a handsome clean Dutch Citizen’s wife, and  
 the other like a poor Town Lady of Pleasure, painted and riban’d out  
 in her Head dress, with tarnish’d silver lac’d shoes and a ragged under  
 petticoat, a miserable mixture of Vice and poverty. (22 Aug. 1716; 1: 255)

Although both governing structures are entirely male-dominated, Montagu’s colorful scenario places symbolic females as representative figures for the state. While Montagu, the unofficial diplomat, credits the self governance of the ‘Free Towns’ with establishing flourishing economic and civic environments, the Ambassador’s wife praises the industry of maids, shop women and housewives maintaining their operation, repeatedly lauding the middle class virtues of neatness, cleanliness, and plainness. Montagu is willing to criticize what she views as negative female behavior; she lampoons the luxury and pettiness of court life, particularly the elite women’s obsessions over the ranks and titles of their husbands. The middle class is rewarded with well-stocked shop shelves; the ladies at court, especially in the diplomatic

ranks, are mired in status-seeking infighting. Montagu has little patience for the affectations of court life, reporting that the Saxon ladies at the Elector's palace in Dresden, despite their civility, adopt a "soft little lisp, and a pretty pitty-pat step"; they appear to "think it a mortal sin if they either spoke or moved in a natural manner" (21 Nov. 1716; 1: 282).

In contrast to the elevated policy and military negotiations which are the highest calling of an ambassador, the most official mediations that Montagu chronicles in her unofficial diplomatic discourse involve women rather than states, and the Austrian women both initiate and control the terms. In Vienna, the ladies of the Court choose gallants, or *cicisbeos*, official lovers, who are in effect their second husbands. These relationships last for decades with duties for the gallants separate from those of a husband (20 Sep. 1716; 1: 271). A "Woman of Quality ...always sits in state with great Gravity" between her "Lover and Husband" (*ibid.*). The woman often controls her gallant's fortune (*ibid.*). Montagu attests that these "sub-marriages" have as the "first article of the Treaty" the "establishing [of] the pension" and the "pensions are as well known as their Annual Rents, and yet nobody esteems them the lesse" (*ibid.*). Though the pensions may well be an agreement both legally and socially accepted and approved, Montagu's use of the language of high diplomacy, "the first article of the Treaty," hints that she ironically speculates that the power and agency of Viennese noblewomen is in reality an institutionalized form of adultery that is sanctioned by the state. She softens her opinion on her way home when she analyzes the Genoese version of *cicisbeism*, assuring that "the husband is not to have the Impudence to suppose 'tis any other than pure platonic Freindship" (28 Aug. 1718; 1: 430).

In her writings, Montagu thinks it wise to remain neutral in disputes at court, then decides "for the public good," to assume full diplomatic authority, both in her unofficial discourse and at the Viennese Court, by advocating solutions for its antagonistic rivalries, such as extending the title of Excellency to envoys, elevating them to the level of ambassadors to relieve the infighting

she witnesses (30 Aug. 1716; 1: 257). Here she proves herself a bit of a loose cannon, overstepping her bounds; diplomatic practice would instead recommend strictly recognizing and adhering to established rank and soothing ruffled feathers. Montagu approves of the corrective of Nuremberg's sumptuary laws as an acceptable institutional solution to ostentation. They dictate the allowable dress by rank, acting as a curb on the vanity and wasteful spending of the debt-ridden upper classes, who consume resources for personal display in order to uphold a concept of honor that could instead be used for the benefit of the city (22 Aug. 1716; 1: 255). She urges the adoption of such laws elsewhere, convinced that "[p]lain cloth!" promotes good governance (ibid). Montagu practices such simplicity in her dress on the journey, though not at court. While travelling, she wears an unadorned riding habit considered masculine in style (Grundy 117). Montagu's disdain for excessive ceremony and court protocol hardens her opinion that "absolute sovereignties" permit the concentration of "all the riches and magnificence" at court, depriving the citizenry of participation in prosperity (25 Nov. 1716; 1: 286). Her political discourse may have been heightened in the rewriting of the pseudo-letters after Vienna, observing conditions in the countryside compared to the court.

Montagu has so far resisted engaging in one of the chief diplomatic responsibilities: military analysis. She makes light of military matters in a letter from Leipzig to her sister, the Countess of Mar:

This is a fortify'd Town, but I avoid mentioning fortifications, by being sensible that I know not how to speak of 'em. I am more easy under my ignorance when I reflect that I am sure you'l willingly forgive my Omission, for if I made you the most exact description of the Ravlins [Ravelins] and Bastions I see in my travels, I dare swear you would ask me, What is a Ravlin? And what is a Bastion?



(21 Nov. 1716; 1: 284)

Safe in Saxony, Montagu slights the topic of military defenses, deliberately choosing a feminine and humorous tone. Yet in other matters, she is fully engaged in unofficial diplomatic discourse. She chronicles her purchase of the liveries for the servants at the embassy in Constantinople and provides her requisite analysis of the conditions and operation of the local marketplace: its goods, prices, customs duties, and the level of industriousness of the populace (ibid). She accords equivalent status to the “Merchants” and the “people of Quality” (ibid). Montagu takes for granted her sister’s lack of interest in military architecture and local history; it reinforces Montagu’s own tendency toward neglect of these subjects in her Western European letters in favor of focusing on topics of the most diplomatic interest in the region: the current economic conditions, trade practices, and the customs and manners at the courts of Europe. Military analysis becomes a crucial concern as she leaves Western Europe to enter the Austro-Ottoman frontier, an area of recent armed unrest. Vienna has twice fended off direct assaults by the Ottomans; the outskirts of the city represent the furthest advance west in the Ottoman Empire’s attempt to conquer European territory. Although the final Ottoman siege of Vienna took place thirty-four years prior, in 1683, the Austrians are still wary. Montagu writes: “I am at this time in Vienna, where the Carnival is begun and all sorts of diversions in perpetual practice except that of masqueing, which is never permitted during a War with the Turks” (1 Jan. 1717; 1: 291).

## CHAPTER TWO

## THE FRONTIER

In Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's first letter to Alexander Pope from Vienna, she describes a spectacular performance of Handel's opera, "Alcina," which, she is told, cost thirty thousand pounds to produce. The opera, influenced by Charlemagne's successful battles against Islam, was written in celebration of the Hapsburg victory over the Ottomans at the battle of Peterwardein, fought six months earlier (Grundy 122). Montagu writes:

The Stage was built over a very large Canal, and at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Act divided into parts, discovering the water, on which there immediately came from different parts 2 fleets of little gilded vessels that gave the representation of a Naval fight. It is not easy to imagine the beauty of the Scene, which I took particular Notice of....

(14 Sep. 1716; 1: 262-3)

The faux sea battle in the canal is the only locus of a military engagement, albeit a fictional one, that Montagu encounters during her journey, until she reaches the contested Austro-Ottoman frontier. After traversing it, she writes: "all I see is so new to me, it is like a fresh scene of an opera every day" (1 Apr. 1717; 1: 309). On the frontier, Montagu confronts not only evidence of past martial activity, but also fears of its renewed outbreak. Just as the opera is an artistic "representation" of a battle, Lady Mary uses the familiar letter and her classical education to represent the aftermath of a real one. She is keenly aware of the difference, noting that the enchantment of the opulence and complexity of the operatic performance has not shaken her from the "Discipline of the Church of England," by "the air of these popish Countrys," signaling her commitment to hard-headed realism in the midst of such display (14 Sep. 1716; 1: 262). She can enjoy and reflect on the hubristic operatic celebration just as she will later choose

relevant and measured passages from poetry to represent the battlegrounds she encounters. Lowenthal maintains that Montagu reveals in her letters “a series of performative selves...the identities configured through varying styles” (10). In the military scenes of her frontier letters, Lady Mary varies not only the literary styles, but the genres, of her version of diplomatic discourse within her travel narrative when she represents the military scenes in her frontier letters. She provides both a straightforward unofficial diplomatic record of the progress of the official embassy, comparable to dispatches sent by British ambassadors, and a literary version of some of the material that reflects the imagination of a writer, who can see the world alternately with an operatic or an increasingly masculine empirical gaze.

Lady Mary’s penultimate letter before venturing into the intermittent battleground of the Austro-Ottoman frontier, written to her sister, Lady Mar, recounts Montagu’s conversation with Prince Eugene of Savoy, the victorious General of the Hapsburg Austrian forces, about the dangers of her upcoming journey. She never mentions military matters, displacing any fear of threat from attack onto anxiety about the weather because “the cold is so violent many have been kill’d by it. I own these terrors have made a deep impression on my mind because I believe he tells me things truly as they are, and nobody can be better inform’d of them” (16 Jan. 1717; 1: 95). Montagu’s use of the words “violent” and “kill’d,” in reference to weather, rather than armed conflict, while speaking to the best “inform’d” military leader intimates, that if she feels a fuller range of “terrors,” she chooses not to articulate them, leaving the issue of her state of fear unresolved. Her partial suppression of it indicates her shift to a more pronounced male voice as she prepares to cross a potential battle zone, as the diplomatic mission enters a more challenging phase. Prince Eugene’s last victory at the Battle of Peterwardein established a relative peace.

In Montagu’s brief, final letter from Vienna, written to Alexander Pope the day before her departure to the frontier, she makes a rhetorical shift within her literary imitation of

diplomatic discourse by framing her farewell as the advent of an adventure tale, though the danger is lessened by traveling with a large Austrian guard troop in tow. Addressing Pope, she treats with bravado issues that she had described with trepidation the previous day in her letter to Lady Mar:

I have not time to answer your Letter, being in all the hurry of preparing for my Journey, but I think I ought to bid Adieu to my friends with the same Solemnity as if I was going to mount a breach, at least if I am to beleive [sic] the Information of the people here, who denounce all sort of Terrors to me; and indeed the Weather is at present such as very few set out in, I am threaten'd at the same time with being froze to death, bury'd in the Snow, and taken by the Tartars who ravage that part of Hungary I am to passe. 'Tis true we shall have a considerable Escorte, so that possibly I may be diverted with a new Scene by finding my selfe in the midst of Battle. How my adventures will conclude I leave entirely to Providence, if comically, you shall hear of them. (16 Jan. 1717; 1: 304)

Montagu's lively tone anticipates that she could be comically diverted by a diversion into a war zone, though it is partially a performance for Pope's entertainment; their relationship is based on "wit and raillery" (14 Sep. 1716; 1: 263). She later uses the words "diverting" and "adventure" in yet another context, writing to Lady Mar that she does not "mention" her recent childbirth as "one of my diverting adventures" (10 Mar. 1718; 1: 380). The description of enduring hardship on the road is a popular and ubiquitous convention in travel literature, but Montagu eschews it unless real peril looms, such as the later episode in which she crosses the slippery Alps, while being carried in a chair (25 Sep. 1718; 1: 435). Her current meteorological fears prove unfounded,

and the peace terms hold. Her slightly satirical farewell to Pope speculates on her possible “adventures” on the frontier, perhaps “with a new Scene ...in the midst of Battle,” including the possibility of being “taken by the Tartars who ravage that part of Hungary” (16 Jan. 1717; 1: 304). Presumably, she also fears being ravished herself, though she does not approach even broaching the topic with Prince Eugene. Montagu defends herself by trusting that following diplomatic protocol offers protection, and by strengthening her operatic, literary and masculine gazes. If what she views on the road is comparable to scenes from operas, then what she sees cannot harm her. Lowenthal argues that “[w]hen [Montagu] expresses her own fears concerning the possible dangers along the road, she romantically enhances her depictions of the threatening countryside, but she assigns herself the part, not of the virtuous heroine, but the courageous *hero*” (53). Montagu infuses a literary context into her letters whenever she writes to Pope.

Montagu’s narrative strategy in her unofficial diplomatic discourse takes an abrupt turn once out of the safe haven of Vienna, as she approaches the frontier, preparing to cross the latest demarcation of the Ottoman border. Edward Wortley’s appointment as the mediator of the negotiations in the Austro-Ottoman War is superseded by his embassy; as he assumes his full authority as Ambassador, Montagu assumes greater authority, expertise and independence in her unofficial diplomatic discourse, even taking on the role of historian. Her letter to Lady Mar, dated January 30, 1717, follows a two week odyssey to the East; it is a defining document as Montagu, in her self-appointed role as unofficial diplomat, elucidates her open and receptive, even Turkophilic, views on the history, policies and character of the Ottomans. Montagu, for the first time, uses expert sources rather than relying solely on her own impressions and observations, in order to give a comprehensive, though opinionated, account of the history and changing conditions on the frontier. Referring to the letter’s contents as “little scraps of the history of the Towns I have pass’d through,” Montagu first provides a detailed history of the

armed conflict and fluctuating state of Austro-Turkish relations in the town of Raab, throughout the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. She begins with the current state of its fortifications (30 Jan. 1717; 1: 298-9). It is a dispassionate retelling; she uses the word “stratagem,” for an incident in which the Turks attempt to outwit the local Hungarians, but the Turks are not portrayed as devious or cunning for doing so (ibid). She continues her diplomatic analysis through numerous towns, devoting the most attention to Buda, where the formerly beautiful royal palace is in ruins. Only the fortifications and the governor’s residence have been restored. The Governor tells her not the size of his population, but now many fighting men he has—twelve thousand (30 Jan. 1717; 1: 299-300). She chronicles all twelve occasions on which Buda changed hands over the previous two centuries. Montagu sympathizes with the Hungarians, yet still regrets the loss of Ottoman prosperity after the battles; Adam and Fodowar were “both considerable Towns when in the hands of the Turks. They are now quite ruin’d; only the remains of some Turkish towers shew something of what they had been...[and] Esseek...was a Town of great Trade, very rich and populous when in the hands of the Turks” (30 Jan. 1717; 1: 301).

Montagu rarely comments on Wortley’s performance of his duties in her unofficial diplomatic discourse, but there is one subject that she always raises: the proper and honest handling of ambassadorial expenses. She assures:

The few people that inhabit Hungary live easily enough. They have no money, but the woods and the plains afford them provision in great Abundance. They were order’d to give us all things necessary, even what horses we pleas’d to demand, Gratis, but Mr. W[ortley] would not oppress the poor country people by makeing use of this order, and allways paid them the full worth of what we had from ’em. They were so surpriz’d at this unexpected Generosity...(30 Jan 1717; 1:301)

Montagu's general lack of hostility to the Ottomans, in her unofficial diplomatic discourse, owes much of its origin to her antipathy to Catholicism, partially exacerbated by the repugnance she feels while gazing at relics in European Cathedrals (30 Aug. 1716; 1: 258). Just as she champions the often Protestant Free Towns and republics over the largely Catholic princely cities, Montagu holds the Jesuits more responsible for the ravaged Hungarian countryside than the Turks. In her letter of January 30, 1717 to Lady Mar, Montagu writes:

travelling...through the finest plains in the world...[that are] extreme  
fruitfull, but for the most part desert and uncultivated, laid waste by  
the long war between the Turk and the Emperour, and the more cruel  
civil War occasion'd by the barbarous persecution of the protestant  
Religion by the Emperour Leopold. That Prince has left behind him  
the character of a most extraordinary Piety and was naturally of a  
mild mercifull temper, but putting his conscience into the hands of a  
Jesuit, he was more cruel and treacherous to his poor Hungarian  
Subjects than ever Turk has been to the Christians, breaking without  
scrupule his Coronation oath and his faith solemnly given in many  
public Treatys. Indeed nothing can be more melancholy than travelling  
through Hungary, reflecting on the former flourishing state of that  
Kingdom and seeing such a noble spot of Earth allmost uninhabited.

(30 Jan. 1717; 1: 299)

Earlier, Montagu wonders: “[i]f the womanly spirit of Contradiction that works in me,” is responsible for “so much Zeal against popery in [my] Heart” (1 Oct. 1716; 1: 277-8). There is much critical consensus that by deeming Catholicism the Other because of her steadfast attachment to Anglicanism, and to Protestantism in general, she allows the Ottomans and the

Muslims to enjoy a relative equivalence to her own Protestant culture, but there is disagreement as to the depth and sincerity of her commitment to it. Cynthia Lowenthal sees the use of the *Other* positively, as an escape from “relying on European customs as the sole measure of appropriate standards because it provides a leveling of differences” (89). Billie Melman claims that Montagu is only “latitudinarian” at her own convenience because “her praise of Islam is rather conventional and rhetorical” for “[p]raise of the Turks was a stick which Protestants-well before the Enlightenment-used to beat Catholic intolerance” (94). Aravamudan is even more skeptical; he sees Montagu as accepting relativism as a replacement for ethnocentrism but without truly accepting the responsibility for it (n.p.). But Montagu could also deem it her diplomatic duty, for her unofficial diplomatic discourse allows her to make the leap to relative equivalence with the Muslim Ottomans as she approaches the border. As *Ambassadress*, her discourse with and about the Ottomans requires openness and receptivity to succeed, and by her ability to recognize their achievements she sees the possibilities and accomplishments that were lost in the war zone, not just the devastation or the vanquishing of the enemy. In the Balkans and Constantinople, she freely extends both praise and criticism, offering an *apologia* for Turkish slavery, chastisement for the reticence of the Sultan, and condemnation for the janissaries. Montagu’s use of intemperate language about the Catholic Emperor Leopold matches the expression in selected diplomatic dispatches. Though not a common example from his correspondence, the Turkophobic Sir Robert Sutton’s assessment of Sultan Ahmed III is harsh, for “as far as we can know his character, [it] is exceedingly covetous, haughty, and ambitious. He is hasty, violent and cruel, but variable and unsteady” (Kurat 2).

In a letter to Lady Mar, written from the last Austrian outpost, Montagu praises their reception by the garrison, and the splendid entertainment offered by the commandant and his officers (16 Jan. 1717; 1: 295). But heading for the village that will serve as the rendezvous point



with the Turkish convoy, Lady Mary writes to Pope portraying the Holy Roman Emperor's troops more as bandits than as disciplined military men. Montagu writes: "these people, but to say the truth, they are rather plunderers than soldiers, having no pay and being oblig'd to furnish their own Arms and horses. They rather look like Vagabond Gypsies or stout beggars than Troops" (12 Feb. 1717; 1: 304). Ambassadors were ever vigilant in noting any unrest in the ranks as a bellwether to further trouble at the top. Montagu has the diplomatic insight to be cognizant that the state's failure to pay troops can lead to anarchy. She identifies the soldiers as "this race of Creatures... really of the Greek Church," with "their extreme Ignorance...letting their Hair and beards grow inviolate," who "make exactly the figure of the Indian Bramins" (12 Feb. 1717; 1: 304). Montagu's assessments of the Orthodox reveal her religious relativism; she equivocates between condemning them, along with Catholics, and according them the deistic equivalence and tolerance that she extends to Muslims. In this case, Montagu raises issues of race and class now that she is no longer under the protection of the officers of the Hungarian garrison, but rather the foot soldiers upon whom their lives and the integrity of Wortley's embassy depend. Montagu's initial reaction of confusion, even disdain, is indicative of Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the "contact zone," but each party respects the other's station (Pratt 4). The soldiers are not relegated to the status of the Other, even though they appear strange to her; she immediately recalibrates into her role as the dispenser of unofficial diplomatic discourse and gives a few, impartial lines on the practices of Greek rites. Montagu uses Brahman as a signifier of ethnicity, rather than elite status within a social hierarchy. She cites no actual incident of misbehavior on the part of the soldiers towards her or her husband; in her report during "this little digression," Lady Mary's discourse indicates uneasiness rather than fear (12 Feb. 1717; 1: 304-5).

A key letter dated February 12, 1717, written to Alexander Pope from Belgrade, tracing

the Wortley Montagu's crossing from Austrian to Ottoman-ruled territory, is pared down to its essential narrative of diplomatic discourse, while stylistically fulfilling the function of the literary genre as travel narrative. It is written not to Pope, the satirist and wit, as Montagu's previous letter to him had been, but to Pope, the translator of the *Iliad*; the first volume of his translation was published in 1715, the year that Montagu and Pope met (Grundy 92). Lady Mary's retelling of her frontier saga adopts the trajectory of a minor epic, as slightly Dantesque as it is marginally Homeric. Montagu "pass'd over the feilds of Carlowitz, where the last great Victory was obtain'd by Prince Eugene over the Turks" (12 Feb. 1717; 1: 305). The Battle of Peterwardein, fought six months before the Wortley Montagus arrived, was the decisive Hapsburg victory that permanently halted further Ottoman incursion into Austrian territory (12 Feb. 1717; 1: 305). Montagu witnesses the battlefield still littered with the detritus of fierce fighting:

The marks of that Glorious bloody day are yet recent, the feild being strew'd with the Skulls and Carcases of unbury'd men, horses and camels. I could not look without horror on such numbers of mangled humane bodies, and refflect on the Injustice of War that makes murther not only necessary but meritorious. Nothing seems to me a plainer prooffe of the irrationality of Mankind (whatever fine claims we pretend to Reason) than rage with which they contest for small spot of Ground, when such vast parts of fruitfull Earth lye quite uninhabited. 'Tis true, Custom has now made it unavoidable, but can there be a greater demonstration of want of reason than a Custom being firmly establish'd so plainly contrary to the Interest of Man in General? I am a good deal inclin'd to believe Mr. Hobbs that the State of

Nature is a State of War, but thence I conclude Humane Nature not rational, if the word reason means common sense, as I suppose it does. I have a great many admirable arguments to support this refflexion, but I won't trouble you with 'em but return in a plain stile to the History of my travels. (12 Feb. 1717; 1: 305)

Despite the anti-war sentiments she espouses beginning in the second line of her description of the battlefield, her reference to that “Glorious bloody day” is not ironic; as a European Christian attached to the British Ambassador, she must favor an Austrian victory. But the triumphant tone in which three weeks earlier in Vienna she had compared Prince Eugene of Savoy to Hercules, gives way immediately to a consideration of the war's human costs (16 Jan. 1717; 1: 293). She gazes with horror because the “numbers of mangled humane bodies” could total thirty thousand and some of the mangling is due to impalement (Grundy 132). Montagu's vehemence on the injustice of war is due not only to wrenching evidence of the battle, but to the ongoing fraying of the settlement brokered because of it. The Treaty of Karlowitz defined the current state of the Austro-Ottoman relationship; the Turks lost considerable territory in Central Europe when it was ratified in 1699. Karlowitz marks a key moment in the decline of Ottoman power (Stavrianos *Balkans* 103). Because further hostilities had arisen, Edward Wortley had been mediating Austro-Ottoman negotiations since arriving in Vienna. Montagu ruminates on the Hobbesian “miserable condition of Warre,” not only for reasons of compassion and philosophical inquiry, but because of the gravity of her husband's diplomatic responsibilities (Hobbes 117). Wortley would ultimately fail and be replaced as British Ambassador because the Hapsburgs considered his territorial concessions to the Ottomans to be too generous and he is punished for his failure to anticipate future Austrian successes against the Turks (Grundy 155-6).

Lady Mary's unofficial diplomatic dispatch on the Peterwardein battlefield articulates

philosophical issues beyond the usual scope of diplomatic discourse. Melman notes how “Montagu the narrator changes from the female traveler, the collector of information and storyteller, to the *philosophical traveller...*” (92). Her response to Peterwardein is to write an essay within a letter to Alexander Pope, which employs both Hobbes’s political philosophy and references to classical literature to explore the human cost of war, in addition to serving as a battlefield report. She bears witness, gazing at the battlefield and sees: “the field being strewed with the skulls and carcasses of unburied men, horses and camels” (12 Feb. 1717; 1: 305). Book One of Pope’s translation of the *Iliad*, published two years earlier, contains the lines: “The souls of mighty chiefs untimely slain/Whose limbs unburied on the naked shore/Devouring dogs and hungry vultures tore” (4-6). Thomas Hobbes’ translation of the same passage of the first book of the *Iliad*, published in 1675, reads: “what Souls/Of Heroes down to *Erebus* it sent/Leaving their bodies unto dogs and fowls” (2-4). Montagu’s literary imitation of diplomatic discourse, based on her eyewitness testimony, intersects with the expression and themes of epic poetry. Rather than romanticizing the battle with small golden ships, she endows the actual battlefield with the stature of classical literature, not to celebrate war, but to acknowledge the magnitude of the human toll it exacted at Peterwardein, and throughout history. Her words resonate not only with a classically trained male readership, but with the wide audience for Pope’s Homeric translation. In her next letter to Pope, sent from Adrianople, she writes that she has “read over your Homer” and does not “wonder to find more remains here of an Age so distant than is to be found in any other Country” (1 Apr. 1717; 1: 332). Diplomats share the horror of the atrocities they view in their dispatches; Ambassador Strangford’s correspondence is an unending litany of bloody ethnic attacks and retribution, but Montagu has the luxury of fully choosing literary and political expressions for her reaction to the shock of the battlefield.

Lady Mary resumes her unofficial diplomatic dispatch with an analytical account of the

transition to Ottoman territory. The Wortley Montagus reach Betsko, the village where the Austrian troops are to be exchanged for Janissaries, the troops of the Ottoman Army. She admits: “I was very uneasy till they were parted, fearing some quarrel might arise notwithstanding the parole given,” especially since it was negotiated that each side was to send an equal number of troops, but the Ottomans have sent a larger force (12 Jan. 1717; 1: 305). Montagu is justified in her uneasiness. According to Gerald MacLean, the diplomatic journey could be “the start of dangers and exciting adventures in parts of the world where formal agreements between Istanbul and London counted for very little: robbery, captivity, being taken for a spy were all very real dangers” (*Rise* xvi). The Wortley Montagus are taken to Belgrade, which has been temporarily retaken by the Ottomans from the Austrians. Her odyssey through unprotected territory ends safely as the rest of her journey traverses land fully in control of the Ottomans, but she chronicles ample first and second-hand reportage of incidents of upheaval due to the rampant misbehavior of the janissaries. Sending accounts evaluating internal unrest is one of the prime components of an ambassador’s diplomatic dispatches. Immediately upon arrival in Belgrade, Montagu pens a lengthy second-hand account of a mutiny in the ranks of the local garrison connected to Turkish plundering incursions along the Austrian frontier. She painstakingly examines the rumors, claims, and the aftermath of several different versions of the recent mutiny at the local garrison, which ended when the troops “immediately fell upon [the Bassa] with their Scimitars (without waiting the sentence of their Heads of Law) and in a few moments cut him to pieces” (12 Feb. 1717; 1: 307). With this account, Montagu returns to the model of a diplomatic dispatch; if sent by an ambassador, it would serve its purpose by providing a thorough assessment of a worrying topical event that could erupt into a major crisis or power shift that would cause concern at the Foreign Office.

Montagu’s letter takes an abrupt turn from the topical to the literary and historical as she

immerses herself in Ottoman and Muslim life (ibid). She has one of the most important exchanges in her Anglo-Ottoman encounter in Belgrade; the rest of the letter is devoted to her daily conversations with her host, Achmet-Beg, a scholarly, literary Ottoman nobleman with whom she discusses many cultural issues, including the status of women (12 Feb. 1717; 1: 307-8). Melman describes their month-long discourse as “a *rational* exchange” between “an enlightened Christian and an equally enlightened Muslim” (92). Montagu reorients her gaze to access fully both masculine and feminine views, a discourse she returns to repeatedly throughout her tenure in the Ottoman Empire. Though a seeming departure from traditional diplomatic discourse, Montagu’s auxiliary role as an ambassador’s wife allows her to access more fully the dynamics of Ottoman society, religion and culture as a whole.

One of the most curious aspects of Montagu’s sojourn in the Balkans is how often it is overlooked by writers and historians. From Belgrade, she writes the crucial letter dated February 12, 1717 to Alexander Pope with the description of the battlefield at Peterwardein, the garrison mutiny, and her many conversations with the effendi Achmet Beg. It is bookended by four additional Balkan letters, including one to the Princess of Wales.

With the exception of Montagu’s discourse with Achmet Beg, which is seen by a number of writers as a key moment in her correspondence, the Balkan elements of her travel narrative have been largely ignored. By contrast, the ‘Turkish Embassy Letters’ is widely read as a literary, historical, feminist and even a popular text on the Ottoman Empire, Turkey and Istanbul. On September 14, 2011, the travel section of the *Guardian* ran a feature by Malcolm Burgess on the top ten books on Istanbul for the literate traveler, taken from the website “the city-lit café.” The ‘Turkish Embassy Letters’ is included along with works by such noted Turkish authors as Orhan Pamuk and Yashar Kemal, as well as the contemporary writers anthologized in *Istanbul Noir*. But Montagu’s writing on the Balkans goes unmentioned in such classics as

Rebecca West's *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, the masterly epic of West's journey through Yugoslavia. L.S. Stavrianos' authoritative and comprehensive history, *The Balkans Since 1453* cites only Montagu's description of the role of the Jews in Constantinople in a section on non-Muslims in Ottoman institutions (90). In *The Balkans: A Short History*, Mark Mazower's few references to Lady Mary follow her nowhere in Europe outside of Thrace. In his article, "Memoirs of Conflict: British Women Travellers in the Balkans," Andrew Hammond claims that women travel writers in the region chiefly chronicled states of unrest or war as a result of the legacy of Ottoman rule; a key feature of their accounts is the empathetic portrayal of the oppressed condition of the local populations (Hammond, n.p.). Hammond does not mention Montagu in the article, even though she established the Balkans as a locus for British women's travel writing, most notably in her multiple moving accounts of the pillaging of Serbian villages by the Ottoman infantry known as the Janissary Corps. Aravamudan includes the Balkans as a stage of Montagu's journey, but his account moves from Vienna to Turkish matters without focusing on it (n.p.). Even when historians and critics do mention Montagu, they miss the primacy of her portrayal. In a *New York Times* article, titled: "Rebecca West: This Time, Let's Listen," written at the beginning of the dissolution of the state of Yugoslavia in 1991, Larry Wolff suggests that Montagu found Belgrade "an Ottoman fortress, entirely of the Orient," referring to her extended, illuminating discussions on Turkish and Muslim culture with Achmet Beg. Yet the other significant focus of the unofficial diplomatic discourse within her Belgrade letters is her awareness that the Ottoman fortress of the Balkans is crumbling. She writes to Pope: "You may imagine I cannot be very easy in a Town which is really under the Government of an Insolent Soldiery" (12 Feb. 1717; 1: 307). Belgrade would fall to the Hapsburgs six months after Montagu's visit. Lady Mary's total immersion in the Orient takes place in the stability of Sofia, at the Turkish bath, the one locus in Eastern Europe where her presence is widely

acknowledged by most critics.

In his book, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, Larry Wolff claims that the concept of early eighteenth century Eastern Europe, the lands between the Holy Roman and Ottoman empires, “whose possession lay in the balance,” was “vague and implicit.” (41). Western Europeans saw the most salient dichotomy in the Ottoman dominated territories of Eastern Europe, not in the competition between Christianity and Islam, but between “primitive backwardness and enlightened civilization” (Wolff 42). Montagu refers to the Serbs as Rascians, an outdated but not pejorative medieval term, demonstrating a hazy sense of identity not necessarily connected to Serbia (ibid). Wolff claims that Lady Mary considers herself in the Orient in Belgrade and Sofia, cities that have been under Ottoman control for several centuries, “while Eastern Europe manifested itself incidentally along the way in dirt huts and tawny complexions” (43). But Wolff barely acknowledges the disruptive incidents that are not at all incidental, that most bring the Balkans into sharp relief for Montagu and her readers: the despoiling of the Serbian villages by the janissaries. Montagu’s literary imitation of diplomatic discourse reaches its peak in her Balkan letters when she writes of the military encounters and upheavals occurring during the imperial clash in Eastern Europe. Wolff notes only the anguish of the Wortley Montagu’s transporters and drivers at the janissaries’ refusal to reimburse the workmen for the heavy costs of the horses and wagons that carry the British Ambassador’s party through the Balkans. Lady Mary also writes movingly of the losses incurred by the inhabitants of the Balkan towns, villages and countryside during this journey (Wolff 165). By the end of the eighteenth century, the idea of Eastern Europe would coincide with the desire to drive the Ottomans out of most of the continent altogether (Wolff 43). Wolff only partially acknowledges that Montagu was able to chronicle, in her unofficial diplomatic discourse on the frontier, the nascent stage of this process (ibid).



In her final segment of her frontier Balkan correspondence, Montagu writes to Caroline of Anspach, Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales, and the Abbé Conti in letters dated April 1, 1717; each missive features further depredations by the janissaries, among other matters, but her unofficial diplomatic discourse differs in these two letters in regards to status, gender, and style. Of the five letters with this date, theirs are the only two that cover the conditions in the Balkans. The letter between Caroline's and Conti's, to the anonymous Lady--, is Montagu's most famous, depicting the scene of women in the Turkish bath in Sofia. Its languid portrayal of women's leisure is bookended by letters describing the mayhem and looting of Serbian villages and farms by the janissaries. Montagu's rare awkward moment as an unofficial diplomat is her clumsy salutation to the Princess of Wales; ambassadors are masters of eloquent obsequiousness in their official correspondence, particularly in their greetings. The letter to the Princess of Wales starts stiltedly; Montagu begins with exaggerated boasting about the exclusivity of her journey, and deferential attestation to Wortley's ambassadorial diligence (Halsband, 310). Much of this framing rhetoric may be standard protocol for royalty, but Montagu is also anxious that her husband not be blamed for any diplomatic mishaps, and the letter needs to convince the Princess of Wales of the trustworthiness of Lady Mary's judgment on substantive matters. Caroline would be a future key royal ally to Montagu (Worsley 228-9). Lady Mary relates the troubled state of the Serbian countryside, harassed and attacked by both the outlaws and the janissaries:

We cross'd the Desarts of Servia almost quite overgrown with Wood, tho a Country naturally fertile and the Inhabitants industrious, but the Oppression of the peasants is so great that they are forc'd to abandon their Houses and neglect their Tillage, all they have being a prey to the Janizarys whenever they please to seize upon it. We had a guard of 500 of 'em, and I was almost in tears every day to see their insolencies in the poor villages through which we pass'd. (1 Apr. 1717; 1: 310)

The janissaries were the weapon that allowed the Ottomans to conquer vast territories in Eastern Europe; the Ottoman standing army, under the direct command of the Sultan, was the first in Europe (Inalcik 11). Formed originally with prisoners of war, the Janissary units in the provinces had a century earlier been mostly composed of military slaves, native to the area, who, in effect, were plundering their own people (Inalcik 18). Up to twenty percent of the Christian children in Balkans Europe were taken every five years in the child levy for mandatory life service in the Janissary Corps (Stavrianos *Balkans* 39). This practice had been discontinued by the time of Montagu's journey. In her letter to the Princess of Wales, Montagu provides a short travelogue on the climate, fertility, and the bounty of the wine vintage before the subject of the janissaries once again intrudes. The targets of their plunder include even Wortley's transporters:

The happiness of this Plenty is Scarse perceiv'd by the oppress'd people. I saw here a new Occasion for my compassion, the wretches that had provided 20 Waggons for our Baggage from Belgrade hither or a certain hire, being all sent back without payment, some of their Horses lam'd and others kill'd without any satisfaction made for 'em. The poor fellows came round the House weeping and tearing their Hair and beards in the most pitifull manner without getting any thing but drubs from insolent Soldeirs. I cannot express to your Royal Highness how much I was mov'd at this Scene. I would have paid them the money out of my Heart, but it had been only giving so much to the Aga (the commander of the Janissary Corps), who would have taken it from them without any remorse. (1 Apr. 1717; 1: 311)

Montagu's insistence that Wortley always covers the travel expenses of the embassy no longer holds once in Turkish territory—increasing evidence, along with the anarchic behavior of the janissaries, that the frontier is unstable, authority having broken down. Having promised the Princess an amusing letter, Montagu ends with a travelogue and an assurance that the terrain in England, ruled by a government and a king that loves liberty, is most desirable. Following a litany of janissary misbehavior, Montagu's appreciation of British government and its king is awkwardly stated, but must be sincerely felt. Her letter written the same day to Mrs. Frances

Hewett, an old friend, is a typical charming and light familiar letter, consisting only of pleasantries (1 Apr. 1717; 1: 309). In contrast, the Princess of Wales receives a letter of some gravity and diplomatic detail.

The Princess of Wales was a patron to writers and intellectuals alike, but the Abbé Antonio Conti far outstrips her in his grasp and reach of knowledge (Grundy 84). Conti, a Venetian nobleman, who pursues mathematics, science, philosophy and literature, receives Montagu's last significant frontier letter (Grundy 89). He and Alexander Pope are her only identified male correspondents, and the frontier letters written to them focus on the same two topics: the anarchy of the janissaries and Montagu's discussions with Achmet Beg. In each of the letters to them, she extends the boundaries of her literary imitation of diplomatic discourse as she continues to establish her expert authority. Lady Mary begins her narrative of the janissaries in the same locus as she had with the Princess of Wales:

The desert woods of Servia are the common refuge of Theeves who rob 50 in a company, that we had need of all of our Guards to secure us, and the villagers so poor that only force could extort from them necessary provisions. Indeed the Janizarys had no mercy on their poverty, killing all the poultry and sheep they could find without asking who they belong'd to, while the wretched owners durst not put in their claim for fear of being beaten. Lambs just fall'n, Geese and Turkeys big with Egg: all massacred without distinction. I fancy'd I heard the complaints of Moelibeus for the Hope of his flock. When the bassas travel 'tis yet worse. Those Oppressors are not content with eating all that is to be eaten belonging to the peasants; after they have cram'd themselves and their numerous retinue, they have the impudence to exact what they call Teeth-money, a contribution for the use of their teeth, worn with doing them the Honnour of devouring their meat. This is a litteral known Truth, however extravagant it seems, and such is the natural corruption of a Military Government, their religion not allowing of this barbarity no more than does ours. (1 Apr. 1717; 1: 316)

Both of the frontier letters concerning the janissaries, written to the Princess of Wales and the Abbé Conti, are hybrids; the flexibility of unofficial diplomatic discourse that conveys information is combined with literary expression that enhances Montagu's authority. The version written to the Princess is personal, compassionate, even heart-wrenching, yet it still retains the elements of simple descriptive power and empirical content that would be included in a diplomatic dispatch. The scene in which "[t]he poor fellows came round the House weeping and tearing their Hair and beards in the most pitifull manner without getting any thing but drubs from the insolent Soldeirs," reads simultaneously as overwrought opera with biblical overtones and heartbreaking realism (1 Apr. 1717; 1: 311). It is an emotional letter written by a woman to a woman, but with content that would be equally valid for its diplomatic value to the Secretary of State. Conti receives a letter on the same topic that is more literary, philosophical, political, violent and gendered. It begins with a forest filled with bands of thieves. The janissaries are murderers without mercy, though animals, not humans, are the victims, as they are "killing all the poultry and sheep they could find" (1 Apr. 1717; 1: 316). Montagu pens the tragic line: "Lambs just fall'n, Geese and Turkeys big with Egg: all massacre'd without distinction!" (ibid). If composed by a man, or in a different setting under other circumstances, one would assume the line to be mock-heroic, for Montagu is a satirist as well as a poet, but here she is in earnest. Lady Mary is the mother of a three-year-old son; she gazes at the carnage of a major battlefield six weeks before this line is composed. She writes about the death of the lambs and egg-bearing barnyard fowl as an elegiac metaphor for the mangled bodies she has seen at the battlefield at Peterwardein, while mourning as well for the loss of the livestock, so desperately needed by their "wretched owners" (ibid). The massacre of the "fall'n" lambs and the "Geese and Turkeys big with Egg" is memorialized as a line of female epic war poetry. In the next line of her letter, Montagu's "fancy" that she "heard the complaints of Moelibeus for the Hope of his flock," (ibid) recalls the portentous birth of lambs in Virgil's "First Eclogue":

I envy not your fortune, but admire  
 That, while the raging sword and wasteful fire  
 Destroy the wretched neighborhood around,  
 No hostile arms approach your happy ground.

Far diff'rent is my fate: my feeble goats  
 With pains I drive from their forsaken cotes  
 And this, you see, I scarcely drag along,  
 Who, yeaning, on the rocks has left her young;  
 The hope and promise of my falling fold.  
 (13-21)

Montagu's maternal feelings and concern for the welfare of the villagers prompt her to recall Virgil, just as the battlefield brought the *Iliad* to her mind. The fruits of her classical education, pursued on her own, surface in her correspondence with Pope and Conti, heightening her literary authority in letters that also serve as dispatches from the volatile homefront. Her story of the Bassas (Pashas) extorting "Teeth-money, a contribution for the use of their teeth, worn with doing [the peasants] the Honour of devouring their meat" becomes a legendary tale of theft that she immortalizes with biting irony, showing the officers behaving even more brazenly than the men, while she offers it as proof of "the natural corruption of a Military Government" (1 Apr. 1717; 1: 316). This sort of brief illustrative anecdote of execrable conduct or practice that highlights an event, lesson or belief, deftly told, is as relevant and meaningful an element of the diplomatic dispatch, as it is of the travel narrative. "Teeth-money" is a term first recorded in the papers of Sir John Finch, British Ambassador to the Sublime Porte from 1674 to 1681 (Abbott 91). G.F. Abbot's history of Finch's embassy, *Under the Turk in Constantinople*, claims that the idea of "teeth-money," in Turkish "*(dishe parassi)*," originated in polite society as a gift that hosts bestowed upon their guests; only later did it become a "degrading imposition" (394). Abbot describes Finch travelling to Court in the Sultan's retinue through Thracian villages in 1675; the progress could bear "a strong resemblance to a hostile invasion...extorting the necessary provisions from the Greeks" (91). The peasants took such precautions as making "their doors just big enough for a man to creep in at, so the distinguished travellers might, at least, not be able to use their houses as stables" (Abbot 92). Abbot avers that the Sultan's progress was a delightful experience because for the Ottoman officials "[a]ll this was in strict accord with the custom of the country" (ibid). To Montagu, far more in danger in the volatile Balkans, it was a shockingly unfair imposition by soldiers on people who had nothing to spare. To Finch, in

peaceful Thrace, the progress was a routine but heavy-handed demand for hospitality for the Sultan and his Pashas. Abbot's interpretation, written in 1920, differs from Montagu's account, but a brief section of it may have been influenced by hers.

Montagu's final contention in her paragraph on the janissaries, that Islam eschews "barbarity" just as Christianity does, leads her to extend her unofficial diplomatic discourse with Conti by recounting her wide ranging conversations with Ahmet Beg, discussed earlier in a letter to Pope (1 Apr. 1717; 1: 316). She presents in her "long digression," her most thorough unofficial diplomatic dispatch, an in-depth and nuanced analysis of the overall role of scholarship in Ottoman governing institutions and society: how the scholarly elite control and operate the legal, religious and administrative institutions, and the relative distribution of governing and financial power between the court, the scholarly elite and the military (1 Apr. 1717; 1: 316-7). She comments on Ottoman inheritance law. As Montagu and Achmet Beg discussed religion and morality thoroughly, she outlined the dichotomy between Anglicanism and Catholicism for him, and he explained doctrinal differences in the various branches and sects of Islam to her. She accepts that deism accounts for the shared mystery of different faiths and that his praise of the Qu'ran is of more value than a Christian detractor's malice (1 Apr. 1717; 1: 318). Achmet Beg's willingness to flout certain religious regulations must have appealed to Conti, a skeptic, and an Abbé no longer in orders (Grundy 89). Montagu finishes her literary and unofficial diplomatic discourse with a travelogue on antiquities, during which she refocuses her gaze from the past to the present long enough to vouch for the structural soundness of every Ottoman bridge she has crossed from Belgrade to Adrianople (1 Apr. 1717; 1: 320). The extent of Montagu's discourse with Conti exceeds the variety and level of topics in most diplomatic dispatches, but she demonstrates the mastery of the material that a diplomat would require. Lady Mary continues to expand the scope and depth of a version of the eighteenth century woman's familiar letter; her substantive correspondence with the Abbé Conti is entirely free of the obligatory "tittle tattle" that she deplored in Madame de Séveigné's compositions (Lowenthal 2).

In her letter to the Abbé Conti, Montagu expresses full authoritative command of her methodology in constructing her travel narrative and unofficial diplomatic discourse. She writes:

“I can assure you that the desire I have to oblige you to the utmost of my power has made me very diligent in my enquiries and observations” (1 Apr. 1717; 1: 315). She doubts the accounts “by merchants who mind little but their own Affairs or Travellers who make too short a stay to be “able to report any thing exactly of their own knowledge” (ibid). Her belief in the indispensability of eyewitness experience to assure the trustworthiness of her findings will be her guiding principle throughout her Turkish sojourn. She is cognizant of the inherent difficulties of cultural exchange, the parties knowing little of the each other’s manners and beliefs, wondering if the Turks would be willing to converse openly with short term visitors who misunderstand information (1 Apr. 1717; 1: 315-6). But these are often the very people that actual ambassadors must rely on for needed vital intelligence and breaking news. Having developed her observational skills in Western Europe, Lady Mary’s experience and growing knowledge, gained on the frontier, allow her to devise and hone the strategies and tools that determine the direction of her unofficial diplomatic discourse as the Wortley Montagus reach the political center of the Ottoman Empire, the Sublime Porte.

## CHAPTER THREE

## DIPLOMACY IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

The narrative in an ambassador's correspondence draws attention to and defines the issues and events that he deems of paramount importance. Even seemingly innocuous incidents can become flash points that grow into crises. The demands of strong narrative in travelogue and diplomatic correspondence coincide, making the former more enlightening and the latter more effective. For Prousis "the narratives in the dispatches provide a great deal of fascinating information about conditions in the Ottoman Empire at a particularly crucial time in the history of the Eastern Question" (Prousis *Lord*). Diplomats are invariably concerned with the relations of foreign dignitaries at Court. "Umbrage" is the word most associated with Sir Robert Sutton's dispatches; they were ongoing litanies of who has taken umbrage at whom, a topic familiar to Montagu from the Court at Vienna. Such episodes can produce fascinating accounts. As a scribal author, Montagu was able to edit her narrative by rewriting, even redirecting her letters. Scribal publication allows new editions entirely at the writer's discretion (Love 53). The narrative in diplomatic dispatches cannot be changed, only added to or revoked in subsequent dispatches, as new events and fresh reports warrant, or as inaccuracies need to be corrected. Sutton's narrative style is best showcased in an anecdote retelling the negotiations for a meeting between two allied but wary rulers. Sutton relates:

The Tartar Han is lately come to visit and confer with his Suedish Majesty...He hath taken some disgust by reason of the difficulties, which arose about the Ceremonial and the manner of his Reception by the King, which there being no means found to adjust to their mutual satisfaction, they agreed upon the Expedient, that their interview and Conference should be on Horseback, and I am told that thro' some accident or misunderstanding his Majesty disappointed him the first time they were to meet.

(Kurat 14)

In his next dispatch, Sutton has to backtrack on this proposed encounter:

I must beg your Lordship's pardon for the wrong information I gave



touching an interview of the King Sueden and the Tartar Han on horseback near Bender. 'Tis true that the difficulties of the Ceremonial hindring the Han to visit his Majesty, the former proposed an incounter and conference on horseback; but the King of Sueden was desirous to see him and confer with him about any affairs of importance, he ought to visit him, and should in such case be civilly received and entertained; but that when he mounted on horseback, 'twas for his diversion and exercise, and that he was used to ride so hard, that it would be incommodious to the Han to accompany him. This refusal was something displeasing to the Han...but hath not diverted him from keeping a good correspondence with his Suedish Majesty.

(Kurat 16)

So round one goes to the King of Sweden; since the Tartars' military prowess is due to the renown of their horsemanship, his Majesty's swipe must have rankled. This high-stakes standoff is reminiscent of Montagu's story of the Viennese noblewomen's refusal to yield to each other's carriages until the Emperor's troops come to settle the deadlock (26 Sep. 1716; 1: 273). There is much more at stake for the monarchs and for Sutton, because an outbreak of hostilities between the Ottomans, Swedes and Tartars against the Russians threatens at this point; the Swedish King is currently in exile from a previous Russian military encounter. Charles XII of Sweden desperately needs Tartar backing to maintain his Ottoman asylum and support against the newly ascendant Russians, so he, in effect, is provoking a close ally. But the Tartar Khan is ultimately more amenable than the Court ladies of Vienna, as he has the grace to yield without armed intervention (Kurat 4).

A seemingly minor amusing anecdote about a botched meeting between two rulers leads to an escalating chain of events lasting for four years that dominates Sutton's dispatches. Tensions mount as the Swedish King, insisting upon marching his army home through Poland, has twelve European powers poised on the brink of war, threatening the abrogation of the Treaty of Karlowitz between the Austrians and the Ottomans. A number of episodes in this saga provide terrific narrative as Sutton portrays how the aggrieved Sultan, appearing increasingly impotent

while trying to keep the peace, is goaded again and again by the machinations of the Swedish King, nicknamed Ironhead Charles, “a figure so little honourable or reputable” (Kurat 34). When offered 250,000 dollars and 1000 carts to depart, the monarch immediately responds by “building a house for himself and making preparation for passing the winter at Bender” (Kurat, 74). The bid rises to 600,000 dollars and hundreds of horses to no avail (Kurat 135). Sutton reports that the “Sultan enters in to great suspicions and Jealousies, and is at a losse how to send the King of Sueden away in such a manner, as may save his own honour” (Kurat 142). When Charles declines to leave with a convoy provided to forcibly extract him from the empire, a popular revolt, known as the Assault of Kabalik, is launched:

But the King seeing the Janissaries fire and enter the Barricades in confusion, retired to his Palace at the Door whereof several Officers pressing upon him His Majesty happened to fall, and several Janissaries entering pell mell, one of them fired his pistole at him, as he lay on the ground, so close that the fire scorched him under the left ear, and the Ball raced his Cheek and grased upon his Nose, and besides which he was wounded with a scimitar on his left arm near the wrist....  
(Kurat 164)

But Ironhead Charles is not down for the count:

He cleared the Hall of Janissaries...caused the Door and windows to be barricaded and defended himself there till night, when, the Turks having set fire to the roof of the House, which was covered with wooden tiles, and the Ceiling falling down, He endeavoured to retire to a neighboring house, but in his way in the dark was taken and carried Prisoner to the Pashaw. (ibid)

Sutton has to juggle the possibility that Queen Anne would be outraged at such treatment of a European monarch, ponder the ramifications of the abuse of hospitality against “the Person of a Prince,” and discover if the Sultan’s expressed outrage against the attack is sincere or feigned. The death of Charles XII in battle in Norway in 1718 must have been greeted with a sigh of relief by the diplomats at the Sublime Porte. King Charles makes an appearance in “The Turkish

Embassy Letters,' when in a letter to Conti, Montagu writes:

I have bespoke a mummy, which I Hope will come safe to my hands, notwithstanding the misfortune that befell a very fine one design'd for the King of Sweden...Some old prophecys were remember'd...and the Mummy [was] committed prisoner to the 7 Towers, where it has remain'd under close Confinement ever since. (29 May 1717; 1: 364-5)

If the word “umbrage” is the most ubiquitous word in Sutton’s diplomatic glossary, the word “sanguinary” dominates Strangford’s dispatches. “Sanguinary” repeatedly modifies “excesses,” “outrages,” “persecutions,” “proceedings” and “measures”; it is modified by “atrocious” and “most” (*L S*). Almost all of his narrative is devoted to outbreaks of Greek-Turkish violence and retaliation during the Greek uprising in 1821, and the swift meting out of punishment by the Ottoman government. Several of the most horrifying reports are written by Strangford’s staff; his own accounts are at times more restrained. One of his anecdotes demonstrates the extent to which the populace has taken up arms:

Another order, not less beneficial has been that of disarming the Turkish children. Little miscreants, under seven years of age, and armed with daggers and pistols, had, till now, the privilege of robbing, stabbing, and shooting with impunity. (*L S* 135)

This story certainly qualifies as one of his “rich snapshots” (*L S* 12). Strangford’s relative reticence does not keep him from transmitting the full horror of the attacks and retaliation on both sides but he worries about the most extreme reports making their way into public journals. The good news in the same memo is that “the shops and markets are again opened” (*L S* 135).

While Montagu canvasses the quality and variety of goods in the shops and warehouses in Rotterdam, Vienna and Constantinople, Strangford regularly tracks when shops and markets are open or closed in embattled cities due to ethnic strife. Sutton tracks many of the same goods on board as he distinguishes whether the ships “in these seas” are armed men-of-war or “our merchant ships” (Kurat 43). He has to account for each type of vessel, where they are bound and when they will reach their destinations. Montagu tracks ships in several letters when Wortley

is away. When British merchants face ruin because their grain shipments have been embargoed to drive prices down, Strangford has to fight to have them released and make sure that the payments are not made in debased coinage (*L S* 173). Just as Lady Mary witnesses the lack of food for peasants and villagers in the unstable rural Balkans, and the slaughter of their farm animals, Strangford reports that in Wallachia and Moldavia a “dreadful system of devastation practiced by both Greeks and Turks, has destroyed every vestige of cultivation” (*L S* 165). Strangford notes when the government in Adrianople begins to stockpile corn in anticipation of war. Sutton worries about the supply shortages in war zones “as there are no considerable Preparations yet made, nor any provision to supply the Dearth and scarcity of Corn and Provender on the Frontiers...” (Kurat 167). Montagu’s lengthy descriptions of the extensive markets in Vienna and Constantinople do more to express the power of these two world capitals than any other metric could have.

Both Montagu and Sutton wrote detailed accounts of elaborate processions showcasing the Sultan, referred to also as the Grand Signor, in full ceremonial display at the height of his power. Montagu’s description works equally well as an official record of a royal event and a colorful anecdote in a travel narrative. The first, comparatively modest parade that she witnesses is to the mosque; the janissaries and other mounted soldiers with feathered headdresses lead royal gardeners in bright garb arranged like a tulip bed with the highest officials, dressed in sable and velvet, marching before the Sultan and his horses. They are followed by courtiers—their turbans distinguishing their ranks—carrying gold and silver coffee pots and a silver stool (1 Apr. 1717; 1: 323). Sutton writes of a march to an audience with the Sultan in honor of the Czar’s letter ratifying a treaty, “a very pompous shew,” featuring Russian diplomats “all set off with abundance of Jewells” following “15 Lead Horses sumptuously furnished, and 50 footmen in very rich Liveries” (Kurat 189). Sutton’s procession is of greater diplomatic importance; he is most interested in the identities of the diplomats, but his briefer, less descriptive account lacks Montagu’s narrative sweep. Sutton is an observer and scribe, while

Lady Mary also claims participatory status with herself in the spotlight, assuming that the Grand Signor “happen’d to stop under the Windows where we stood and (I suppose being told who we were) look’d upon us very attentively that we had full Leisure to consider him, and the French Ambassadrese agreed with me as to his good Mien” (1 Apr. 1717; 1: 323-4). The only parade marched under an official ensign, described by Strangford, is of a much different tenor:

“Twenty-three prisoners, taken at a place called Volo...were paraded through the streets of Constantinople on Saturday last, together with three standards, and a large quantity of noses and ears” (*LS* 134).

Six weeks later, Montagu chronicles a procession of far greater gravity than the Sultan’s mosque visit; she travels to a military camp hosting the Ottoman troops that parade before the Sultan prior to marching off to the frontier. The spectacle lasted for almost eight hours, and in Montagu’s estimation, involves twenty-thousand men. (17 May 1717; 1: 356-7). The occasion is of significant diplomatic interest, as any topic regarding war is of prime interest to the Secretary of State, and his ambassador. Montagu has the expert knowledge to recognize the ranks of the Generals, the “Bassas of 3 Tails,” delineated by the gilded balls atop their standards or ensigns of power, yet her account also captures the broader appeal of the parade as public spectacle, as the “Ladys go in their Coaches to see this camp as eagerly as ours did to that of Hide Park” (17 May 1717; 1: 356). The procession begins with the “Effendi mounted on a Camel richly furnish’d, reading aloud the Alcoran, finely bound, laid upon a Cushion,”; it then features performing boys, marching sowers, reapers, bakers, jewelers, mercers, musicians, dancers, soldiers and finally the volunteers:

all naked to the Middle, their arms peirc’d throu with Arrows  
left sticking in their heads, the blood trickling down their faces,  
and some slash’d their arms with sharp knives, making the blood

spout out upon those that stood near; and this look'd upon as an  
Expression of their Zeal for Glory. (17 May 1717; 1: 356-7)

Lady Mary's detailed description illustrates how the perception of the Sultan's power is buttressed, both symbolically and in real terms, by the celebration and display of the abundance of Ottoman life, the might of the Empire's military, and the fervency of the commitment of its troops. She presents it in the format of unforgettable travelogue. As always, Montagu worries about the tradesmen, articulating their fears that the upcoming war will have an adverse impact upon their businesses.

Montagu also dispenses candid and colorful commentary revealing fissures in the Sultan's actual power that might be found in a confidential memo to a Secretary of State, though she does not hesitate to add her own pithy twist. She makes the rather Hegelian assessment that "[t]he government here is entirely in the hands of the Army, and the Grand Signor with all his Absolute power as much a slave as any of his Subjects, and trembles at a Janizary's frown" (1 Apr. 1717; 1: 322). In a dispatch about the Sultan, Sutton expresses a more subtle appraisal that still partially validates Montagu's bold statement:

This sudden departure [of Forces]...was chiefly occasioned by the Sultan's uneasiness at the great disorders, insolences and quarrels of the Soldiers, which were indeed extraordinary, they being under no obedience, discipline or Order, and neither the Government nor their own Officers daring to punish them, insomuch that there was no other remedy found but to dispatch them away. (Kurat 45)

Each statement underlines the effective checks and constraints on the power and reach of an absolute monarch ruling a far flung empire. Yet where the unofficial diplomat Montagu illustrates the age old truth about the effective reach of the power of kings, the actual diplomat

demonstrates that the size of the empire is also the practical solution to the problem; send them away and let them exercise their own blunt power over others while not threatening the Sultan.

Lord Strangford records in his diplomatic dispatches a number of extreme incidents committed by the janissaries during the early stages of the Greek rebellion against the Turks both with and without the sanction of the Ottoman government. But unlike Montagu and Sutton, Lord Strangford tells a tale of the Sultan standing up to his unruly troops in a most extraordinary manner. The aga, or leader of the janissaries, more frightened of his soldiers than his sovereign, knelt before the Sultan to pull off the monarch's royal boots before entering the mosque, then presented the janissaries' demands to the Grand Signor:

The sultan replied with a great deal of firmness that he would never consent to sacrifice his faithful adherents, to the vengeance of the janissaries—that if the latter persisted to shake the tranquility of his Empire, he had sufficient resolution to put an end to his own life, and to take that of his only son, the sole heir of the Ottoman line, sooner than yield to their unjust demands—and that the guilt and the shame of such a result would fall upon the heads of his rebellious troops” (*L S* 83).

Strangford claims that the Sultan demanded and received the “unconditional submission” of the janissaries, then rewarded them with a payment of six hundred thousand piastres (*ibid*).

Strangford's story confirms that the ongoing power struggle between the Sultan and the arrogant Janissary Corps continues to be a frequent topic of concern in diplomatic dispatches as a marker of the Ottoman Empire's stability and a rumination upon the limits of autocratic power. Strangford dramatizes an incident indicating the waning influence of the janissaries in a manner that reflects one of Montagu's favorite narrative techniques, retelling an event or an encounter in

the format of a story or folktale. By the era of Strangford's tenure, the 'Turkish Embassy Letters' had long been considered a classic text on Turkey, reissued in an authorized edition in 1803, less than two decades before Strangford's embassy began (Mon xviii). Strangford's tale told in the midst of the destabilization at the outskirts and the center of the Empire, caused by widespread Greek-Turkish clashes, demonstrates how the Sultan's strategic move embraces his seeming vulnerability to project his strength. By publicly standing up to the disobedient soldiers in defense of his "faithful adherents," many of whom are fighting against the Ottomans for their freedom, the Sultan, feigning sacrifice, reasserts his power and authority over all of his people against a common foe.

Lady Mary notes the rigid protocol required in the presence of the Sultan and his Court, comparing it to contemporary British political practice. She sees "a much greater appearance of Subjection than among us," an affront to her Whig sentiments (1 Apr. 1717; 1: 322). The Sultan and his ministers may only be addressed upon bended knee. Lady Mary is quick to note the contrast between the intolerance of criticism allowed by "the Absolute Monarch upon Earth, who owns noe Law but his Will" and the political pamphleteering and name calling tolerated in Britain (*ibid*). She claims that this repression can manifest itself in wild resistance with sudden bursts of shocking violence, such as when an unpopular state Minister is deposed and the people "cut off his hands, head and feet, and throw them before the Palace Gate with all the respect in the World, while the Sultan (to whom they all profess an unlimited adoration) sits trembling in his Apartment, and dare neither defend nor revenge his favourite" (*ibid*). Strangford would disagree on one count; he likens the crowds pillaging to riots in Britain forty years earlier.

Montagu's dramatic retelling is partially reinforced by the ambassadors' diplomatic dispatches. Sutton demonstrates the operation of autocratic rule by recounting instances in which the viziers deposed by the Sultan met with swift execution, but the sentences are imposed by the



Sultan, not the people. The Sultan's intermittent political impotence recorded in Sutton's dispatches are more often caused by military misbehavior and stand-offs with foreign leaders than popular revolt. Strangford includes an ironic anecdote on an incident in which the Ottoman authorities demonstrated their skittishness over the destabilization in the wake of the revolt by silencing internal criticism by several Sufi ascetics:

The severities of the Porte are not confined to its Greek subjects.

On the 28th, two dervishes were executed in Constantinople. They were accused of witchcraft, and of having (perhaps without any extraordinary effort of their art) pretended to divine that the Ottoman government could not possibly last much longer. (*L S* 108)

Any speculation on the vulnerability of the government is an existential threat that must be quickly quashed, especially when the perpetrators could attract a popular following.

Montagu reports that the Ottoman government practiced extensive spying to keep dissent at bay. Montagu's passion for going about town incognito is more than an issue of personal freedom through anonymity and a bit of a thrill; she is also unofficially gathering information. She is a spy who sets her own terms, because rather than being compelled, she chooses to do it. Her access to the wives of the highest Ottoman government officials may or may not have yielded political tidbits, but her close friendship with the wife of the French Ambassador, at the center of the diplomatic hub, certainly could have. Montagu spies for Wortley in his absence, writing to him: "I hear that the F[rench] A[mbassador]'s busyness at Adrianople is to buy the Holy Land and that there is 1,000 purses offer'd for it, which is to pass throu his hands. I beleive he neglects no oppertunity" (9 Apr. 1718; 1: 394). Lady Mary may be passing on information from Wortley's sources or subordinates, but gossip gleaned from her fellow ambassadress is a possibility. This "official" diplomatic dispatch to her husband, the

British ambassador, contradicts Turner's contention that Montagu has no interest in politics and diplomacy in Constantinople. Lady Mary writes a letter containing a key to a Turkish code based on the names of flowers, fruits and other substances, but it is a language for love letters, not governmental espionage (16 Mar. 1717; 1:388-9).

Much diplomatic information was not readily available through official channels, and secret intelligence gathering was often necessary. The British did not practice bribery to the extent that the Russians did (Kurat 9). Sir Robert Sutton did not have the funds to either buy extensive political favors or to send observers to the various military fronts, as was standard procedure for the deep-pocketed French (Kurat 82). His tendency to ignore commerce in his dispatches may be part of his funding problem; the Levant Company controls his purse strings. The British envoy to Charles XII discovers secret negotiations between France and the King of Sweden when a letter "accidentally falls into his hands" (Kurat 142). Coded messages in Sutton's dispatches report that the Tartar Han "*had a secret understanding with the Gr. Seignior*" and calls the Sultan "*a Prince well versed in the art of dissimulation and disguise*" (Kurat 150). When the French Ambassador and Swedish Ministers discuss the assurances they plan to give to the Sublime Porte, the Sultan "having placed himself in another room behind a lattice window, which looked into the room where they were, overheard the whole discourse" (Kurat 155). Keeping Britain updated on the circumstances at Bender, the headquarters of Charles XII, Sutton writes:

Neverthelesse I have certain knowledg, that the Sultan hath lately  
 Several persons privately and in disguise to Bender to spy and  
 observe the condition and situation of affairs and what passes there.  
 But instead of making a faithfull report directly to himself, one or  
 more of them have at their return been secretly at the Vizir and

received his instructions what they should represent. (Kurat 15).

The anxious Sutton has to balance his suspicions of his rivals with his need of their intelligence and influence.

When Strangford reports the apprehension and confession a Greek spy disguised as a wandering dervish, the ambassador records in his dispatch the names of the other men implicated, then executed, as well as the translation of the placards affixed to their heads adorning the Seraglio Gates the following morning (*L S* 167-8). Strangford requires a second dispatch to accurately identify the names and ranks of the executed. He describes another incident involving disguise:

[a] Greek (supposed to be an Albanian) dressed as a Shepherd, entered a mosque near the gate of Silivria, and employed himself...in breaking the lamps, defacing the inscriptions, and destroying the ornaments.

On being seized and conducted to the Porte, he boldly claimed to be one of a band of forty resolute Christians...determined to avenge the insults offered to the Church of Balkuli...by doing as much mischief as possible to all the mosques in Constantinople. This poor madman was instantly executed. (*L S* 192)

Strangford's account centers on an individual rather than a group, allowing the ambassador to construct his narrative with greater empathy than a standard report. He does not mention employing spies, but he receives important intelligence such as the location of the leader of the original uprising, Prince Alexander Ypsilanti. Strangford receives reports on recent massacres, an outbreak of plague in Smyrna and its shipboard origin, and the enslavement of the women and children of Aivalli (*L S*).

Because Montagu was not occupied with the daily responsibilities of high diplomacy, she

has the leisure to engage in the diplomatic practice of analyzing Ottoman governing and social institutions. In pondering the underpinnings of power in the Ottoman Empire, Lady Mary revisits her conversations with her first Muslim mentor, the effendi Achmed Bey, in a letter to the Abbé Conti. Whenever she references her conversations with Bey, she ties selected subjects discussed to her letter's recipient. In her letter, dated April 1, 1717, to Conti, she explicates the wide reach of the effendis, or scholars, who control the Islamic legal and religious systems, "the only men really considerable in the Empire" (316). Sutton reports effendis wrote and compiled treaties (Kurat 94). Montagu notes that their lack of titles at Court is compensated for by the effendis' control of "almost all the Wealth of the Empire" (1 Apr. 1717; 1: 316-7). She claims that they are "the real Authors, tho the Souldiers are the Actors of Revolutions," for the effendis are responsible for deposing the late Sultan Mustapha, though she earlier claimed that Mustafa was killed in a popular revolt (1 Apr. 1717; 1: 317).

In *Global Rift*, L.S. Stavrianos relates that Early Modern travelers lauded the efficiency of the Ottoman government (123). A Hapsburg diplomat provided his analysis of the structure and operation of the merit-based Ottoman imperial bureaucracy where Christian subjects were trained for office, and talent allowed upward mobility all the way to the office of the Grand Vizier. The diplomat reported: "[i]n making the appointments the Sultan pays no regard to the pretensions on the score of wealth or rank...he considers each case on its own merits and examines carefully into the character, abilities and disposition of the man whose promotion is in question...' (Stavrianos *Global* 124). Though these standards represented an ideal not consistently upheld by the eighteenth century, their examination is proof that diplomatic analysis of key institutions was considered the responsibility of a diplomat. The values revealed by the analysis mirror the Whiggish Montagu's sentiments on Ottoman adoption law. She applauds the Turkish custom in childless marriages of adopting poor children and raising them as their own

under binding contracts rather than the English practice that could require leaving entailed estates to unknown distant relatives. She states:

I own this custom pleases me much better than our absurd following our Name. Methinks 'tis much more reasonable to make happy and rich an infant whom I educate after my own manner, brought up (in the Turkish Phrase) upon my knees, and who has learnt to look upon me with a filial respect, than give an Estate to a creature without other Merit or relation to me than by a few Letters. (--May 1718; 1: 409-10)

It also kept the Sultan from confiscating one's fortune after death. Montagu's comments become ironic when viewing the history of her own miscreant son, a stranger to "filial respect" (ibid). He was a charlatan, who at seventeen married a much older, lower class, probable washerwoman, prompting his parents' first attempt to disinherit him (Grundy 289). Christine Laidlaw's history of the Levant Company, *The British in the Levant*, devotes more space to the misbehavior of the bigamous eccentric adult Edward Wortley Jr. when he visited Istanbul, than she does to the activities of his father during his embassy (46-9).

Montagu writes to the Abbé Conti about the status of Jews in the Ottoman Empire, a "people [that] are in Incredible Power in this country" (17 May 1717; 1: 354-5). She notes that the majority of the wealthiest tradesmen are Jews. Montagu's contention that Jews have privileges not extended to Turks, and are allowed to follow their own laws is a basic description of the millet system, in which religious minorities in the Ottoman Empire, particularly Christians and Jews, were allowed to create their own communities, or millets, and follow their own religious authorities, laws and customs (Stavrianos *Balkans* 89). Montagu's claim that Jews "are the Physicians, the Stewards, and the Interpreters of all the Great Men," has diplomatic implications, for interpreters, or dragomans, were necessary to, and highly prized by

ambassadors, both as sources of information and for their language skills (17 May 1717; 1: 355). Stavrianos credits the predominance of Jews in selected powerful professions in the Empire to Ottoman political tactics, Islamic tolerance for Christians and Jews, known as the “People of the Book,” and the forced immigration caused by the expulsion of Spanish Jewry in 1492 (Stavrianos *Balkans* 90). Montagu voices some suspicion about the extent of Jewish power in Constantinople and contempt for the sloth of the Turks, expressing concern for “the English, French and Italian Merchants’ ability to operate independently” (ibid). Montagu’s self-imposed diplomatic duty prompts her to first study Ottoman institutions, then analyze how they intersect with British interests. But if Montagu’s gaze was fixed on Ottoman institutions, the Ottoman gaze had begun to be directed back at the West. July 1718 marked the advent of the Tulip Period, the era in which the first modest pro-Western reforms in Ottoman history were adopted. It began one month after the Wortley Montagus left on their journey home after the termination of Wortley’s abbreviated embassy.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## WOMEN AND DIPLOMACY

One of the most salient differences between Montagu's unofficial diplomatic discourse and the dispatches written by ambassadors is that diplomats rarely address women's issues. Strangford sends information on female victims of war, when killed or sold into slavery, within reports on overall casualties, but dispatches do not generally feature women as a separate topic. When his pregnant wife is 'insulted' and beaten going to and returning from mass, it is a private matter that goes unmentioned in the diplomatic dispatches (Millar 25). As Montagu spends time during the final year of her sojourn exploring how institutional and political power in the Ottoman Empire, the Sublime Porte and the diplomatic community operate, she notes how they affect women's agency, including her own diplomatic role.

Little is known of the five British ambassadors who preceded Montagu, but there are records that two of the women were expected to remove articles of clothing at the request of the Ottoman Court. A member of Lord Glover's retinue reports that Lady Glover has to leave her gloves at home when visiting the Sultaneses because the Sultan 'wore no gloves, nor suffered any to do so in his presence, which likewise all their women observe' (*Rise* 223). Reporting on the "folly of courtly costumes," John Bulwer writes that Lady Wych, dressed in her hoop skirt, called a Verdingal, was asked by the Sultanesse if it represented 'her naturall and reall shape' (*Rise* 225). Lady Wych demonstrated that it did not. Montagu puts on the dreaded Venetian Court dress to call on the wife of the Grand Vizier of the Sultan, in response to the expectations of Ottoman luxury, but at the Turkish bath in Sofia she is also pressured to partially disrobe. Lady Mary dons her Court clothing to officially represent her nation. Kader Konuk asserts that Montagu resists removing her clothing at the bath to keep "her Englishness intact" (394). The tale of the Turkish bath, or hammam, is at once both the most famous scene in the travelogue of

the ‘Turkish Embassy Letters,’ and an extended ironic comment on the self-importance and competitiveness of aristocratic women in Viennese diplomatic circles. Montagu writes: “I know no European Court where the Ladys would have behav’d them selves in so polite a manner to a stranger” (1Apr. 1717; 1: 313). In contrast to the incessant scramble for status in Vienna, often played out through such ostentatious dress that Montagu longs for sumptuary laws where the ruler mandates a reasonable dress code, Lady Mary discovers in the hammam “200 Women and yet none of those disdainfull smiles or satyric whispers that never fail in our assemblys when any body appears that is not dress’d exactly in fashion” (ibid). Class and elegant clothing are so tightly intertwined in Europe that the absence of the latter negates any recognition of the former. Ottoman women sit together in seeming equality, “without any distinction of rank by their dress, all being in the state of nature,” with the key exception that their slaves sit behind them (ibid). Montagu’s metaphor on power and dress continues in her own refusal to disrobe, until “I was at last forc’d to open my skirt and shew them my stays,” then seeing that the Turkish women “believ’d I was so lock’d up in that machine that it was not in my own power to open it, which contrivance they attributed to my Husband” (1 Apr. 1717; 1: 314). Aravamudan analogizes the misapprehension of Lady Mary’s stays, as a matrimonial rather than a cultural requirement, to the imposition of a chastity belt, an intimate form of coercive power that contrasts with the freedom and ease of the naked Turkish women (n.p.). He posits that for Montagu, the hammam is a feminine “privileged locus” that represents a secular, “sociopolitical space,” that encourages free and open discourse in a similar manner to the masculine haven of the English coffee house (Aravamudan n.p.).

Montagu employs the tragic image of a naked young female corpse to illustrate the operation of Ottoman law enforcement and jurisprudence. Lady Mary discloses that:

About 2 months ago there was found at day break not very far from



my House the bleeding body of a young woman, naked, only wrapp'd  
 in a coarse sheet, with 2 wounds with a knife, one in her side and  
 another in her Breast. (–May 1718; 1: 407)

The woman's identity remains unknown because women's faces are not publicly viewed. Montagu states that "[v]ery little enquiry was made about the Murderer, and the corps privately bury'd without noise" (–May 1718; 1: 408). She reports that the unknown victim's family is responsible for enacting vengeance for the crime, including monetary compensation because "[m]urder is never pursu'd by the King's officers as with us" (ibid). She opines that:

One would imagine this defect in their Government should make  
 such Tragedys very frequent, yet they are extreamly rare, which is  
 enough to prove the people not naturally cruel, neither do I think in  
 many other particulars they deserve the barbarous character we  
 give them.... (ibid)

Montagu's political aside exhibits her Turkophilic leanings and tolerant attitude towards Islamic society. Her story of the unfortunate young woman's fate follows an account of Lady Mary's second visit to a Turkish bath for an all female celebration of the marriage of another young woman. Earlier, at the hammam in Sofia, Montagu had lightheartedly mused that "I was convinc'd of the Truth of a Refflexion that I had often made, that if twas the fashion to go naked, the face would be hardly observ'd" (1 Apr. 1717; 1: 314). She does not mention that her own face is marked from smallpox, but her flippant remark becomes bitterly ironic if applied to this latest misfortune; identifying the murdered woman's corpse is impossible because her body and face are gazed upon only by men, from whom they have always been hidden, rather than by women who may have recognized her.

Montagu, with the exception of her comments on paying the porters, eschews public

comment on her husband's ambassadorial duties. She writes to Wortley of an inquiry she received on his scheduled departure: "I was ask'd, and made answer (as I always do upon your affairs) that I knew nothing of it" (9 Apr. 1718; 1: 394). Though Montagu provides exhaustive accounts of the Sultan's parades she witnesses, she writes to the Abbé Conti of the rite in which Wortley is presented to the Grand Signor: "I tell you nothing of the Order of Mr. W[ortley's] entry and his audience. Those things are allways the same and have been so often describ'd, I won't trouble you with the repetition" (17 May 1717; 1: 359). She offers only the comment that the Sultan's handsome eleven year old son, who is not the heir to the throne, is in attendance, sitting near his father, then shares her opinion that "[t]his reign has been bloody and avaritious" (17 May 1717; 1: 359-60). Montagu may be reluctant to admit that she does not have the same access to the Ottoman Court that she previously had at the courts throughout Europe.

Though Montagu steadfastly refers to her husband simply as Mr. Wortley, rather than by his title of Ambassador, she not only coins the epithet of Ambassadress, but uses it on selected occasions to refer to herself. Whether Montagu envisions the title as an official or an unofficial rank, she deflects possible accusations of hubris or self-promotion by initially attaching the appellation only to her friend and colleague "the French Ambassadrese," while both women are on diplomatic duty as spectators to the Sultan's parade to the mosque. Montagu contrasts their styles of fulfilling their diplomatic obligations, avowing that it:

would be a great reliefe if I could perswade her to live without those forms and ceremonys that make Life formal and tiresome, but she is so delighted with her Guards, her 24 footmen, Gentlemen Ushers, etc., that she would rather die than make a visit without 'em... What vexes me is that as long as she will visit with this troublesome Equipage, I am oblig'd to do the same. However, our

mutual interest makes us much together. (1 April 1717; 1: 324)

Lady Mary prefers to travel in a plain Turkish coach, accompanied only by her Greek interpreter and a female servant. One of the benefits Montagu accrues from the “mutual interest” of their friendship is that it allows her to describe the “2 young Christian Ambassadors” going “all round the Town in an open Gilt Chariot with our joint train of Attendants, preceded by our Guards...” (1 Apr. 1717; 1: 324). Lady Mary is able to assume the title of Ambassador by sharing it with her companion when they are performing their official and unofficial tasks, rather than boldly assigning it to herself. Montagu’s subsequent usage of the epithet of Ambassador is stated in third person, attached to both women. Lady Mary shares her new rank with her ostentatious French friend while showcasing her British Whiggish prudence in rejecting self-display and excess. The French Ambassadesse’s entourage may be reflective of her social power; the French Embassy is the social headquarters of the diplomatic community. She is also perpetually pregnant so sticks close to home, while Montagu exults that the lying-in period is so much shorter here than at in Britain.

Lady Mary’s auxiliary status as the ambassador’s wife grants her access not to the Sultan, and the highest officials of the Ottoman government, but to their wives. Unlike the Courts of Europe, in which aristocratic men and women gather together, most of Montagu’s contact comes through visits to the private homes of noblewomen connected by blood and marriage to Ahmed III, the Grand Vizier and top military leaders in Adrianople and Constantinople. Montagu identifies a strategy in which noblewomen find paths to preserve their agency after widowhood. The Sultana Hafise, a favorite wife of the assassinated Sultan Mustafa, was ordered immediately to choose her next husband; remaining a widow was not an option. Hafise chooses an elderly man of high stature to maintain as much autonomy as possible (10 Mar. 1718; 1: 380-1). Her remarriage to the eighty-year old Secretary of State is an

announcement that she is honoring her vow to her first husband” (10 Mar. 1717; 1: 381).

Lady Mary’s growing comfort with the privilege and power inherent in ambassadorial status is best shown in her accommodation with the Janissary Corps. She feared the soldiers’ anarchic behavior on the unstable frontier, ridiculed the Sultan’s perceived discomfort at their excesses, but finds that when her personal protection in Constantinople is at stake, “[t]hey are very Zealous and faithfull when they serve, and look upon it as their busyness to fight for you on all Occasions....” even if “Scimetars” are needed (*ibid*). Her storytelling instincts overtake her diplomatic decorum in her travel narrative of a visit to the village of Phillipopolis. When her request for pigeons for her dinner party cannot be fulfilled by a town official on short notice, she gleefully recounts:

My Janizary...immediately lock’d him up prisoner in his room,  
telling him he deserv’d death for his impudence...but ...out of respect  
to me he would not punish him but by my order, and accordingly came  
very gravely to ask me what should be done to him...that if I pleas’d,  
he would bring me his head. (1 Apr. 1717; 1: 325)

Montagu delights in debunking travelers’ tales of Oriental fantasy, especially when her male predecessors’ sexual speculation is certainly specious, but she is not immune to literally and literarily exploiting the exotic East to shock and amaze her potential readers.

Montagu’s extensive description of her Turkish dress donned in Adrianople goes into such exquisite detail that it too must fall into the category of exoticism aimed at her readership. (1 Apr.1717;1:326-7) Kader Konuk’s concept of ethnomasquerade characterizes Montagu’s masquerading as “no more than a short-lived fantasy of embodying the Other and serves as a narrative strategy in her letters” (394). Montagu sees veiling and Turkish dress as a way for Turkish women to “have more Liberty than we have” (1 Apr.1717; 1:328). Just as in the bath,

“there is no distinguishing the great Lady from her Slave” (ibid). Her lengthy supposition that it facilitates the meeting of lovers reinforces the exoticism that she decries in male travel writers. When she states: “Upon the Whole, I look upon the Turkish Women as the only free people in the Empire,” it is a political statement that must surprise western readers but it is qualified in context with speculation on illicit affairs (1 April 1717; 1: 329). She admits that as tempting as it is to practice masquerade in the marketplace, one still must worry about the janissaries.

Three of the Turkish Embassy letters are written to Wortley when duties call him away from Constantinople. They give little insight into his ambassadorial interactions with the Ottomans, but quite a bit more into the diplomacy within the relationship between Montagu and Wortley. As all three letters are written after the British government has recalled his embassy, cutting it from five years to two, the correspondence largely concerns planning for their return journey home. Montagu makes arrangements for her funds to be transferred from Britain via the Levant Company to defray their moving expenses. She wants Wortley to insist that he receive the relocation allowance given to his predecessor, Sir Robert Sutton, and other previous ambassadors (23 Mar. 1718; 1: 392). She reports on ships docking, discusses customs duties, exchange rates, and negotiates a jewelry sale, all tied to their personal finances. She encourages Wortley to seek a reconciliation with her father, stemming from the estrangement caused by their elopement. Montagu charts the path for a successful negotiation:

I perceive by my F[ather's] letter that he is desirous to be well with us, and am very clearly of Opinion (if my opinion is of any weight with you) that you should write him a civil Letter. The birth of your Daughter is a proper occasion, and you may date your Letter as if writ during my Lying in. I know him perfectly well, and am very sure such a triffling respect would make a great Impression upon

him. (9 Apr. 1717; 1: 394)

Montagu's diplomatic talents must have been as useful during Wortley's tenure as they proved to be at its conclusion. Montagu asserts her agency throughout these letters to her husband, as if his dismissal from his ambassadorial post allows her to act openly on his diplomatic matters. Negotiation had been the foundation of their marriage. Anxious to escape from the arranged marriage planned by her father to the inelegantly named Clotworthy Skeffington, and unable to marry the man she loved, Montagu settled on a compromise choice: an elopement with Edward Wortley (Grundy 48). Halsband reports that their "courtship correspondence" was "one of the most extensive prenuptial negotiations on record" (Halsband 51). Conducted for over two years and spanning one hundred and thirty letters, Montagu proves an indefatigable negotiator, encroaching on her father's privilege to decide her own future. Montagu had been an unofficial diplomat long before venturing East.

## CONCLUSION

## RETURNING HOME

Montagu's last letters before and the first after leaving Constantinople were written to the Abbé Conti. When she concludes her stay, having lived in the ambassador's residence in the diplomatic enclave of Pera for not quite a year, she is:

allmost of the opinion 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 or  
studying some Science to which we can never attain, or if we do,  
cannot perswade people to set that value upon it we do our selves.

(13 May 1717; 1: 415)

Lady Mary largely excuses herself from politics and diplomacy on her journey home after her premature departure in the wake of Wortley's recall. No longer on duty, she pays only the most cursory attention to the diplomatic topics that had fascinated her. It is significant that these two letters are directed to her scholarly friend, for Montagu takes refuge in her classical scholarship on her voyage home, sailing past Greece and docking in Tunis, eager to see Carthage. Eterpi Mitsi notes the irony that Montagu, the first female traveler writing on Greece, "never set foot there," but gazed from the deck of a ship, "afraid to disturb the ideal, the imaginary landscape of classical antiquity by experiencing contemporary reality" (Mitsi n.p.). Lady Mary writes that she "had a great mind to land on the fam'd Pelopponessus" but has been "credibly inform'd 'tis now overrun with Robbers" (31 Jul. 1718; 1: 422). In her first post-Turkish encounter, Montagu loses the objectivity of her gaze in the "contact zone" of Tunis (Pratt 4). Claiming that "many of the women flock'd in to see me and we were equally entertain'd with veiwing one another," she barely allows that the North Africans are human, comparing them to "Baboons" (31 Jul. 1718; 1:

427). Aravamudan assesses this tension in Montagu's departure strategy in diplomatic terms:

At the end of her travels, Montagu turns to an archaeological stance of classicism and cultural antiquarianism as a compromise strategy for mediation between differences after encountering an Ottoman Empire that tolerated the social mixture of multinational, multiethnic, and multireligious populations in a manner that would have bewildered the still provincial English. (Aravamudan n.p.)

There is an official diplomatic connection to the classical world; Strangford considered the protection of antiquities to be part of his official responsibilities. He intercedes with the reis effendi "to protect ancient monuments in Athens from the excesses of Ottoman troops" because "I thought it right to make an effort to save them from their fury" (*L S* 178-9). In Italy, most of Montagu's attention is centered on art and architecture, a retreat into the prime concerns of scholarship and travel narrative but the very pursuits she ignored when she was outward bound.

Montagu would continue to extend her own diplomatic accomplishment and authority through her writings because "[h]er *Letters* acquired the status of an authority on things oriental, a text of reference and a model...[that] had an enormous impact," both as a scribal manuscript and upon publication (Melman 2). After posthumous publication in 1763, the 'Turkish Embassy Letters' received exemplary reviews, conferring upon Montagu expert diplomatic authority, not bound by her gender. Tobias Smollett felt that her letters "were never excelled, we might venture to say, never equalled by any letter-writer of any sex, age, or nation" (Lowenthal 82) Voltaire believed that the letters "were written for all nations" (*ibid*). Edward Gibbon exclaimed: "What fire, what ease, what knowledge of Europe and Asia!" (Lowenthal 83). Even her enemies could not deny her diplomatic accomplishments in the Ottoman Empire. John Cleland satirized her in his 1751 novel, *Memoirs of a Coxcomb*, as "the celebrated lady Bell Travers" (Cleland 281).



His eponymous hero places the character based on Montagu as a participant in a disturbing sexual act even as he testifies to her expert ability, admitting that “[s]he had too seen most of the courts of Europe, and had picked crumbs of politics enough to have set up 10 modern ministers” (Cleland 295). Awarding her the acumen to govern over ministers, he can only attack her legitimacy and reputation by an assault on her gender through fantasized sexuality behavior.

In her *New York Times* article, “Through Jungle and Ice by Armchair,” Mary Lee Settle awards plaudits to the Wortley Montagus for introducing the outdoor cafe to Western Europe, but Lady Mary left a more crucial diplomatic legacy. Montagu’s greatest feat of negotiation takes place when she introduces the Turkish method of small pox inoculation called engraftment or variolation to Britain. Having suffered smallpox herself only a year before leaving on the embassy, she announces: “I am Patriot enough to take pains to bring this usefull invention into fashion in England,” vowing to have the courage to go to war with English doctors (1 Apr. 1717; 1: 339). Smallpox inoculation had been known in England since the end of the century but had been considered to be too risky to implement (Aravamudan n.p.). Montagu arrives back in London with her healthy inoculated son in tow and the knowledge of the successful Turkish engraftment technique involving a small quantity of live virus from a mildly infected patient (Grundy 210). She writes the essay “A Plain Account of the Inoculating of the Small Pox,” in 1722 after a virulent outbreak (Grundy 217). Montagu has the influence of two indispensable allies, George II and Caroline, the Princess of Wales, who agrees to have her children engrafted (Worsley 220). A dissenting pamphlet by William Wagstaffe expostulated that ‘an Experiment practiced only by a few *Ignorant Women* amongst an illiterate and unthinking People, shou’d on a sudden...so far obtain in one of the Politest Nations in the World, as to be receiv’d into the *Royal Palace*,” especially when advocated by ‘some *sanguine* Traveller from *Turkey*.’ (qtd. Grundy 216). Montagu is able to contribute to the scientific progress of the

Enlightenment as a result of her first-hand experience garnered as an unofficial diplomat, but it requires a prolonged political battle with the British medical and religious communities.

The identification of unofficial diplomatic discourse within the ‘Turkish Embassy Letters’ broadens its narrative reach beyond Montagu’s original parallel conversation of travelogue within the format of the familiar letter. Having expanded both genres by bringing greater substance to the woman’s familiar letter and a woman’s voice to secular travel narrative, her commitment to unofficial diplomatic discourse demanded that she move beyond the curiosity and descriptive capability of a standard traveler, into taking on the role of an analytical and empirical observer fulfilling her expanded chosen agenda and adopted responsibilities. It was a reflection of her level of engagement. There are key differences between official and unofficial diplomatic dispatches. Ambassadorial correspondence “convey[s] the important details of rapidly unfolding situation[s]” (Prousis *Lord*). Dispatches can be obsolete as soon as they are sent and are read only by a few officials. The demands upon the accuracy and selection of their narrative is great because the stakes are so high. The focus can be narrow because it is often limited to the most crucial matters. Montagu has both less and greater agency than a diplomat. She is constrained in the speed of the transmission of her letters but she can play the long game to an increasingly wider audience; her dispatches still have impact when they are published almost fifty years after their composition. She retains her own power because of the ‘Turkish Embassy Letters’ after Wortley’s dismissal. A number of her non-fictive direct correspondents are prominent politically connected people who do receive actual letters and do not have to wait for scribal correspondence. Montagu can serve as a semi-public, even permanent recorder of information in her unofficial diplomatic dispatches that diplomats keep off the public record on such matters as the effective limits on the power of the Sultan. Diplomats convey numerous first hand reports but they are often collected rather than experienced by the diplomat himself.

Montagu's status and access allow her to be the ultimate first-hand source and an unofficial diplomat both. She has the choice of multiple literary approaches working in a genre that she makes flexible enough to meet her needs.

Montagu was an unofficial diplomat because it was almost impossible for her not to be one. Only eleven years before her departure, the Act of Union placing England, Scotland and Wales into 'one united kingdom by the name of Great Britain' was passed (Colley 1). Linda Colley calls Great Britain "an invented nation" (6). She portrays an eighteenth century urbanizing Britain, busy building roads, canals and trade, topics that Montagu chronicles. Gerald MacLean writes that "the experience of going [to the Orient] changed what it meant to be English" (*Rise* xiv). Montagu leaves her newly recreated nation to journey to the crossroads and battlegrounds of Christendom and Islam and arrives in Constantinople, the center of the immense and wealthy Ottoman Empire and she is at the forefront of each place and stage. Drawing on all of her literary resources to capture all that she sees on her journey as an unofficial diplomat would have been irresistible to her. When she returns, she comes back as a "Patriot...willing to take pains" to carry what she has learned about smallpox inoculation to her newly created nation after representing that nation (1 April 1717; 1: 331). Her experience as an unofficial diplomat embraces both what she has learned in the Orient and her own nationality.

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