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Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was a gifted, insightful, and witty author in eighteenth-century England. Her most famous work, the Turkish Embassy Letters, is a collection of letters written between 1716 and 1718 in which she addresses her observations of various countries, cultures, and customs during her husband's Embassy to Turkey. Throughout this collection, Lady Mary oversteps the boundaries of decorous behavior for aristocratic women of that time period by addressing issues resserved only for men or issues that were inappropriate for either gender to broach. Even so, she was aware of the literary, social, and cultural value of this work. The indecorous aspects of her observations and opinions are precisely the reason Lady Mary would not allow the publication of the Letters during her lifetime; the

awareness of their potential value is her justification for taking steps to insure their publication after her death.

This thesis is a feminist analysis of the Turkish Embassy Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Three steps are employed to achieve this analysis. First, a definition of and justification for feminist theory is presented. The result is the selection of a cultural gynocritics approach for this analysis. This first step allows for the next two aspects of this thesis, which include a brief review of the history of women of eighteenth-century England and a review of biographical information on Lady Mary. The history indicates that women were an educationally, professionally, and socially oppressed group. The biographical information discloses that Lady Mary, though not immune to social standards regarding decorum for women of her position, was exceptional in her ability to achieve balance between decorous behavior and her desire to learn and to excel as a writer.

The analysis of the Turkish Embassy Letters utilizes the conclusions drawn from the historical and biographical reviews. Cultural gynocriticism provides the justification for utilizing such material. The result is an analysis which reveals why Lady Mary refused to publish the Letters in her lifetime--the subject matter was considered indecorous for an aristocratic woman in England during the eighteenth century. The analysis also reveals that the Turkish Embassy Letters is a cultural document and literary work worthy of recognition.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's Turkish Embassy Letters

A Feminist Perspective

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Diane, for her

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Introduction

Almost since the inception of the modern women's movement, feminist literary theory and practice have struggled for recognition within the academic setting. As with most new genres of criticism, feminist criticism has had its share of doubt and ridicule; yet, it still survives. Even so, misconceptions exist.

Some theorists disregard feminist criticism because they believe that it is radical, an attempt to overthrow traditional forms of criticism. Others believe it is a phase that, like the radicalism of the feminist movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, will eventually subside and be assimilated into the more traditional, established schools of criticism. Some proclaim an acceptance of the genre but ignore it when the time comes for its application. Many dismiss feminist criticism on the grounds that it lacks authority and cohesiveness.

In several respects, the concerns of scholars about the purpose and practice of feminist literary theory are not unfounded. On a surface level, feminist criticism does appear to lack cohesiveness. Part of the goal of feminist theorists is to reconsider traditional forms of criticism and to redevelop those forms to incorporate an awareness of the female literary experience. However, this thesis attempts to explain the apparent contradictions within

feminist theory, to establish the need for a feminist approach to literary criticism, and to demonstrate the application of this theory in an analysis of the Turkish Embassy Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu.

The specific approach to this analysis is cultural gynocriticism. This approach, as is explained in Chapter One, incorporates a number of facets and is not limited to those used here. First, an understanding of the roles of women within the eighteenth century is necessary. Second is a review of biographical information on Lady Mary and how her life compares to the prescribed roles for women of eighteenth-century English society. Finally, an analysis of the Turkish Embassy Letters is presented. This analysis takes into consideration the roles of women in English society, the specific aspects of Lady Mary's experience within that society, and the effects of these social standards on the writing and publication of the Embassy Letters. Within this analysis is a recognition of the restrictions under which Lady Mary worked and the benefit of this work to the literary history of the period.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was an outstanding wit and author. Few people today, man or woman, with several advantages not known in Lady Mary's society, could produce such a valuable work. When one considers the restrictions under which she worked, which a feminist critical approach allows, Lady Mary's accomplishment becomes even more remarkable.

Chapter One

Feminist Literary Theory

When considering feminist literary theory, a number of names come to mind--Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett, Elaine Showalter, Helene Cixous, to name a few. In addition to the names are theoretical catchwords--androgyny, socialism, "Images of Women," gynocritics, and psychoanalysis. As the number of names and catchwords indicates, a definition of feminist literary theory is a bit elusive as compared to, say, Marxist literary theory. Before one can begin to conduct a feminist analysis of any piece of literature, one must understand the complexity of that undertaking. In order to come to an understanding, the critic must review the various facets of this particular literary theory and make a choice as to which aspect to use.

To begin, three schools dominate feminist literary criticism--Anglo-American, British, and French. The greatest diversity lies between the Anglo-American and the French. Basically, the British differs from the Anglo-American in that British feminist criticism takes place outside of the academy because women's studies programs and courses are less established within the university setting. Radical politics, journalism, and publishing provide the institutional foundation for feminist criticism in Great

Britain (Showalter, "Feminist Critical Revolution" 8). In many respects, however, British and American ideologies are similar. For example, Cheri Register notes that Virginia Woolf's belief in mental or psychic androgyny is eagerly grasped by American feminists as "the natural state to which we might return if the arbitrary constraints on male and female behavior, or 'masculinity' and 'femininity,' were done away with" (4). French theories, however, differ considerably.

The most common name associated with French feminism is Simone de Beauvoir. Because of this association, many might wonder why French and Anglo-American criticism are so different. After all, Beauvoir is hailed in America as an outstanding figure in the women's movement. In fact, the main thesis of The Second Sex is that women, throughout history, have been portrayed as man's Other, reduced to mere objects (Moi 92), and American feminists use this argument as a platform for reform. Upon closer examination, though, Beauvoir's theory does differ from Anglo-American theories. As Moi points out, when The Second Sex was published in 1949, Beauvoir believed firmly that socialism, not feminism, would end the oppression of women (91). She goes on to note that "though most feminist theorists and critics of the 1980s acknowledge their debt to Simone de Beauvoir, relatively few of them seem to approve of her espousal of socialism as the necessary context for feminism" (92).

Simone de Beauvoir also differs from her successors in French feminist theory, who move even further away from

Anglo-American theory. Moi notes, "Beauvoir's uncompromising refusal of any notion of a female nature or essence is succinctly summed up in her famous statement 'One is not born a woman; one becomes one'" (92). French feminist theorists of the 1980s take an opposite stand. An offshoot of the Paris student revolt of May, 1968, modern French feminist theory is steeped in "uncompromising intellectualism" (Moi 95-96). Under the influence of Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida, "French feminist theory looks at the ways that 'the feminine' has been defined, represented, or repressed in the symbolic systems of language, metaphysics, psychoanalysis and art" (Showalter, "Feminist Critical Revolution" 9). The concept of _ecriture feminine_ is the primary focus for French feminist theorists. Showalter states:

> _L'ecriture feminine_ is not necessarily writing _by_ women; it is an avant-garde writing style like that of Joyce, Bataille, Artaud, Mallarme, or Lautreamont. However, the most radical French feminist theorists also believe that _ecriture feminine_ is connected to the rhythms of the female body and to sexual pleasure (_jouissance_), and that women have an advantage in producing this radically disruptive and subversive kind of writing. They urge the woman writer to ally herself with everything in the culture which is muted, silenced, or unrepresented, in order to subvert the existing systems that repress

> feminine difference. ("Feminist Critical Revolution" 9)

More concisely, Showalter states, "the concept of _ecriture feminine_ provides a way of talking about women's writing which reasserts the _value_ of the feminine and identifies the theoretical project of feminist criticism as the analysis of difference" ("Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" 249). As is indicated, French theorists today, such as Helene Cixous, the best known theorist of _ecriture feminine_, emphasize difference, whereas Simone de Beauvoir advocates striving for equality with men (Moi 98).

Deconstruction, _ecriture feminine_, and the emphasis on difference as opposed to equality are relatively new concepts in American literary criticism, particularly American feminist literary studies. The earliest stages of Anglo-American feminist literary criticism find their roots in such works as Kate Millett's _Sexual Politics_ and Mary Ellman's _Thinking About Women_. These works are "the basic source of inspiration for what is often called 'Images of Women' criticism, the search for female stereotypes in the work of male reviewers commenting on women's work" (Moi 32). With the publication of Elaine Showalter's _A Literature of Their Own_ in 1977, focus was shifted from images to the actual works of women writers and recognition of these authors (Moi 50,56). Moi goes on to note, "This woman-centred approach has now become the dominant trend within Anglo-American feminist criticism" (51). A more detailed discussion of these concepts will follow; however, Moi makes

some interesting comparisons between the Anglo-American and French theories and practices which should be noted.

The primary difference Moi cites is in the generation of new methods and analytical procedures. In Anglo-American feminist criticism the novelty comes not in new theories but in the politicizing of existing critical theories (87). In short, American feminists are working within the system of patriarchal ideologies rather than forming a separate, feminist ideology, and Moi sees this compromise as a contradiction and a limitation (69).

> The central paradox of Anglo-American feminist criticism is thus that despite its often strong, explicit political engagement, it is _in the end_ not quite political enough; not in the sense that it fails to go _far_ enough along the political spectrum, but in the sense that its radical analysis of sexual politics still remains entangled with depoliticizing theoretical paradigms. (Moi 87-88)

Consequently:

> For the Anglo-American feminist critic the fact that there is very little feminist _literary criticism_ in France may be disconcerting. With a few exceptions, such as Claudine Hermann and Anne-Maria Dardigna, French feminist critics have preferred to work on problems of textual, linguistic, semiotic or psycho-analytical theory, or to produce texts where poetry and theory

> intermingle in a <u>challenge</u> (emphasis added) to established demarcations of genre. (97)

Moi goes on to offer an explanation for the disparity between Anglo-American and French feminist theories:

> One of the reasons for the relatively limited influence of French theory on Anglo-American feminists is the 'heavy' intellectual profile of the former. Steeped as they are in European philosophy (particulary Marx, Nietzsche and Heidegger), Derridean deconstruction and Lacanian psycho-analysis, French feminist theorists apparently take for granted an audience as Parisian as they are. (96)

Indeed, after careful study, the concept of feminist criticism of literature is much more complicated than might be expected. After consideration of the various schools, I have chosen to apply an Anglo-American approach to reviewing the Turkish Embassy Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. My decision to use this particular school over the British or the French will follow the analysis of Anglo-American feminist criticism, but, before the British and French schools are dismissed, it is essential to identify a unifying factor of all three schools. Elaine Showalter states it best. Reflecting on the various emphases of the three schools, she concludes by saying, "All are struggling to find a terminology that can rescue the feminine from its stereotypical associations with inferiority" ("Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" 249). Theoretical differences

aside, this attempt to present women in a better light is the uniting force of all feminist literary theorists and critics.

Anglo-American feminist criticism is not without its own diversity. A number of concerns are created by the lack of a concrete theory. On the other hand, some view that lack of cohesiveness as a strength, as an ability to expand and to espouse a number of theoretical doctrines without distorting the "spirit" of feminism. Even with the diversity, though, American feminist criticism has unity, as is seen when examining definitions of feminist theory.

Linda Woodbridge, in her work, Women and the English Renaissance, states:

> . . . modern feminism is the belief in the essential intellectual, emotional, and moral equality of the sexes, an equality which underlies apparent differences which feminists believe are mainly attributable to cultural influences, and the concomitant belief that this equality of essence makes logical and just the demand for equality of rights and opportunity for women. (3)

In terms of literature, she says, "And I believe that, as life often imitates art, the image of Woman in literature has long influenced the behavior of living women" (6). Lenz, Green, and Neely, in The Woman's Part, define feminist criticism as:

> . . . more a matter of perspective than subject matter or gender. Feminists assume that women are

> equal to men but that their roles, more often than men's and in different ways, have been restricted, stereotyped, and minimized; their aim is to free women from oppressive constraints: 'the struggle for women is to be human in a world which declares them only female.' Feminist critics are profoundly concerned with understanding the parts women have played, do play, and might play in literature as well as in culture. (3)

Both definitions grasp three essential tenets of American feminist criticism; one, that women want equality; two, that women in literature consistently have been portrayed as stereotypically inferior; and three, that literature does not exist in a vacuum but influences the actual lives of those who read it.

These definitions provide a framework for what feminist literary criticism is, but they do not explain why, as Cheri Register demands, an exploration of the female nature requires a new form of criticism (16). A number of justifications have been offered by various feminist critics in defense of their research.

Fraya Katz-Stoker is very blunt with her justification when she claims that old schools of critical theory are merely a useless and elitist pastime (321). She states:

> Present criticism prevents literature from 'telling it' by concentrating on the technological (formal) aspects instead of literature's

> 'oppositional' (contextual) nature. By ignoring all opposition to the status quo, criticism helps to preserve it. (317)

Elaine Showalter, no less direct, basically justifies feminist criticism with a similar argument to Katz-Stoker, blanketed in humanism:

> The new sciences of the text based on linguistics, computers, genetic structuralism, deconstructionism, neoformalism and deformalism, affective stylistics, and psychoaesthetics, have offered literary critics the opportunity to demonstrate that the work they do is as manly and aggressive as nuclear physics--not intuitive, expressive, and feminine, but strenuous, rigorous, impersonal, and virile. . . . Literary science, in its manic generation of difficult terminology, its establishment of seminars and institutes of postgraduate study, creates elite corps of specialists who spend more and more time mastering the theory, less and less time reading the books. We are moving towards a two-tiered system of 'higher' and 'lower' criticism, the higher concerned with the 'humanistic' problems of content and interpretation. ("Toward a Feminist Poetics" 140)

In this charge against whole schools of criticism, Showalter makes a strong statement in favor of feminist theory and its humanistic, "higher" qualities. Certainly this viewpoint

allows room for debate but also provides a substantial justification in defense of the value of feminist critical theory.

Cheri Register, in her justification, incorporates the argument that criticism and academia are male dominated; consequently, literary standards are sex-biased (2). She claims that because of this bias, female experiences in literature remain on the periphery: "Only experiences encountered by male characters are called 'universal' or basic to 'the human condition'" (10).

With these justifications on their side, feminist critics faced the challenge of developing a theory and a practical application of that theory. Register acknowledges that feminist literary criticism derived its impetus from the American women's movement beginning in the 1960s (1). Elaine Showalter agrees with Register but also recognizes feminist criticism's debt to the "old patriarchal institution of literary criticism and theory, and it has had to come to terms with the meaning of its mixed origins" ("Feminist Critical Revolution" 7-8). Considering its contradictory parentage, it is not surprising that feminist criticism has struggled to deal with its antithetical nature and to present a unified, coherent front.

One of the first concerns of developing a critical theory was that it could not point to any particular, "acceptable" authority for justification of its literary principles (Showalter, "Feminist Critical Revolution" 4). Another issue lay precisely at the heart of American

feminist criticism; that is, in a male-dominated academic arena, women were developing a criticism dealing with women. Showalter argues, "While feminist criticism neither must nor should be the exclusive province of women, it is important to understand that its history and expression were determined by issues of gender and sexual difference" ("Feminist Critical Revolution" 4-5). Finally, feminist critics were unable to define exactly what they wished to accomplish and by what means they intended to achieve these vaguely defined goals. Showalter continues, "The absence of a clearly articulated theory makes feminist criticism perpetually vulnerable to such attacks, and not even feminist critics seem to agree what it is they mean to profess and defend" ("Toward a Feminist Poetics" 127). Annette Kolodny, in "Dancing Through the Minefield," agrees with Showalter on this final point:

> The very energy and diversity of our enterprise have rendered us vulnerable to attack on the grounds that we lack both definition and coherence; while our particular attentiveness to the ways in which literature encodes and disseminates cultural value systems calls down upon us imprecations echoing those heaped upon the Marxist critics of an earlier generation. (149)

What Kolodny does not confirm, however, is that this aspect of feminist criticism is a "problem." Rather, she concludes that pluralism is a correct and good component of feminist criticism:

> And if feminists openly acknowledge ourselves as pluralists, then we do not give up the search for patterns of opposition and connection--probably the basis of thinking itself; what we give up is simply the arrogance of claiming that our work is either exhaustive or definitive. (161)

She concludes by urging a continuation of the development of possible feminist approaches and an avoidance of generating a "straightjacket" for the purpose of a common theoretical paradigm (161).

Although the methods of criticism are diverse, Showalter emphasizes that a pattern has developed in feminist literary criticism. In its first stage, "feminist criticism concentrated on exposing the misogyny of literary practice," particularly the stereotypical images of women in literature and women's exclusion from literary history ("Feminist Critical Revolution" 5). The second phase was a discovery of and concentration on women writers and the content and quality of their work (6). In its third and newest stage, American feminist critics are demanding "a radical rethinking of the conceptual grounds of literary study, a revision of the accepted theoretical assumptions about reading and writing that have been based entirely on male literary experience" (8).

The first stage presented by Showalter commonly is referred to as "Images of Women" criticism. This type of criticism primarily is ideological, says Showalter, in that it concerns itself with the feminist as reader, analyzing

stereotypes of women in literature and misconceptions about women in criticism ("Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" 245). A substantial collection of this type of critical approach is found in Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives, with articles by Susan Koppelman Cornillon, Cheri Register, Fraya Katz-Stoker, and Josephine Donovan, to name a few. Register claims that this form of criticism "is ultimately cultural criticism" (10). The purpose is to inspire women to campaign actively for a better position for women in society. Register warns that the positive female stereotype can be just as detrimental to social reform as the negative female stereotype. Both obscure the social reality of women's roles, feelings, abilities, and beliefs (3-6). As Moi points out, then, in a negative sense, "Images of Women" critics are, according to their theories and goals, grounded in literature that is realistic and authentic and are not open to non-realistic forms of writing (47-48). On the other hand and in a positive tone, Register claims that the popularity of "Images of Women" criticism lies in this focus on realistic writing and in "the need for female readers to see their own experiences mirrored in literature" (15).

The second and third stages of feminist criticism have been labeled "gynocritics" by Showalter. The primary focus is the study of women as writers. As Showalter defines, "Its subjects include the psychodynamics of female creativity; linguistics and the problem of a female language; the trajectory of the individual or collective

stereotypes of women in literature and misconceptions about women in criticism ("Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" 245). A substantial collection of this type of critical approach is found in Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives, with articles by Susan Koppelman Cornillon, Cheri Register, Fraya Katz-Stoker, and Josephine Donovan, to name a few. Register claims that this form of criticism "is ultimately cultural criticism" (10). The purpose is to inspire women to campaign actively for a better position for women in society. Register warns that the positive female stereotype can be just as detrimental to social reform as the negative female stereotype. Both obscure the social reality of women's roles, feelings, abilities, and beliefs (3-6). As Moi points out, then, in a negative sense, "Images of Women" critics are, according to their theories and goals, grounded in literature that is realistic and authentic and are not open to non-realistic forms of writing (47-48). On the other hand and in a positive tone, Register claims that the popularity of "Images of Women" criticism lies in this focus on realistic writing and in "the need for female readers to see their own experiences mirrored in literature" (15).

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female literary career; literary history, and, of course, studies of particular writers and works" ("Toward a Feminist Poetics" 128). Gynocritics is broken into four major areas of concentration: biological, linguistic, psychoanalytical, and cultural.

In her essay, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," Showalter explains these four areas of concentration:

> 1. Feminist criticism in the biological perspective generally stresses the importance of the body as a source of imagery. (251)
> 2. Linguistic and textual theories of women's writing ask whether men and women use language differently; whether sex differences in language use can be theorized in terms of biology, socialization, or culture; whether women can create new languages of their own; and whether speaking, reading, and writing are all gender marked. (252-253)
> 3. Psychoanalytically oriented feminist criticism locates the difference of women's writing in the author's psyche and in the relation of gender to the creative process. (256)
> 4. A cultural theory acknowledges that there are important differences among women as writers: class, race, nationality, and history are literary determinants as signigicant as gender. (260)

This program of gynocritics encompasses Showalter's

third stage as well as the second. In "Toward a Feminist Poetics," Showalter states, "Gynocritics begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture" (131). In "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," she calls this focus the third stage.

Thus far, according to Kolodny, the success of this two-tiered concept of gynocritics "has been the return to circulation of previously lost or otherwise ignored works by women writers" ("Dancing Through the Minefield" 145). The success of the second aspect of gynocritics, I contend, will have to be determined at a later time. Feminist critics are in the middle of developing the tools for identifying "the female literary experience," which will involve a continuation of the study of "Images of Women," women as writers, and the biological, linguistic, psychoanalytical, and cultural aspects of the female creative process, in addition to the as-of-yet unidentified concerns, theories, and procedures.

The opinions on the ultimate objective of feminist literary criticism are as pluralistic as the theories and procedures for accomplishing that objective. Annette Kolodny sees the objective as "playful pluralism" itself ("Dancing Through the Minefield" 161). Fraya Katz-Stoker contends that the exposure of the reality of our sexist society should be the concern of feminist critics (326). Showalter wants "a new universal literary history and criticism that combines the literary experiences of both

women and men, in a complete revolution in the understanding of our literary heritage" ("Feminist Critical Revolution" 10). Register states that feminists, including feminist literary theorists, "want a new social order founded on 'humanistic' values, some of which are traditionally 'female' and not respected in contemporary society" (20). Sandra Gilbert claims that what feminist critics want is to "decode and demystify all the disguised questions and answers that have always shadowed the connections between textuality and sexuality, genre and gender, psychosexual identity and cultural authority" (36). Essentially, regardless of the specific objectives and procedures, these feminist critics are saying that women deserve a respectable place in literary history--as characters with genuine, realistic emotions, behaviors, and intellectual abilities; as writers with merit, based on humanistic standards, not specifically or necessarily male; as readers with a desire and a need to see members of their sex as positive, realistic role models; and finally, as critics with valuable insights and important contributions to the world of literary criticism.

The following analysis of the Turkish Embassy Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu will be patterned on a cultural gynocritics approach. My reasons for choosing an American feminist critical method are several. First, I firmly believe in equality between men and women and in literature's influence on cultural standards, as stated in

the definitions of feminist criticism by Woodbridge and Lenz, Green, and Neely. Second, an American approach meets my needs and goals more closely than a British or French approach. The primary platform for literature in this country is within academic institutions; therefore, it is more expedient to use the academic setting to discuss my subject. Third, although Lady Mary is a British writer, a British feminist approach to analyzing her letters is not demanded. Lady Mary did not write under the influence of British feminist theory, so her works are open to a variety of feminist critical approaches. Finally, I disagree with the French emphasis on difference. I do not disagree with the _concept_ of _ecriture feminine_ but with the _timing_ of its implementation. Equality must be established more concretely before difference is emphasized; otherwise, that difference the French espouse may be misunderstood as an excuse for inferior writing. I contend that society will not accept the difference until society accepts the women, and we have yet to reach that point.

I choose a cultural gynocritics approach because, as Elaine Showalter states:

> Before we can even begin to ask how the literature of women would be different and special, we need to reconstruct its past, to rediscover the scores of women novelists, poets, and dramatists whose work has been obscured by time, and to establish the continuity of the female tradition from decade to decade, rather than from Great Woman to

Great Woman. ("Toward a Feminist Poetics" 137)

During my research for a class on Dryden, Pope, and Swift, I discovered that very little feminist exploration has been done on the women writers of the eighteenth century, particularly Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. The task suggested by Showalter, in particular that of establishing continuity, is enormous at best and overwhelming at worst. Because of that magnitude, an analysis of Lady Mary's Embassy Letters simply becomes a starting point for fulfilling the need for more feminist criticism of that era, for reconstructing the past, and for rediscovering women writers. Yes, Lady Mary is considered one of the "Great Women" of that era, but an analysis of her Embassy Letters is at least a beginning for reconstructing the female tradition. What I hope to contribute through this analysis is a small but significant piece to the puzzle that in the future and through the work of a great many feminist critics will illustrate the continuity that Showalter desires.

The procedure for the analysis of the Embassy Letters incorporates three steps. First, a brief history of some of the aspects of what women of the eighteenth century experienced as members of a male-dominated society will be presented. The focus of this historical perspective will be on women's roles in society, their education, their relationships to and with men, social expectations, and their roles specifically as writers. The second step will be to discuss Lady Mary in particular and to examine her life in relationship to the conclusions drawn in the

historical analysis. Emphasis will be given to the major, influential events in her life regarding her career as a writer. The final and dominant step will be the examination of Lady Mary's most famous work, the Turkish Embassy Letters. This analysis will include a documentation of the content of these Letters, with emphasis given to the indecorous aspects of the work, a review of prior criticism of the Letters, an evaluation of the content, paying particular attention to social prescriptions as to what was and was not considered decorous for a woman of her position, and finally, the benefit, if any, of these Letters in elevating respect for writers of the eighteenth century, specifically women writers.

The content of this analysis is far from exhaustive. It touches the surface of possibilities for feminist criticism of the eighteenth century and for Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. I see this analysis as a companion to other works examining the biological imagery, the linguistics, and the psychoanalytical aspects of her Embassy Letters and other works, which then will merge into a coherent whole, reflecting one, small dimension of the continuity of the feminine tradition.

Chapter Two

Women in Eighteenth-Century England

In all likelihood, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu did not see herself or other aristocratic women of eighteenth-century England as members of a particularly oppressed group. She was a member of one of the first generations of English women to receive an education. She was able to pursue her writing career, albeit in a restricted fashion. She could participate in a limited capacity in the political activities of the day. Financially, she was secure. She had the freedom to live and to travel independently for many years on the Continent. In comparison to past generations of aristocratic women, she experienced a number of advantages not previously known.

Hindsight suggests advantages, though, that Lady Mary did not have. First, historians objectively can evaluate the situation of women of the eighteenth century and assert that Lady Mary Wortley Montagu is an exceptional woman. Second, modern society can positively claim that women can write and publish without fear of social ostracism; that women can assist in creating political doctrine, not simply assist in the political advancement of fathers, brothers, and husbands; that women have the right to an education equal to their brothers and the ability to grasp as much knowledge,

if not more, than they. Whether or not Lady Mary saw herself as oppressed is irrelevant. When considering the status of women today, the fact remains that the disparity in marriage expectations, legal rights, financial situations, educational opportunities, career options, and social expectations demonstrates that eighteenth-century women were not allowed the same advantages and opportunities as their male counterparts or of women of future generations. Eighteenth-century English society was thoroughly patriarchal, and, as such, oppressed the women of its culture.

One institution that proved to be particularly oppressive for women in England during the eighteenth century was marriage. Rogers notes, "Marriage was more or less forced on women, as their only way to a recognized position in society" (7). Inherent in that statement is that women attained positions in society which closely reflected the positions of their husbands. On the other hand, husbands were not restricted or advanced in their social placement according to the social status of their wives. Besides the fact that marriage was a given, women were married at a relatively young age. W. Lyon Blease claims that the "usual age of marriage was probably about seventeen, and it was not greatly increased until the middle of the eighteenth century" (22).

Another reality regarding marriage was that women were seldom allowed the freedom to choose a husband:

> A woman's happiness, social position, and future,

> depended upon the man she married. Traditionally she was supposed to have little say in the choice of her future mate; this was a matter for more mature minds, her parents or guardians. Society, especially in the upper reaches, often placed family and financial considerations above personal ones. And if, in the best of all possible worlds, the parent never chose a husband likely to make his daughter unhappy, all too often reality saw a woman married to a man she could neither love nor respect, who had little thought for her happiness. (Schnorrenberg 190)

Katharine Rogers expands on the financial considerations of choosing a spouse for a young woman:

> The elaborate contracts negotiated before an upper-class marriage dealt exclusively with such matters as how large a portion the bride's family was to hand over, what allowance was to be settled on her during the marriage, and what maintenance assured to her in case of separation or widowhood. Women were ashamed to admit that physical attraction affected their preference; equality of birth and wealth were generally accepted as essential. (13-14)

Rogers also states that even when young women were given the freedom to choose their spouses, social demand for modesty and passivity in the female population prevented women from actively seeking mates or openly responding to the

affections of men attracted to them (11). After a spouse was chosen, a woman theoretically had the right to refuse, but this was not a common practice (Rogers 12). Finally, Rogers notes that women who refused to abide by their parents' wishes were likely to be left without an inheritance and ostracized because of their "uncontrolled passion and willfulness" (11).

Once in a marriage, women encountered a number of obstacles to equality with their husbands. For example, a social double standard concerning adultery and chastity existed. Rogers states, "Chastity, narrowly defined, was the all-important factor in determining how a woman was valued, by others and by herself as well. It was equated with virtue and honor in women; and, once lost, it was assumed to be irrecoverable" (9). Men were not exposed to such scrutiny. Besides that inequity, "she was expected to graciously overlook adultery in her husband or, if she reacted at all, to examine herself to see how she might have failed to please him" (Rogers 9). Blease affirms Rogers's observations and also asserts that not only was adultery tolerated in men but also was considered "a not ungraceful accomplishment in a man of good breeding" (27-28). Those married women who had difficulty enduring infidelity, abusiveness, or neglect had little recourse. "Separation discredited a woman, regardless of the circumstances" (Rogers 8). Divorce proved even more difficult: "Divorce with the right to remarry, obtainable only by an act of Parliament and in effect granted only to husbands who proved

their wives had committed adultery, brought social ostracism to women, though no stigma attached to adulterous males" (Rogers 9). The unmitigated control of the husband in legal matters made equality between husband and wife an impossibility. Okin observes that:

> The husband's right to his wife's consortium was so absolute that, at least until the early nineteenth century, he was considered by the courts to be entitled to imprison her in order to prevent her from leaving him. Only gross misconduct on his part could deprive a man of the right to force his wife to live with him. (137)

As has been stated, adultery was not considered gross misconduct.

Besides the legal control of the husband in regard to marriage and divorce, the only other aspects of the law specifically regarding women were those dealing with the resulting property settlements of marriage (Schnorrenberg 194). Normally, women were not allowed to inherit land. Land usually was settled on the eldest male heir (Okin 127). In the rare occurrence that a woman did inherit, common law dictated that, upon marriage, what was hers became the husband's (Okin 125). Even when the practice of separate estate became common in the eighteenth century, women gained minimal financial independence.

First, separate estate had to be specified in the marriage settlement. If it were not specified, common law

prevailed, in which case the husband gained absolute control of the woman and her property and money (Okin 129). It was also common law that, when designing a marriage settlement, "a prospective husband was held to have a reasonable 'expectation' that his wife's property would become his" (Okin 130); therefore, the settlement regarding the wife's property had to meet his approval before the marriage ever occurred. When settlements allowed for separate estate, the husband generally was named the trustee. If no trustee were named, the husband automatically assumed that position. According to Okin:

> This meant in theory, of course, that he was supposed to follow his wife's wishes with regard to the property held in trust. But the laws that regulated marital relations until the late nineteenth century were such to make the notion of a husband's acting as trustee for his wife's 'independent' property patently absurd. She was obligated by both religious and secular law to obey him absolutely, and he was in a position of such legal power with regard to both her and her children as to enable him to punish her cruelly in many ways if she did not. . . . Indeed, whether or not her husband was the trustee for her property, he was in such a position of power over her every decision or action that it makes very little sense even to conceive of her as capable of owning and controlling property independently of him. (133)

Just as the concept of separate estate did not, in reality, resemble its theoretical foundations, the concept and practice of the use of pin-money were also at odds. On the surface, pin-money appeared to be a fixed income for the wife, but as Okin points out, "it was not hers to spend or save as she chose; it was explicitly intended to be spent so as to keep up her appearance and that of the household consistent with her husband's social and economic position" (136). In every respect, the wife usually remained financially dependent on her husband. Even if she had been allowed control of her finances, "almost all eighteenth-century women were hampered by their total ignorance regarding business matters and the failure of the business world to take them seriously" (Okin 135).

This ignorance regarding business matters was the result of the lack of educational opportunities for women in eighteenth-century England. In the first half of the century, large numbers of women, even in aristocratic circles, had no education or education only in superficial matters (Blease 41). Rogers claims that a girl who was able to obtain an education was one who taught herself or one "so fortunate as to have a learned father, brother, or friend who took an interest in teaching her" (28-29). If a woman were fortunate enough to acquire an education, social dictates demanded modesty and concealment of such a "masculine" attribute (Blease 43).

The eighteenth century did see a gradual change in attitude toward the education of women, if in practice the

change was only minimal. In 1706, Mary Astell argued that men were depriving themselves of intellectual companionship in marriage by not providing educational opportunities for girls as well as boys (Stone 345). Rogers claims that during the eighteenth century "the clearest evidence of progress is the wider recognition that the education of women is important to society" (29). For the time period it is conceivable that the concept of any education for women was considered a radical step. Today, however, the evidence indicates that this push for better education was limited, because, as Blease notes, "Most of the new thinkers among women were content with personal liberty" (50). Bridget Hill notes that the thinking of the time did not promote the concept of equality in education:

> Underlying the views of all but a minority of eighteenth-century writers on the education of girls of the middle and upper classes is the conviction that women were of different and inferior intellectual abilities. Nor was it a view confined to men. Many women writers, however critical of the nature of the education provided for girls, shared the belief that an education different in kind from that of men was appropriate to them. (44)

Even though people were recognizing the need for improved education of women, the application of this belief was slow and undeniably sex-biased.

The lack of training and the stigma placed on women who

worked for money meant that careers outside of marriage and motherhood were extremely limited for women. Of course the age-old occupation of prostitution was always available to those unfortunate women who lost their reputations and who faced social ostracism (Rogers 20). The only other career that gradually opened for women during the eighteenth century was writing but not without severe censorship and restrictions. Many women, like Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, published anonymously or posthumously. Others, particularly novelists, were treated with tolerant condescension, as long as their works were decorous. Most female authors of the era remained, according to Rogers, "apologetic and furtive about their creative work" and wrote "under conditions unthinkable for a male author" (21-25). So, except for prostitution and writing, most women "were loaded with meaningless social obligations and inhibited from committing themselves to serious work. And always, a woman's comfort, fulfillment, and self-respect depended on the good will of the men around her" (Rogers 35).

Besides the restrictions placed on women in terms of marriage, finances, education, and career, society placed stringent demands on the general behavior of women. Schnorrenberg states:

> The view of holders of power was that woman's only proper role was that of dutiful adjunct to man, whether as daughter, wife, mother, or sister. She had no place outside the family and its home. . . . It was the female's duty to provide a safe

> haven in which children could be nurtured in innocence and morality and where husbands would find refuge from the masculine wars of business, politics, philosophy, and theology. (185)

Nussbaum states, using scriptural authority, it was "a woman's natural function to bring stability to the larger society by ordering the domestic world" (8). Blease states it acutely when observing that women were "directed to obey Saint Peter and Saint Paul more often than encouraged to emulate Miriam or Deborah" (18).

In addition to managing and stabilizing the domestic world, women had direct obligations for influencing and developing refined, civilized behavior in their husbands. As previously stated, if a husband were adulterous, it was the wife's duty to change whatever behavior _she_ displayed to "force" his infidelity. In addition, Rogers notes, wives "were supposed to be by nature sprightly and witty to amuse men, refined and tasteful to polish their manners, sweet and compliant to soothe their tempers, pure and self-controlled to elevate their morals" (37).

Women held duties concerning their husbands, brothers, or fathers also outside of the home. Kinnear observes:

> Women were prominent at the political courts. Never ministers of state, they nevertheless contributed a measure of polite society with their presence at balls, receptions, gambling, and theatrical events and used their opportunities to further the careers of men connected with

them. (91)

The achievements or failures of those men connected with them is the only way women's political influence in the eighteenth century can be measured (Steinen 229).

Besides being responsible for harmony, the husband's fidelity, and the furthering of a husband's career, a wife also was faced with upholding the extremely vague notion of reputation, not only for herself but for her husband and children as well. According to Rogers, "Since reputation consists of what is said about one rather than what one is, since it was so important to women and so irretrievable once lost, women were terribly dependent on public opinion" (36). If a woman were unfortunate enough to lose the good opinion of her peers, no matter what her behavior actually had been, she could never regain her standing in society and also faced ostracism from her spouse and family. All of these duties combined "led to the defining of excellence of women in terms of usefulness to men" (Rogers 37).

Considering that women's behavior and reputation were based on subjective, restrictive, and uncontrollable standards, men's attitude toward women is consistent and somewhat understandable. Men viewed women either as "a vicious and contemptible aggregation of littleness" or as a "delicate and fragile creature" (Blease 37). Neither view is flattering. Ironically, these aggregations of littleness and fragile creatures were created by that patriarchal system that men so closely guarded. Rogers states, "Men who could see women as human beings like themselves were as

exceptional as women who attained freedom and fulfillment" (39).

If there is one point on which most historians agree, it is that there always are exceptions to the rule, and the one name which consistently is offered as an exception among women of eighteenth-century England is Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Lawrence Stone mentions Lady Mary's challenge to Bishop Burnet about the poor educational opportunities for women (345). Karl von den Steinen notes Lady Mary's outstanding involvement in terms of political activity (233-235). Bridget Hill claims that women like Lady Mary, Mary Astell, and Catherine Macauley should be viewed as "exceptionally courageous" (12). Barbara Schnorrenberg states that "Lady Mary was far from satisfied with or willing to accept society's role and limitations for women" (188). Finally, Katharine Rogers, addressing Lady Mary's writing, observes, "Anger repeatedly breaks the surface of Montagu's decorous acceptance of the status quo" (97).

These observations should not suggest that Lady Mary was unaffected by the demands and expectations of the society in which she lived. She certainly was. The difference lies in her ability to challenge the boundaries of existing standards for women while maintaining her position within that society. She challenged existing standards through her objections to the educational system, through her interest in and implementation of a smallpox inoculation practice she discovered in Turkey, and through

her insistence on writing, among other efforts. Even so, Lady Mary felt the pressures to conform. As Blease summarizes, women of Lady Mary's capacity felt hampered throughout their lives and died with talents and potential contributions to society wasted (44).

Women in eighteenth-century England were forced to live under a number of oppressive constraints. With the exception of a few, their educational levels were woefully below those of their male counterparts. Marriage was forced on them, and they were not allowed even to select their own spouses. Marriage settlements, even in situations where separate estate was established, allowed them almost no financial independence. The law basically ignored them. Their only choice in terms of career was that of wife and mother. Writing gradually did become a career option but within very narrow constraints. They lived in a society that allowed them no recognition as equal human beings; yet, they were to remain cheerful and obedient. They were made responsible for bringing stability into their homes and for maintaining their husbands' moral characters but were not vested with any power to fulfill those responsibilities. In short, their entire existence was justified only in terms of their service to the men around them. Autonomy for women was not possible. There were women, such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who challenged this oppression; however, as the next chapter, which deals specifically with her life, will demonstrate, even women like Lady Mary were severely impeded in their efforts to achieve recognition and

equality. Only recently have scholars and society acknowledged the individual talents of women of Lady Mary's stature.

Chapter Three

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu

"She rebelled against the attitude of men to women; and seemed to the earnest ladies of the close of the eighteenth century a patron saint, a star in blue stockings" (Barry 8).

In eighteenth-century England, women were assigned a subordinate role to men. They were to be nonassertive and obedient, chaste and faithful, pleasant and cheerful. Educationally they only needed what was necessary for polite conversation in social settings and for managing the affairs of the family. Beyond the superficial, most knowledge was considered inappropriate for the "fairer sex." Those who did acquire a greater knowledge were apt to conceal it.

Into this restrictive environment was born Lady Mary Pierrepont, the future Lady Mary Wortley Montagu.[1] Christened on 26 May 1689, she was the daughter of Evelyn Pierrepont, the future Earl of Kingston, Marquess of Dorchester, and finally, Duke of Kingston-upon-Hull, and Lady Mary Fielding (Halsband 1, 7, 47).[2] Considering what is known about the life of this woman, it is understandable why later feminists would consider her a "patron saint." Though she herself probably would deny being a feminist, she did challenge the subordination of women, not so much through policial activism but through her daily life,

achievements, and writing. By her life she seems to assert, "Yes, I know what my role is and, yes, I will abide by decorum, but also I will learn, I will write, I will be an individual." In essence, she lived on the edge of what was acceptable--just far enough from socially acceptable behavior that her contemporaries could criticize her but not far enough for them to ostracize her completely. The last twenty years of her life she lived in self-imposed exile in a Continental-European society that was less critical of well-educated women.

Many aspects of Lady Mary's life fit well within the confines of social standards for women of the era. Like many of her aristocratic contemporaries, Lady Mary's basic education was left to a governess, but she also was fortunate enough to have the run of her father's library. By the age of 13, she had taught herself Latin and by 14 had read most of her father's books (5, 7). Even though this accomplishment may seem extraordinary, recall that Katharine Rogers has established that some fathers did take an interest in educating their daughters. Lady Mary's case seems to indicate passive assistance from her father.

Lady Mary's courtship with and eventual marriage to Edward Wortley was anything but routine. The aspects of this relationship will be addressed later. What is fairly typical for the time is that her father and Wortley could not come to terms on the settlement (13). Her father then proceeded to arrange a marriage for her with the Honorable Clotworthy Skeffington. Lady Mary begged her father to

reconsider. When he would not, she eloped with Edward Wortley. The exact date of their marriage is unknown, but Halsband places it on 20 August 1712 (20-27).

Shortly after their marriage, Wortley began to neglect his wife as he pursued his career at Court. Letters between the newlyweds indicate this discord (30). When Edward Wortley Montagu, Jr. was born on 16 May 1713, Wortley's tenderness and attention toward his wife and child did not increase. At this point, Lady Mary became determined to maintain the facade of a happy marriage and continued in this mode with her husband until his death in 1761 (33-34, 275).

During the early years of marriage, Lady Mary had the usual responsibilities for a wife and mother. She was responsible for securing and maintaining their house in London with economy since they married without a settlement. She also looked for an opportunity to reconcile with her father. Even though they did reunite eventually, her father still refused a dowry or settlement (35, 41). In April, 1716, when Wortley was appointed Ambassador to Turkey, Lady Mary prepared to accompany him. They left England for their Embassy on 1 August 1716 (55, 58). During this two-year venture Lady Mary compiled the Turkish Embassy Letters. The Wortley family returned to London in the fall of 1718 with the addition of a daughter, Mary, who had been born in Turkey in January, 1718 (80, 93).

After this time, Lady Mary's assertiveness and independence appear to have increased. Her acceptance of

the status quo was limited to routine conformities. She resumed her role at Court as any wife of a member of Parliament appropriately would (94-95). She also continued her parental duties toward her children, but ironically, her daughter married Lord Bute on 13 August 1736 against her parents' wishes and received no dowry (155). Her marriage with Wortley continued on the same track it had taken in its earliest stages, but he provided financial support for her his entire life, even during her almost twenty-four year absence from England (189). She corresponded frequently with Wortley during her sojourn on the Continent. Most of their communication dealt with their children, particularly their son, who was somewhat rebellious and troublesome (190-275). After leaving England on 25 July 1739, she never again saw her husband. He died on 21 January 1761, and Lady Mary did not return to England until January, 1762 (178, 275, 279).

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's deviations from accepted social behavior far outnumber her conformities. It is impossible to say what factors had the greatest influence on her actions. A number of occurrences and character traits point to making her an outstanding individual, probably not the least of which was her innate intelligence. Apparently, she was masterful in accomplishing a balance between conforming and deviating because her contemporaries, though critical, never fully turned her away. What is certain is that her exceptional abilities and qualities surfaced at an early age.

In 1703, she began the writing career for which she is best known. She compiled poems and songs and attempted to imitate an epistolary romance. She probably was influenced by her father's friends, with whom she frequently interacted. These friends included Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, William Congreve, and Dr. Samuel Garth (5, 6, 8).

At age 15, she wrote about opening an English monastery for ladies. She always was interested in the inequity of education for women, but as Halsband states, "She tended to be a blue-stocking proud of her erudition, though she later regarded a reputation of learning as a misfortune in a woman. Her studious disposition, she thought, distinguished her from other girls her age" (7). In a letter in 1710 to Bishop Burnet which accompanied her translation of Epictetus's Enchiridion, she argued for better education for women but also stated that she was not advocating equality of the sexes (14). In January, 1753 she wrote a letter to her daughter, Lady Bute, and offered advice on the education of her granddaughters. Halsband claims that, "The most peculiar part of her advice was that since matrimony at best is hazardous, the girl should be prepared for spinsterhood" (251-252). An education, she argued, was always there for a girl even if a spouse were not (252).

Marriage is another subject on which Lady Mary was fairly outspoken. During her courtship with Edward Wortley, Lady Mary claimed that marriage was a form of servitude (9). In a letter dated 28 March 1710, her first to Wortley, Lady Mary said she preferred a life of simplicity rather than

wealth (11), and later she was active in a campaign against her father and others refuting the concept of mercenary marriages (13-15). When Wortley questioned her about her dowry, she responded that she was tired of the humility of being treated like a slave (16). When her brother was married in 1711, she despised the match on the grounds that it was mercenary (20). Apparently she fully believed in her convictions about mercenary marriages and that they created servitude for women because, as already stated, she did marry Wortley without her father's consent and without a settlement, which makes a statement of her independence and her attempt to avoid servitude to a man who had purchased her.

During the eighteenth century, women were present at Court, but few took as active a role in their husbands' careers as Lady Mary. She was very ambitious, and, because she herself could not hold a seat in Parliament, planned a great political career for her husband. She suggested a seat he could buy and later persuaded Wortley to accept a post as Junior Commissioner of the Treasury (40-42). In 1715, when the Wortleys moved permanently to London, Lady Mary immediately set out to win the favor of the new King, George I. She taught herself German in order to communicate with him. She also went as far as to become friends with his two mistresses. Always with an eye to the future, Lady Mary also became friends with Princess Caroline of Wales, the wife of the heir to the throne of England (46-47). During the Embassy in Turkey, Lady Mary continued to advise

her husband even after he was recalled for failing to secure peace between Austria and Turkey (77-81). The return from Turkey, however, indicates a change in her attitude toward her husband's career. She appears to have detached herself from him and became more independent in her political views. Halsband does not provide reasons for this detachment; however, after that Wortley never again held an appointed position, and he remained in Parliament the rest of his life (94). This fact suggests that Lady Mary was a significant source of Wortley's ambition and/or success. In the late 1720s, Lady Mary remained good friends with Robert Walpole despite the fact her husband and Walpole disagreed politically (136). Her final direct political activity appears to have occurred during her stay on the Continent. While in Italy, she wrote to her husband and volunteered to be a political informer. Wortley accepted her offer and asked her to keep him posted of any interesting news about foreign ministers. In January, 1740, Lady Mary sent her husband information, but Halsband does not elaborate on the content or the result of receiving this information (186-187).

One of Lady Mary's greatest social contributions came not in the political arena but in her assistance in establishing the practice of smallpox inoculation in England. Certainly, her motivation is clear. In July, 1713, her brother died of smallpox, and she herself contracted the disease in December, 1715. Although she survived, her beauty was marred by the disease (35, 51). During their

Embassy, she learned of an inoculation method commonly used in Turkey and on 19 March 1718 had her own son inoculated (71-72, 80). In the spring of 1721, a smallpox epidemic broke out in England. Lady Mary then inoculated her daughter and became involved in a promotion of the new medical practice (104). Many leading physicians disputed the practice, but Lady Mary was insistent, and in April, 1722, Princess Caroline inoculated two of her daughters. Lady Mary's active participation consisted primarily of writing essays in defense of the practice. In September, 1722, one of her essays was published in a popular London newspaper with no author designated (110). Even though her writings were anonymous, many in her social circle knew of her involvement in establishing the practice of inoculation. She won a great deal of fame in London as the popularizer of this medical breakthrough (114). As late as 1754, she continued to be praised for her efforts in bringing the inoculation practice from Turkey to England (255).

Lady Mary was far less outspoken on feminism than on inoculation, but there were some connections between her and the feminist movement of the eighteenth century.[3] These connections lay not so much in activism but in her attitudes and convictions concerning typical feminist issues, such as education for women and the roles of women in marriage, and the people with whom she associated. In addition to the already mentioned attitudes toward education and marriage, Lady Mary was particularly aware of the oppression of women in England. During a visit to a Bagnio in Turkey, Lady Mary

"began to develop the paradox of Turkish women's liberty and English women's slavery" (68). Indeed, a number of the Embassy Letters address this issue. Then in the early 1720s, she became friends with Mary Astell, a founder of England's feminist movement. She allowed Astell to read her Embassy Letters, and Astell wrote a preface for the work. She also begged Lady Mary to publish the Letters, but Lady Mary said that they could not be published in her lifetime (117). Her most direct defense of feminism came in 1738. In December, 1737, Lady Mary began writing and publishing a political newspaper, The Nonsense of Common Sense. This publication was created in direct contrast to the leading Opposition paper of the period, Common Sense. Pretending to no Party affiliation, Lady Mary's newspaper claimed that its only purpose was "to expose social evils and defend moral virtue" (165). The sixth edition of The Nonsense of Common Sense specifically defended feminism, and, until the end of her life, she was particularly proud of that essay (168, 171). Her value to contemporaries who were involved actively in the feminist movement is inestimable, but it is known that she was thought of by members of that movement as an extraordinary intellectual (100). One member who particularly respected Lady Mary was Mary Astell. Ruth Perry observes, "Astell recognized in Lady Mary a mind equal to her own, with an eloquence and a literacy equally out of place in the world in which they found themselves" (Mary Astell 277).

In addition to her feminism, Lady Mary was particularly

daring in her personal friendships. Some of these relationships apparently were topics for gossip, for when Pope published the Dunciad and "Of the Uses of Riches," his audience readily identified Lady Mary and two of her friends (130, 140-141).

The Dunciad alludes to Lady Mary's friendship with Toussaint Remond de Saint-Mard, a French critic and author whom she had met during the trip to Turkey. Upon her return, she and Remond continued corresponding (96). In 1720, Remond remained persistent in his pursuit of Lady Mary and finally persuaded her to get involved in financial speculations for him. She ended up purchasing South Sea Company stock for herself, Remond, and others. In August and September 1720, when the stock dropped drastically, Remond accused Lady Mary of cheating him. He even threatened to contact Wortley about their dealings. This conflict continued until the summer of 1721 when their feud inexplicably ended (101-108). In the Dunciad Pope says about this dispute, "(Whence hapless Monsieur much complains at Paris / Of wrongs from Duchesses and Lady Marias)" (II.135-136). That Lady Mary was seriously concerned about the problems with Remond is evident. In a letter to her sister, Lady Mar, she states, "'I am too well acquainted with the world . . . not to know that the most groundless accusation is always of ill consequence to a woman'" (107). She was in great fear that her husband would find out because he was very conservative when it came to money matters (109). Halsband claims, though, that the evidence

indicates that Lady Mary and Remond never were lovers and that she eventually did tell her husband about the speculations and the problems (108). She also made a number of attempts to conceal her problems with Remond from her friends, such as Pope. Unfortunately, her attempts were futile, and Pope later immortalized the scandal when he wrote the Dunciad (108).

Just as volatile as the association with Remond was Lady Mary's friendship with Maria Skerrett which also developed in the early 1720s. Skerrett was Robert Walpole's mistress, and she and Lady Mary were mutual friends of Lord Hervey (118-119). According to Halsband, in 1733, when Pope published "Of the Uses of Riches," he referred to Lady Mary as Lesbia. Halsband quotes a draft of the poem as follows:

> 'Why starves the Peer his son? the cause is found:
> He thinks a loaf will rise to fifty pound.
> Why heaps lewd Lesbia that enormous sum?
> Alas! she fears a man may cost a plum.' (140)

He then asserts that many readers of the poem, especially those who knew of the friendship, easily identified Lesbia as Lady Mary and associated this reference with her relationship with Maria Skerrett, thus suggesting a sexual relationship between the two (140-141). Aubrey Williams, editor of the Riverside Edition of Pope's poetry, presents another version of this same passage, in which Lady Mary is referred to as Sappho:

> Why Shylock wants a meal; the cause is found,
> He thinks a Loaf will rise to fifty pound. . . .

> Why she and Sappho raise that monstrous sum?
> Alas! They fear a man will cost a plum.
> (117-124)

This passage does not imply a sexual relationship but rather presents the image of unscrupulous and immodest women. This image ties in more closely with other references made by Pope to Lady Mary in which he also refers to her as Sappho, who often is seen as a self-serving woman.

Of course, Lady Mary's relationship with Alexander Pope was a topic for much discussion. In fact, a literary battle ensued as a result of their eventual estrangement. In 1715, Lady Mary became friends with a number of literary men, including Abbe Conti, John Gay, Dr. Arbuthnot, and Alexander Pope. By the summer of 1715, she and Pope were active correspondents. She and Gay and Pope during that same year wrote three town eclogues which were politically explosive (48-50). During the Embassy to Turkey, Pope and Lady Mary remained in contact. Pope's letters to Lady Mary indicate a strong physical and emotional attraction (63). He also sent her several poems which he wanted her to critique. "Eloisa to Abelard" contains a pointed reference to Lady Mary and to how much Pope misses her company. He states:

> And sure if fate some future Bard shall join
> In sad similitude of griefs to mine,
> Condemn'd whole years in absence to deplore,
> And image charms he must behold no more;
> Such if there be, who loves so long, so well,

> Let him our sad, our tender story tell;
> The well-sung woes will sooth my pensive ghost;
> He best can paint 'em, who shall feel 'em most.
> (359-366)

Upon her return from Turkey, they re-established their friendship and were "the hub of a steady whirl of friends" (98). In fact, Pope commissioned a portrait of Lady Mary, which he displayed in his best room facing the Thames (98-99). By the summer of 1721, though, their friendship took a turn.

Many reasons for the estrangement have been offered. Pope himself claimed that Lady Mary had libelled him and that he felt she had used him for her own gains (131-132). Lady Mary attributed their disassociation to the fact that Pope became jealous of her friendship with the Duke of Wharton and that he was angry because she had laughed at his professions of love (132). Whatever the reason, the result was that Pope wrote a number of poems in which he makes very negative comments about Lady Mary.

In February, 1733, Pope made his sharpest attack on Lady Mary in his "Imitation of Horace" (141-142). In this poem he writes, "Slander or Poyson; dread from Delia's Rage, / Hard Words or Hanging, if your Judge be Page; / From furious Sappho scarce a milder Fate / P--x'd by her Love, or libell'd by her Hate" (81-84). His final attack came in 1735, when he refers to Lady Mary as Sappho in both "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot" and "Of the Characters of Women"

149-150). "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot" states, "Still Sapho--'Hold! for God-sake--you'll offend: / 'No Names--be calm--learn Prudence of a Friend: / 'I too could write, and I am twice as tall, / 'But Foes like these!'--One Flatt'rer's worse than all" (101-104). In "Of the Characters of Women," Pope creates an unappealing, scatalogical image which alludes to Lady Mary's tainted reputation:

> As Sappho's diamonds with her dirty smock,
> Or Sappho at her toilet's greazy task,
> With Sappho fragrant at an ev'ning Mask:
> So morning Insects that in muck begun,
> Shine, buzz, and fly-blow in the setting sun.
> (24-28)

Whether or not Pope is referring to Lady Mary's sexual preference when he calls her Sappho is debatable. What is clear, though, is that his image of Sappho is that of an unflattering, immodest, and possibly immoral woman.

The attacks were not one-sided. In June, 1728, a criticism of the Dunciad appeared. Pope accused Lady Mary of writing it, but she denied authorship (135). In the spring of 1730, "Epistle to Mr. A. Pope" was circulated. It contained slanderous comments about Pope, but Lady Mary again denied any association with the work (137). Finally, "Verses Address'd to the Imitator of the First Satire of the Second Book of Horace. By a Lady" was published on 8 March 1733. Everyone assumed that Lady Mary had written the piece. She claimed she did not write it but that she knew

the author and was not sorry it had been written (142-143). Even if she did write these, which I believe is very possible, the war of words was not restricted to Lady Mary and Pope. After the Dunciad appeared, a number of angry replies surfaced (135). In 1733, two anonymous pamphleteers defended Pope (144). Lord Hervey, Lady Mary's friend and also one of Pope's targets, even became outspoken in this pamphlet war (147). In the upper circles of English society, this estrangement with Pope appears to have been even more inflammatory and dangerous to Lady Mary's reputation than her relationships with Remond and Skerrett judging by the amount of time invested in the battle and the amount of public involvement.

Less well known to her contemporaries than the scandals with Remond, Skerrett, and Pope was Lady Mary's relationship with Count Francesco Algarotti, a scholar of Newtonian physics. Lady Mary met Algarotti in the spring of 1736 through Lord Hervey who had met him through Voltaire. During Algarotti's visit to England in the spring and summer of 1736, Lady Mary and Lord Hervey, who had homosexual tendencies, became rivals for Algarotti's affection (153-157).

Algarotti left England for Paris on 6 September 1736. For the next three years, Lady Mary sent a number of irrational, emotional letters to Algarotti. Apparently, he was an opportunist who used his charisma to sway people to his advantage, and Lady Mary fell for his charms. He ignored her letters including the one suggesting they meet

in Europe. When he finally did respond, he told her that her love would not last. She sent a desperate reply. In October, 1738, she sent a letter to Lady Pomfret telling her of her desire to retire on the Continent. Lady Pomfret and her husband had retired to Italy in July, 1738. Lady Mary then sent money to Algarotti for his return to England. He returned in March, 1739. During this visit they talked of retiring to the Venetian States. On 10 May 1739, Algarotti accompanied Lord Baltimore to the Russian Court, and Lady Mary prepared to leave for Italy. She departed London on 25 July 1739 (156-178).

Lady Mary's reasons for leaving England were numerous. First was the ordeal with Pope which had lasted at least a decade. Her children were grown, and she was no longer responsible for the custody of her sister, Lady Mar. Her marriage with Wortley was loveless. Finally, there was the prospect of being with Algarotti. She told her husband that a trip to the Continent would improve her health. He agreed but no mention was made of his joining her. Except for Lord Hervey, no one knew of her love for Algarotti (179). Lady Mary settled in Venice (184).

In the meantime, during his travels with Lord Baltimore, Algarotti met Crown Prince Frederick, heir to the Prussian throne, and won his favor (183-184). Later this relationship with Frederick provided Algarotti another excuse for not joining Lady Mary in Italy. He then returned to England. He wrote to Lady Mary and suggested they settle in Paris (188). In another letter he said they should meet

either in France, Geneva, or Holland (191). Finally, Lady Mary received a letter from Lord Hervey saying that Algarotti had left England on 6 June 1740 to attend the new King of Prussia, Frederick (196-197). For several months after that, he did not correspond with either Lady Mary or Lord Hervey (198).

During these months, Lady Mary travelled to Florence, Rome, Naples, and Turin (200-213). Algarotti was given the title of Count in the Prussian peerage and in December, 1740, he left Frederick on a diplomatic mission to Turin (209). Finally, after over a year and a half, Lady Mary and Algarotti met in Turin on 16 March 1741. They remained in Turin for two months. In May, Algarotti was recalled to Frederick, and he and Lady Mary separated on unfriendly terms (213-215). She did not meet Algarotti again until 1756, when she was 67 years old. Their friendship was much different this time--less emotional and more relaxed (262-263). During this period of renewed friendship, she continued her writing and shared most of it with Algarotti (267).

July, 1746, marked the beginning of the last of Lady Mary's controversial relationships. In Avignon, she met Count Ugolino Palazzi. For ten years she was involved in this friendship which ended with Lady Mary threatening to take Palazzi to court over the money he had swindled from her. In September, 1756, she was rid of him but embarrassed by the scandal of their relationship. In all, she lost at least twenty-five hundred pounds to the Count and added yet

another scandalous relationship to her already notorious reputation (236-260).

Aside from her outspoken attitudes toward education, marriage, and, to a certain degree, feminism, aside from her activities at Court and her enthusiasm for establishing smallpox inoculation, and aside from her scandalous friendships, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's fame comes from the fact that she was a writer. She understood the limitations placed on women writers and, in a sense, respected her role in society; yet, she wrote. Her career started at a young age and continued throughout her life. Furthermore, her contributions to literary history are not limited to her works but also encompass her roles as critic and patroness of young writers.

Already this chapter outlines a number of Lady Mary's literary endeavors. She began writing poems, songs, and translations at an early age. She used her writing abilities to persuade people to understand her concerns about education for women, the concept of mercenary marriages, feminism, and the need for smallpox inoculation. She conspired with Pope and Gay to write satiric eclogues. Pope asked for her opinion on his works. She possibly and probably used her pen to defend herself against the attacks on her character by Pope and his supporters. She wrote letters and edited them for the purpose of reporting her impressions of and insights into Continental-European and Turkish culture. She wrote for the purpose of displaying her passions and emotions, as in her relationship with

Algarotti. A list of her additional literary endeavors indicates a diverse and productive career. (See Appendix I.)

In many respects, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu is an enigma. Several aspects of her life appear to fit the prescribed mold for a woman of her social stature, such as being a wife and mother. On the other hand, she defied limitations and pursued her interests in areas restricted to the male population of her era, particularly in the area of writing. It is difficult to conceive that much of her life could have been extremely happy for her. From her youngest days she challenged her role; in the end she gave up the struggle and lived isolated from her native country. Maybe she knew she had pushed too far. Maybe her self-imposed exile saved her from the obscurity of being classified as just another "eccentric" woman. Whatever her consciousness of the situation was, she succeeded in maintaining at least a semblance of respectability in English society in the eighteenth century and enough of a hint of literary value that we in the twentieth century can safely and without apology disclose her complete worth as a literary figure.

Chapter Four

The Turkish Embassy Letters

When Octavia meets her husband's mistress, Cleopatra, in John Dryden's, _All for Love_, the two engage in a seemingly civil conversation. Dryden does not allow obscenities or physical violence to pass between them. Their only outlet is biting satire. In Alexander Pope's "Eloisa to Abelard," a tragedy results when two lovers follow the drives of human emotions and passions and neglect the universal concept of Nature. In both works, the underlying focus is decorum, which not only means an adherence to the social laws governing appropriate behavior within the given social order, but also the moral, ethical, and metaphysical laws dealing with woman's behavior. This law of decorum encompasses every aspect of life. In the first, the two women are forbidden any outward signs of hostility because decorum demands that women of their social standing remain civil in a public setting. The second work illustrates what happens to two people who allow love and passion to outweigh the decorous standards of courtship and marriage as encompassed in Pope's concept of Nature. To Pope, Nature is an ordering, harmonizing principle which is the basis for the existence and sustenance of all things, which includes the dictates of decorum.

In the Age of Reason, a number of concerns are addressed by the leading literary figures of the period. Among those concerns are the concepts of wit, nature, beauty, reason, and, of course, decorum, as the works by Dryden and Pope indicate. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, as a social figure, a friend of literary men, and a writer, certainly could not have remained unaffected by the interests of her contemporaries. Her acknowledgment of decorum is demonstrated in some aspects of the Turkish Embassy Letters; however, as with her life in general, Lady Mary pushed decorum to its limits in these Letters, and she obviously recognized this boldness on her part. The Turkish Embassy Letters remained unpublished during her lifetime.

As noted in previous chapters, two reasons exist for the Embassy Letters not being published during Lady Mary's lifetime. First, society believed it indecorous for a woman to publish her writing except under extreme restrictions. Second, Lady Mary herself refused to allow their publication. Isobel Grundy states, "In the stormy career of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu the ambition of authorship played a large but mostly secret part" (19). Robert Halsband contends, "Certainly she was not a professional writer in the sense of one who earns a living by her writing; her wealth and rank made that both unnecessary and indecorous" ("'Condemned to Petticoats'" 37). Considering these statements in conjunction with Lady Mary's refusal to publish the Letters, questions arise. If Lady Mary desired to keep her writing private and truly believed it indecorous

nature, turn out to have an abiding interest and value, and are really addressed, consciously or unconsciously, to future ages" (5). Her design appears to have been conscious. Even though the social dictates of decorum prevented her from sharing her insights with her society, Lady Mary made sure that future generations would benefit from them. Paralleling her own exile on the Continent, Lady Mary "exiled" the Turkish Embassy Letters to a time when the boundaries of decorum were broader, and her insights could be accepted. Ironically, that time of publication and acceptance came only one year after her death.

Robert Halsband is one of the few critics who have specifically addressed the Turkish Embassy Letters; however, his essays do not give much attention to the content of the Letters. Primarily, he focuses on the form of this work, the actual publication and reception of the Letters, and specific Letters addressed to Abbe Conti. His observations on the content are broad and sweeping.

In terms of form, Halsband gives attention to the epistolary mode and to its origin: "It would thus seem that in the main Lady Mary compiled her Embassy Letters from actual letters which she 'edited' by transposing sections and otherwise manipulating them to achieve a more artistic collection" (Complete Letters xvi). In comparison with her other letters, Halsband notes that "the Turkish Embassy ones are relatively impersonal and formal" ("Letter Writer" 161). He also states, "As a conscious literary artist Lady Mary carefully selected what she included" (Complete Letters xv).

In conclusion, Halsband states, "The Turkish Embassy Letters, then, are a hybrid form in which Lady Mary 'crossed' actual letters with a 'cultivated' travel-book" ("Letter Writer" 163).

Halsband's observations on the form of the Turkish Embassy Letters are somewhat expanded by Bruce Redford, who does not specifically mention the Embassy Letters in his discussion of Lady Mary but does clarify why Lady Mary may have chosen the epistolary form. He states that "the eighteenth-century familiar letter, like the eighteenth-century conversation, is a performance--an 'act' in the theatrical sense as well as a 'speech act' in the linguistic" (2). He continues, "If, as Herbert Davis has claimed, the Augustans regarded conversation as 'the chief art of human life,' then they accorded almost equal importance to the sister art of letter-writing" (3).

Redford goes on to prove his theories by analyzing Lady Mary's letters to Lady Mar, Lady Bute, and Algarotti. Strangely, though, Redford fails to mention the Embassy Letters. These Letters provide a prime example proving his theory that Augustans placed high value on letter writing as an art form. As Halsband states, Lady Mary used great care in selecting the content of her Embassy Letters and in editing them. Certainly she saw the end product as an art form and as a publishable work (Halsband, Complete Letters xvii).

Halsband makes some interesting but general observations on the content of the Turkish Embassy Letters.

He lists some of the themes, including religion, feminism, literature, landscape, marriage and divorce, and architecture, and states, "Instead of suffering from narrow insularity, like so many travel writers, Lady Mary is unabashedly open-minded" ("Letter Writer" 162). He also notes, "The most pervasive pattern, growing out of the nature of her subject matter, is a series of contrasts between Western Europe and Turkey; and of contrasts inside Europe and inside Turkey" ("Letter Writer" 162). His final observation about the content is that Lady Mary was at an advantage over other travel writers because she was a woman, allowed to observe certain aspects of the various cultures closed to men and also because of her role as ambassadress ("Letter Writer" 162). Halsband says, "As the first woman traveller in Turkey to record what she saw of her own sex Lady Mary set down particularly trustworthy and vivid observations" ("'Condemned to Petticoats'" 49). Halsband's observations provide some basic insights into the content of the Embassy Letters but fall short of disclosing anything too extraordinary or noteworthy. Yes, Lady Mary does address issues relating to her own sex, but also she comments on fortifications, religion, art, and politics. Halsband fails to deal with these areas of content.

Besides Halsband, few critics have addressed the writings of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, particularly her Embassy Letters. As noted, Redford does not even mention the Embassy Letters. Ruth Perry's article concentrates on Lady Mary's friendship with Mary Astell. The chapter on

Lady Mary in Ann Messenger's book deals with John Gay and the town eclogues. Wolfgang Franke's essay discusses Lady Craven's opinion of five letters presumed to be written by Lady Mary. Isobel Grundy deals with the publication of Lady Mary's poems. Jean Hagstrum only mentions Lady Mary in relationship to Alexander Pope. None of these critics have concentrated solely on the Embassy Letters or their content. They also fail to address the issue of publication of the Embassy Letters. The content of the Turkish Embassy Letters provides the answers to those questions about the postponement of the publication of the work.

Mary Astell, a contemporary of Lady Mary and a feminist, does not hide her praise of Lady Mary's work, as the following quote testifies:

> Rather let us freely own the Superiority of this Sublime Genius as I do in the sincerity of my Soul, pleas'd that a Woman Triumphs, and proud to follow in her Train. Let us offer her the Palm which is justly her due, and if we pretend to any Laurels, lay them willingly at her Feet. (467)

Certainly the grandiose terminology and the Messianic imagery are a bit overwhelming, but Mary Astell's preface to the Turkish Embassy Letters also indicates that she understood Lady Mary's reluctance to publish the work because of the decorous standards prohibiting women to "triumph." She states:

> The most Ingenious Author has condemn'd it to

> obscurity during her Life, and Conviction, as well as Deference, obliges me to yield to her Reasons. However, if these _Letters_ appear hereafter, when I am in my Grave, let _this_ attend them in testimony to Posterity, that among her Contemporarys _one Woman_, at least, was just to her Merit. (466-467)

Although Astell does not elaborate on her convictions or state Lady Mary's reasons for not publishing, one can assume that she is referring to eighteenth-century standards of decorum. No other reason appears to exist. Mary Astell strongly encouraged Lady Mary to publish the Letters; therefore, she must have understood that publication was not feasible even though she herself believed they _should_ be published. Like Lady Mary, she is willing to postpone the publication of her preface to a time when decorum allows for the reception of the Letters themselves.

Lady Mary was conscious of decorum, but she challenged accepted roles for women. She did write and publish. She was active in politics. She continued in friendships that were potentially hazardous to her reputation. She dared to excel; yet, one of her greatest works, the Turkish Embassy Letters, was not published in her lifetime and at her own request. Written in 1716-1718, these Letters address a number of issues indecorous for women. One can only speculate about the exact reasons why she would not allow their publication. After all, she did allow the publication of other works which also touched on indecorous subjects. Although the Turkish Embassy Letters is one of her longest

works with potential social benefit, she probably recognized that this work, time and again, violated decorous standards and probably would be rejected by her contemporaries. She could not have known that the Letters would be accepted with such enthusiasm only one year after her death in 1762. They had been written forty-four years earlier. She was a child of the early eighteenth century. Half of a century is time enough for social change, but Lady Mary stuck with her earlier convictions on decorum.

The work known as the Turkish Embassy Letters consists of fifty-two letters addressed to fourteen different correspondents.[4] The first letter is dated 3 August 1716, and the last is dated 1 November 1718. The correspondents and the number of letters addressed to each are as follows: Lady Mar, thirteen; Jane Smith, one; Sarah Chiswell, two; Lady -----, five; Lady Bristol, four; Anne Thistlethwayte, five; Alexander Pope, seven; Lady Rich, three; Mrs. T-----l, one; Lady X-----, one; Mr. -----, one, Countess of -----, two; Princess of Wales, one; and, Abbe Conti, six.

Placing the list of correspondents into categories, such as family, literary friends, and court friends, is difficult because several of the identities of the correspondents are unclear. Because of this vagueness, conclusions based on what topics are addressed to whom are not sound. Apparently, though, Lady Mary was not too selective about the topics she discussed with any particular person. For instance, she does not address her descriptions of the appearance and behavior of women of various cultures

only to her female correspondents. She discusses this topic with eight of the fourteen correspondents, including Pope and Conti. On the other hand, three of the six letters addressing the descriptions of fortifications of various cities are addressed to Lady Mar and Sarah Chiswell. In other words, she does not limit the scope of her topics to one individual or gender. One possible exception, though, is a letter addressed to Abbe Conti on 31 July 1718. According to Halsband, the manuscript shows that the letter originally was addressed to the Countess of -----. Halsband contends that Lady Mary changed the recipient because the topic, a very vivid description of the land of the Classics, was more suitable to Conti (No. 44, 415-427).[5] Lady Mary did not consider it necessary to abide by decorum in terms of what topic is appropriate for any particular person. She described female behavior and fortification structures with both men and women, and this pattern, or lack of one, is apparent throughout the Letters.

More revealing than her disregard for decorum in terms of the recipients of her Letters is the scope of the content of the Turkish Embassy Letters. Lady Mary knew that women of her social standing were to be limited in knowledge and interest. Her role, as dictated by society, was not to exceed the responsibilities and interests of a daughter, wife, and mother; yet, her Embassy Letters address a wide variety of topics, some reserved for the masculine gender and some inappropriate for either gender to address.

Eight general topics are evident in the Turkish Embassy

Letters. They include: women, politics, religion, the arts, customs and innovations, travel, cultural and architectural observations, and personal interests and concerns. Certainly these topic categories are not absolute. These eight simply facilitate a direct, concrete analysis of the content of the Letters. At this point, it also is necessary to assert that within each of these categories, one easily could identify a number of examples in which Lady Mary observed the standards of decorum; however, the purpose of this work is to demonstrate the ways in which Lady Mary went beyond the bounds of decorum. The remainder of this work will concentrate on these deviations from decorous behavior or thought.

Throughout the fifty-two Turkish Embassy Letters, at least thirty-three references are made to women. Nineteen of these references address general behavior, laws, and customs concerning women in the various cultures Lady Mary observed. Six address women's fashions. Eight deal with Lady Mary's observations of and interactions with women of nobility. In an era in which society believed women should be seen, not heard or discussed, Lady Mary certainly violated decorum simply by placing an emphasis on women.

One observation concerning women deals with the apparent freedom of Turkish women, to which Lady Mary alludes in three letters. To Lady Mar, she says, "Upon the Whole, I look upon the Turkish Women as the only free people in the Empire" (No. 29, 329). The freedom Lady Mary perceives in Turkish women in this letter is based on a

number of observations. First, their attire prevents husbands from recognizing them in public; therefore, they have the ease of conducting secret love affairs. Another reason lies in the fact that many Turkish women are rich and are allowed to conduct their own financial affairs. Third, Turkish women rule the slaves in their possession, and their husbands have absolutely no control in this matter unless given to them by their wives. Finally, even though husbands are allowed four wives, very few take advantage of this law simply because their first spouse would not tolerate it (328-329). Later, Lady Mary expands her view of Turkish women, "who are (perhaps) freer than any Ladys in the universe . . ." (No. 42, 406). In this letter, her perception of freedom lies in her observations that Turkish women are free of cares and spend their time in pleasurable activities. Also their husbands do not deny them the money they desire to amuse themselves. Finally, Turkish women travel as they please without control by their husbands (406). If Lady Mary believed that Turkish women had attained the most freedom of all women, the unstated observation is that English women were still lacking freedom.

Besides freedom, Lady Mary is particularly interested in Turkish attitudes and customs regarding marriage and childbearing. To Lady Bristol she gives a vivid description and account of a young girl's reaction to being forced to marry a man she did not know or love, after having been married to a man she did love and who was killed. Lady

Mary states:

> When she saw this 2nd Husband, who is at least 50, she could not forbear bursting into Tears. He is a Man of Merit and the declar'd Favourite of the Sultan, which they call Mosayp, but that is not enough to make him pleasing in the Eyes of a Girl of 13. (No. 28, 321)

In a letter to the Countess of -----, Lady Mary tells a gruesome story of a Spanish Lady who was captured and raped by a Turkish admiral. When she finally was awarded her freedom, she chose to marry the admiral rather than return to Spain as a disgraced woman and being forced to live the remainder of her life in a convent (No. 42, 405-412). In noting these two far-from-ideal marriages, Lady Mary makes a definite, if subtle, statement against male dominance over women. Women had little say in their choice of spouses or in remaining unmarried.

Lady Mary is shocked by Turkish emphasis on childbearing. To Alexander Pope, in a discourse on church doctrine in Turkey, she says:

> The other point of Doctrine is very extrodinary: any Woman that dyes unmarry'd is look'd upon to dye in a state of reprobation. To confirm this beleife, they Reason that the End of the Creation of Woman is to encrease and Multiply, and she is only properly employ'd in the Works of her calling when she is bringing children or takeing care of 'em, which are all the Virtues that God expects

from her . . . (No. 36, 363)

The emphasis on childbearing must have been very strong to elicit surprise from a woman whose life's choices consisted of being a daughter, wife, and mother. Perhaps part of her surprise came from the contradiction between the emphasis on childbearing in contrast to the apparent freedoms she had already noted in Turkish women. Lady Mary mentions this Turkish belief again, saying, ". . . but in this country 'tis more despicable to be marry'd and not fruitfull, than 'tis with us to be fruitfull befor Marriage" (No. 38, 372). Her tone in this latter reference is rather blunt and matter-of-fact. Her contemporaries in Christian England probably would have had difficulty making such a blatant, unemotional observation on the topic of pre-marital sexual activities considering the English emphasis on purity in young women.

Lady Mary probably would have shocked some of her contemporaries by her blatant disregard for the custom concerning the amount of time to be spent for "lying-in" after the birth of a child and her ready acceptance of Turkish practice in this matter. In one letter she notes, "What is most wonderfull is the Exemption they seem to enjoy from the Curse entail'd on the sex. They See all Company the day of their Delivery and at a fortnight's end return Visits, set out in their Jewells and new Cloaths" (No. 38, 372). In another, she says, "No body keeps their house a Month for lying-in, and I am not so fond of any of our Customs to retain them when they are not necessary" (No. 39,

380). The ease with which Lady Mary disregards English decorum in this matter is radical.

Lady Mary makes two other observations about women in Turkey that would have raised some eyebrows among her contemporaries. First, she insults the women of her society by stating, "but it must be own'd that every Beauty is more common here than with us" (No. 29, 327). If women in her social circle were not already envious of Lady Mary's noted beauty, this insult to the general beauty of the women of England would have elicited some anger from her contemporaries. Second, one letter goes into explicit detail about Lady Mary's visit to a Bagnio in Sophia. She describes the scene with two hundred naked women and also comments about her preference for those with fair skin and good shapes. She then expresses the wish that Charles Jervas, the artist, had been with her to paint the scene, stating:

> I fancy it would have very much improv'd his art to see so many fine women naked in different postures, some in conversation, some working, others drinking coffee or sherbet, and many negligently lying on their Cushions while their slaves (generally pritty Girls of 17 or 18) were employ'd in braiding their hair in several pritty manners. In short, tis the Women's coffee house, where all the news of the town is told, Scandal invented, etc. (No. 26, 314)

A bath house would have been difficult enough for

eighteenth-century aristocracy to accept without assaulting their sensibilities by suggesting a male artist be present in a room full of naked women.

Lady Mary's observations of Turkish women were not prompted merely because she was in a totally dissimilar environment to England. She also makes some startling, indecorous observations about Continental-European women, particularly the women in Vienna. First, she explains that in Vienna, older women are given admiration and consistently are seen with younger men:

> I can assure you that wrinkles or a small stoop in the shoulders, nay, Gray Hair it selfe, is no objection to the makeing new conquests. I know you can't easily figure to your selfe a young Fellow of five and twenty ogling my Lady Suff[olk] with passion, or pressing to lead the Countesse of O[xfor]d from an opera, but such are the sights I see every day and I dont perceive any body surpriz'd at 'em but my selfe. (No. 10, 270)

Her primary target in this passage is the English preoccupation with youth. Then she continues her discourse by addressing the topic of lovers:

> . . . and then that perplexing word Reputation has quite another meaning here than what you give it at London, and getting a Lover is so far from loseing, that 'tis properly geting reputation, Ladys being much more respected in regard to the rank of their Lovers than that of their Husbands.

> . . . Here are neither Coquettes nor Prudes. . . . In one word, 'tis the establish'd custom for every Lady to have 2 Husbands, one that bears the Name, and another that performs the Dutys . . . (No. 10, 270)

Even though Lady Mary concludes that she turned down the offer of a young man, her easy-going, open-mindedness on this matter is apparent. Also her comment on the absence of prudes or coquettes in Turkey is a subtle reference to the artificial barriers English society places on female sexuality. Her final observation concerning the women in Vienna deals with the law. She points out that men do not marry for money in Vienna because the most they can gain from a woman's portion is 2,000 florins. Whatever the wife has beyond that amount remains in her possession and at her disposal (No. 11, 274). In England, women were not considered capable of handling their own finances.

The six references by Lady Mary to women's fashions in various countries are not inappropriate (Nos. 9, 14, 28, 29, 45, 49). They simply contribute to the total number of times Lady Mary speaks of women, which in itself is indecorous. In the eight references dealing with noble women, four are not outstanding. They deal with her descriptions of visits with various nobility (Nos. 9, 18, 19, 46). The other four, however, touch on indecorous subject matter.

Lady Mary became particularly fond of a woman by the name of Fatima. She was the wife of the Kahya, who is second in command in Turkey next to the Grand Vizier. In

two letters to Lady Mar, Lady Mary goes into great detail about her visits with Fatima. Unlike other letters in which Lady Mary acknowledges the beauty of particular women, she appears to be infatuated with Fatima. Not only is the tone of her comments more sincere, but also Fatima is the only beauty on which Lady comments twice and at some length. In the first letter about Fatima, Lady Mary states, "To say all in a Word, our most celebrated English beautys would vanish near her" (No. 33, 350), and "For me, I am not asham'd to own I took more pleasure in looking on the beauteous Fatima than the finest piece of Sculpture could have given me" (No. 33, 351). In another letter and in reference to a second meeting, Lady Mary says, "But Fatima has all the politeness and good breeding of a court, with an air that inspires at once Respect and tenderness; and now I understand her Language, I find her Wit as engaging as her Beauty" (No. 39, 386). One probably could argue that Lady Mary experienced a sexual attraction for Fatima, particularly if one considers her later relationship with Maria Skerrett. The indecorous aspects of such an attraction are obvious. Beyond that, though, is Lady Mary's acknowledgment of and respect for Fatima's intelligence, certainly a quality not encouraged in women of eighteenth-century England.

The other two references to women of nobility are blatantly lacking in decorum. In the same letter in which Lady Mary describes her first visit with Fatima, she also tells about the dances performed by Fatima's maids. The dances apparently were very suggestive, and, as Lady Mary

describes:

> . . . the motions so Languishing, accompany'd with pauses and dying Eyes, halfe falling back and then recovering themselves in so artfull a Manner that I am very possitive the coldest and most rigid Prude upon Earth could not have look'd upon them without thinking of something not to be spoke of. (No. 33, 351)

Once again, Lady Mary is attacking the artificial barriers on female sexuality found in English society.

Finally, during a visit with Sultana Hafife, Lady Mary was able to satisfy her curiosity about harems in Turkey, and she reports her findings to her sister, Lady Mar:

> I did not omit this opportunity of learning all that I possibly could of the Seraglio, which is so entirely unknown amongst us. She assur'd me that the story of the Sultan's throwing a Handkercheif is altogether fabulous, and the manner upon that occasion no other but that he sends the Kuslir Aga to signify to the Lady the honnour he intends her. (No. 39, 383)

Even though sexuality was a taboo for social discourse, Lady Mary totally ignores it in these last two examples.

Within this first topic category of women, Lady Mary makes a number of indecorous statements. Making frequent references to women is her first mistake. She then goes on to discuss freedom for women, laws favoring women, and sexual practices within a harem. With any one of these

issues about women, Lady Mary faced the possibility of rejection by her contemporaries in England.

The second instance in which Lady Mary ignores decorum is in the category of politics. Once again the fact that she is addressing this topic is indecorous. Politics in eighteenth-century England was man's domain, but Lady Mary chose to ignore that fact, because she makes at least twenty-two references to politics. Just as with the other indecorous subjects she addresses, Lady Mary had insights into politics and was compelled to share those insights. These references consist of general comments about government and law, specific comments about noble men, and specific comments about the military and war.

The first section on general comments can be divided into three parts. The first deals with simple observations about the governments and rulers of various countries. For example:

> I have seen all that is remarkable in Collen, Frankfort, Wurtzburg, and this place [Nuremberg], and tis impossible not to observe the difference between the free Towns and those under the Government of absolute Princes (as all the little Sovereigns of Germany are). In the first there appears an air of Commerce and Plenty. . . . In the other, a sort of shabby finery, a Number of dirty people of Quality tawder'd out, Narrow nasty streets out of repair, wretchedly thin of Inhabitants, and above halfe of the common sort

> asking alms. (No. 5, 254)

Quite plainly, Lady Mary's interests in and knowledge of ruling forces goes beyond what a woman of her stature should address or know; however, this reference only touches the tip of the political knowledge and insights of this woman, as the second part testifies.

The second section of the general comments deals with Lady Mary's opinions of some laws in Turkey as compared to similar laws, or lack of, in England. The following is an example. Lady Mary is addressing the Turkish and Armenian practice of adopting children in order to avoid having estates passed to distant relatives. She says:

> 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 to give an Estate to a creature without other Merit or relation to me than by a few Letters. Yet this is an Absurdity we see frequently practis'd. (No. 42, 410)

Certainly, this observation by Lady Mary is a threat to the English concept of inheritance and the maintenance of patriarchy. Note that she speaks of children not just boys. With the English emphasis on male dominance, it is doubtful that she is using the term "children" in a generic sense.

A third and final example of the types of general political comments Lady Mary makes deals with her observations of different political organizations and

recognition of her preference for England's monarch. She states:

> The Country from hence to Adrianople is the finest in the World. Vines grow wild on all the Hills, and the perpetual Spring they enjoy makes every thing look gay and flourishing, but this Climate, as happy as it seems, can never be prefer'd to England with all its Snows and frosts, while we are bless'd with an easy Government under a King who makes his own Happyness consist in the Liberty of his people and chooses rather to be look'd upon as their Father than their Master. (No. 25, 311-312)

This letter, addressed to the Princess of Wales, not only is polite but also is a not-so-uncommon political maneuver. Of course, Lady Mary is only aiding her husband, since she herself could not have a political career. In that sense, then, this letter is not completely indecorous because Lady Mary is approaching politics in the one acceptable way available to her.

The political references Lady Mary makes in regard to nobility contain fewer indecorous statements than her general comments. In fact, six of the seven remarks deal only with descriptions of visits with various kings and princes. Only one shows any sign of her wit and satire and is a bit indecorous. In a letter to Lady Mar from Vienna, she relates to her the practice of keeping dwarves by the Princes of that nation. She then says, "I can assign no

reason for their fondness for these pieces of deformity but the opinion that all Absolute Princes have that 'tis below them to converse with the rest of Mankind . . ." (No. 21, 294). The tone of her comments indicates her distaste for the practice, its purpose, and the attitudes of Princes toward their subjects.

The final area of political concern evident in the Turkish Embassy Letters is a concentration on military forms of government and the insanity of war. Lady Mary states her dislike for military goverments in three separate letters and primarily focuses on the Turkish military (Nos. 24, 27, 28). In one she accuses the military of being barbarous (No. 27, 316). Her comments about war tend to be a bit more descriptive than her general observations on the military. After looking at the battlefields at Carlowitz, she states:

> I could not look without horror on such numbers of mangled humane bodys, and refflect on the Injustice of War, that makes murther not only necessary but meritorious. Nothing seems to me a plainer proofe of the irrationality of Mankind (whatever fine claims we pretend to Reason) than the rage with which they contest for a small spot of Ground, when such vast parts of fruitfull Earth lye quite uninhabited. (No. 24, 305)

Few before or since have verbalized on the injustice of war as eloquently as Lady Mary; yet, according to her society, she should not have considered war at all.

The third category of topics is religion. Lady Mary

expresses an interest in various doctrines while constantly defending the Church of England. She also displays a keen ability in describing the various churches and mosques she visited. Religion itself is not an indecorous subject for women. What falls outside the realm of being decorous is her ability to compare and contrast the doctrines of many different religions with those of her own with a scholarly ease. Also unique to Lady Mary is her display of wit and sarcasm, at times to the point of being sacrilegious.

Lady Mary is especially partial to attacking the Roman Catholic Church, as are many of her contemporaries in England. At least five of her comments are aimed at this particular religion. For example, she tells about a convent in Vienna at which she meets a young nun. Lady Mary visits her several times and feels sorry that this beautiful, young woman will spend the rest of her life in isolation and with very few comforts. She concludes by stating, "God knows whither it be the womanly spirit of Contradiction that works in me, but there never before was so much Zeal against popery . . ." (No. 12, 277-278). In another letter, she tells Abbe Conti her impressions of various religions and says, "I don't ask your pardon for the Liberty I have taken in speaking of the Roman. I know you equally condemn the Quakery of all Churches . . ." (No. 27, 320). An example of her witty disrespect also is aimed at Rome. In Cologne she visited a Jesuit church and describes her impressions of the structure, ornaments, and relics. She then says, "I own that I had wickedness enough to covet St. Ursala's pearl

necklace, tho perhaps it was no wickedness at all, an Image not being certainly one's Neighbour . . ." (No. 4, 253).

Rome is not the only target of her attacks. She criticizes other Christian religions as well, sometimes by comparing them to the Roman Catholic, apparently the ultimate insult in Lady Mary's eyes. For instance, in one letter she speaks of "the farce of Relicks with which I have been entertain'd in all the Romish churches. The Lutherans are not quite free from those follys" (No. 5, 255). In another she sets her target on the Calvinists in France. She says, "You know, speaking disrespectfully of Calviniists is the same thing as speaking honourably of the Church" (No. 3, 252).

Her comments on Mahometism and Turkish mosques are somewhat less critical. In a letter to Conti she provides a long discourse on doctrines of the Turkish church (No. 27, 315-321). She also gives in-depth descriptions of the various mosques she visited (Nos. 34, 41). Even so, she cannot resist getting in another jab at Roman Catholicism. In a letter to Lady Bristol she mentions her visit to a Turkish monastery. She states, "I had the Curiosity to visit one of them and observe the Devotions of the Dervises, which are as Whimsical as any in Rome" (No. 41, 402).

Just as with politics, Lady Mary's interests in religion went beyond the boundaries of decorous standards for women. Had she limited herself to naive comments about the physical structures of churches and their rituals, she probably would have been safe, but she instead spoke with

authority on church doctrine which was a masculine concern. Ironically, her views on Catholicism and her defense of the Anglican Church are conservative and in harmony with the views of many men in England. It is unfortunate for them that their sexual biases prevented such an eloquent spokesperson from being heard.

The fourth category of topics is the arts. Within this category are Lady Mary's observations on literature, specific attacks on travel literature, opinions of opera and theater in several countries, and learning and sharing of the Turkish language and poetry. As noted in previous chapters, Lady Mary's interests in and knowledge of the arts made her an exceptional woman. These Letters simply demonstrate again a knowledge which was inappropriate for her sex.

Most of the general comments about literature are addressed to Pope. In one letter two comments are worth noting. She first tells Pope of a near accident she experienced in the Hebrus River. She teases that Pope and his friends could have written great poetry had the accident actually occurred. She must have felt fairly confident of her acceptance by Pope and his literary friends to make such a familiar remark. The second literary comment deals with her evaluation of Pope's translation of Homer. She says:

> I read over your Homer here with an infinite Pleasure and find several little passages explain'd that I did not before entirely comprehend the Beauty of, many of the customs and

> much of the dress then in fashion being yet retain'd . . . (No. 30, 332)

Focusing on customs and dress is not indecorous, but Lady Mary's knowledge of Homer is. Her ability to compare the past with the present through literature is one of Lady Mary's strong points. In her longest letter in this collection, Lady Mary describes at length to Abbe Conti her travels through the land of the Classics. Her tone expresses pure delight in her observations and connections with literary experiences. Her knowledge of the Classics almost comes to life as she travels through these lands (No. 44, 415-427). Again it is her knowledge of the Classics, not her particular observations, that is indecorous.

The last letter in the Turkish Embassy collection deals specifically with literature. Addressed to Pope and obviously in response to a letter from him, she tells him she does not agree with his romantic assessment of two lovers who were killed by lightning. In fact, she is very sarcastic about the whole incident. She says, "His endeavoring to shield her from the storm was a natural Action and what he would have certainly done for his Horse if he had been in the same situation" (No. 52, 445). Lady Mary's sarcasm attacks the common view held by men that women are possessions who require their protection, just as a horse is a possession. She does in the end fulfill Pope's request that she write an epitaph for the two lovers, but her writing is extremely sarcastic and far from heroic or sentimental, as a woman would be expected to be if she were

allowed to write at all.

Four of Lady Mary's references to literature deal with travel literature. All four express the same basic opinion that other travel writers are inaccurate and that Lady Mary's descriptions, observations, and explanations are the only ones to be trusted. The following passage demonstrates her opinion of other travel writers: "Your whole Letter is full of mistakes from one end to 'tother. I see you have taken your Ideas of Turkey from the worthy author, Dumont, who has writ with equal ignorance and confidence" (No. 37, 368). Lady Mary's boldness in discrediting male authors of travel literature may have been justified but certainly indecorous for a woman in that era.

Another area of the arts in which Lady Mary was fairly opinionated was opera and theater. Three of her four references to theater contain judgmental comments. For instance, reviewing a comedy in Vienna, Lady Mary states, even though she admits that she laughed a great deal, her distaste for the lack of decorum in the production--"But I could not easily pardon the Liberty the Poet has taken of Larding his play with not only indecent expressions, but such grosse Words as I don't think our Mob would suffer from a Mountebank . . ." (No. 8, 263). Ironically, this lack of decorum did not prevent Lady Mary from viewing another production on their second visit to Vienna. She did not like the second much more than the first:

> Last night there was an Italian Comedy acted at Court. The Scenes were pritty, but the comedy

> it selfe such intolerable low farce without either wit or humour, that I was surpriz'd how all the Court could sit there attentively for 4 hours together. (No. 20, 292)

That Lady Mary would attend the theater is not so unusual. What is unusual, once again, is her knowledge of theater and her willingness to voice an opinion on what she has seen. Even though literary decorum and social decorum are not synonymous, once again irony exists in her observations. She is commenting on the indecorous aspects of the theater in Vienna, when her comments are indecorous in themselves.

In terms of the arts, though, Lady Mary's boldest transgression from acceptable female curiosity came in her ability to learn the Turkish language and to translate and evaluate Turkish poetry. Her first reference to this was on her trip to Turkey. While in Belgrade, Lady Mary met a Turkish scholar with whom she discussed poetry and customs. She concludes by saying, "I realy beleive I should learn to read Arabic if I was to stay her a few months" (No. 24, 307). Two months later, Lady Mary addressed a letter to Pope in which she discusses the Turkish language and encloses a translation of a poem which she compares to the Song of Solomon from the Bible. She even rewrites the poem into what she considers an English style. She ends the evalutaion by stating, "You see I am pritty far gone in Oriental Learning, and to say truth I study very hard" (No. 30, 337). A year later, in a letter to Lady -----, Lady Mary again discusses her Turkish studies. She encloses a

copy and translation of a Turkish love letter and says:

> I fancy you are now wondering at my profound Learning, but alas, dear Madam, I am allmost falln into the misfortune so common to the Ambitious: while they are employ'd on distant, insignificant Conquests abroad, a Rebellion starts up at home. I am in great danger of loseing my English. (No. 40, 390)

Not only did Lady Mary pursue a masculine study, but also she lacked the female attributes of modesty and humility in discussing her learning. Lady Mary also is being humorous in her evaluation of herself--a perfect example of her wit, an attribute not particularly valued in women.

The fifth topic category contains Lady Mary's observations of various customs in the different cultures she had the opportunity to witness and also comments on innovations unfamiliar to English society. Some of her observations of the customs are not terribly inappropriate for a woman of her stature. In one letter she comments on the perpetual quarrels among the aristocracy in Regensburg and her inability to understand why the quarrels continue (No. 6, 257). In another she describes the Turkish pastime of sitting in gardens along the rivers, drinking coffee, and listening to music (No. 30, 330-337). In other instances, though, Lady Mary cannot resist the temptation to editorialize. For example, to Lady Bristol she says:

> I know You'l expect I should say something particular of that of the Slaves, and you will

> Imagine me half a Turk when I don't speak of it with the same horror other Christians have done before me, but I cannot forbear applauding the Humanity of the Turks to these Creatures. (No. 41, 401)

In another letter, she goes so far as to suggest that English society learn from Turkish society. She says:

> Thus you see, Sir, these people are not so unpolish'd as we represent them. Tis true their Magnificence is of a different taste than ours, and perhaps of a better. I am allmost of opinion they 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. (No. 43, 415)

What is strange and ironic about her opinion in this matter is that she contradicts herself. If Lady Mary had followed decorum and had limited herself to the appropriate female concerns, her life would have been similar to the Turkish lifestyle she praises in this passage. Women in England appropriately could enjoy music, gardens, and delicate eating, not politics and science.

Along with customs, Lady Mary also discovered several innovations during her travels. Two of those discoveries, greenhouses and traineaus (sleighs), were fairly

inconsequential to her life. The third, however, became an intricate part of her life. During her stay in Turkey, Lady Mary learned of an inoculation for smallpox. To Sarah Chiswell, after describing at length the inoculation method, Lady Mary says, " . . . you may beleive (sic) I am very well satisfy'd of the safety of the Experiment since I intend to try it on my dear little Son. I am Patriot enough to take pains to bring this usefull invention into fashion in England" (No. 31, 339). Lady Mary was as good as her word. As stated in Chapter Three, Lady Mary was very active in a campaign to establish the inoculation and was often credited as the innovator of this practice in England.

Travel is the sixth category of topics found in the Turkish Embassy Letters. Within this category are comments dealing specifically with travelling, climates of different areas, and purchases peculiar to a certain country. Of all eight categories, this one by far is the least controversial. In the fourteen references made to travelling, climate, and purchases, Lady Mary adheres closely to descriptive writing without inserting personal opinions. The following is an example:

> The prodigious Prospect of Mountains [Alps] cover'd with Eternal Snow, Clouds hanging far below our feet, and the vast cascades tumbling down the Rocks with a confus'd roaring, would have been solemnly entertaining to me if I had suffer'd less from the extreme cold that reigns here . . . (No. 47, 434-435)

The only remote possiblity of connection between passages like the one above and a lack of decorum is that a woman could have written such a captivating description.

One of the larger topic categories encompasses Lady Mary's cultural and architectural observations. Lady Mary described many nationalities she encountered and the physical dimensions of the lands in which they lived. At least twenty-nine references fit into this seventh category. As with the topic of travel, very few of these references are inappropriate in terms of content. It could be argued again, though, that the fact that Lady Mary made such detailed observations in itself is indecorous for a woman. Moreover, even in this category, she inserts an occasional opinion. For Lady Mary, sharing her opinions often violates the standards of decorum. When she is describing the city of Lyons, she notes her distaste for the statue of Louis XIV by stating:

> If their King had intended to express, in one Image, Ignorance, Ill taste, and Vanity, his Sculpturers could have made no other figure to represent the odd mixture of an old Beau who had a mind to be a Hero, with a Bushel of curl'd hair on his head and a gilt Truncheon in his hand. (No. 48, 437)

Most references in this category, though, are free of editorial comments like this one.

One aspect of this category that definitely is indecorous is Lady Mary's descriptions of fortifications.

Lady Mary even recognized this impropriety. She states, "This is a fortify'd Town, but I avoid ever mentioning fortifications, being sensible that I know not how to speak of 'em" (No. 15, 284). However, Lady Mary's disclaimer is inaccurate since she already had made note of the fortifications in Nimeguen prior to that statement and made two other observations following it (Nos. 3, 23, 24). In this case, Lady Mary obviously recognized decorum concerning this matter but chose to ignore it.

The eighth and final topic category in the Turkish Embassy Letters consists of comments made on topics of personal interest to Lady Mary. Basically, this category is comprised of statements about her personal health, the health of her children and husband, her desire for news from England, and her attitude about leaving certain countries. This latter type of comment is illustrated when Lady Mary says, "I am now prepareing to leave Constantinople, and perhaps you will accuse me of Hipocricy when I tell you 'tis with regret . . ." (No. 42, 405). As has been observed in the last two categories, the references that fall into this final category seldom violate decorum. Also like the previous categories, though, Lady Mary has at least one reference in which she breaks the boundaries of decorum. In this category of personal interests, the reference comes in a letter to Abbe Conti right before she returns home to England. In this letter she is considering the human thirst for knowledge and is wondering if her curiosity will be satisfied while again in England. Her statement shows great

insight and elicits compassion for her concerns:

> After having read all that is to be found in the Languages I am mistress of, and having decaid my sight by midnight studys, I envy the easy peace of mind of the ruddy milk maid who, undisturb'd by doubt, hears the Sermon with humility every Sunday, having not confus'd the sentiments of Natural Duty in her head by the vain Enquirys of the Schools, who may be more Learned, yet after all must remain as ignorant. And, after having seen part of Asia and Africa and allmost made the tour of Europe, I think the honest English Squire more happy who verily beleives the Greek wines less delicious than March beer, that the African fruits have not so fine a flavour as golden Pipins, and the Becafiguas of Italy are not so well tasted as a rump of Beef, and that, in short, there is no perfect Enjoyment of this Life out of Old England. I pray God I may think so for the rest of my Life . . . (No. 51, 444)

This quote plainly illustrates Lady Mary's recognition that she, unlike other women in her society, has a strong thirst for knowledge. The plea at the end also illustrates her recognition that a thirst for knowledge is an inappropriate desire for women in England.

The Turkish Embassy Letters provide example after example after example in which Lady Mary violates the standards of decorum. She addresses topics, such as sex,

which were inappropriate for anybody to mention in eighteenth-century England. She speaks of subjects, such as politics, which were considered strictly man's domain. She displays her interest in and knowledge of topics, such as Turkish language and poetry, beyond the expectations and acceptance for women of her social standing. She writes with a grace, wit, intelligence, and insight seldom equalled by any man or woman of the eighteenth century. She was one of those unfortunate women born before her time. She understood and eventually, it appears, accepted that hardship. She knew she had violated decorum in the Turkish Embassy Letters, and she chose to delay the publication of her work because of these violations.

The benefits of the Turkish Embassy Letters for today's reader are numerous. As a cultural document, these Letters provide insights into female behavior, religion, politics, and customs of distant cultures. As a literary document, they illustrate a graceful style and provide information concerning literary standards of the era. They combine a number of qualities, such as Lady Mary's gift for descriptive writing, to create a document that goes beyond the normal boundaries of travel literature, enabling the reader to share in Lady Mary's social, cultural, political, architectural, theological, and personal discoveries. In short, the Turkish Embassy Letters are entertaining, educational, and thought-provoking; as such, they deserve a respected place in the chronicles of English literary history.

Conclusion

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was unable to publish one of her greatest works, the Turkish Embassy Letters, in her lifetime because the patriarchal society of eighteenth-century England refused to acknowledge the possibility that a woman could write and write well. Decorum dictated restricted roles for women. Those who refused to abide by decorous standards faced social ostracism. Those, like Lady Mary, who challenged decorum but still managed to maintain a semblance of conformity met the frustration of not being able to share with their contemporaries valuable insights into the society in which they lived.

Thanks to feminist literary criticism, particularly cultural gynocriticism, the errors of past generations are rectified. Albeit late, some satisfaction is gained in knowing that the frustrations of a superb female wit finally have been alleviated. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu can and should assume her rightful position as a major writer in eighteenth-century English literary history.

Appendix I

Following is a catalogue of Lady Mary's additional literary activities not mentioned in Chapter 3:

*1712-1713, critiqued a tragedy by Addison; he followed many of her suggestions in his revision (32).

*July, 1714, wrote a satiric letter defending position of widows which appeared anonymously in the _Spectator_; her first published essay (37-38).

*March, 1716, Edmund Curll published her three town eclogues without permission (53).

*Spring, 1716, wrote three more eclogues (54-55).

*May, 1720, unauthorized version of letter and poems was published (100).

*early, 1720s, became patroness of a number of young literary men (119).

*July, 1726, Curll published essay in favor of abolishing dowries; appears to be Lady Mary's (121-122).

*1727, critiqued Voltaire's "Essay on Epic Poetry" and bluntly told him she did not believe he had written it (120-121).

*1727, became patroness of her cousin, Henry Fielding (128).

*1733, continued to write private verses for friends, such as the Countess of Hertford (145).

*1737-1738, published nine issues of the political newspaper, _The Nonsense of Common Sense_ (163-171).

*14 November 1747, Horace Walpole arranged for publication of the six town eclogues (242).

*1742-1762, Halsband notes several times that Lady Mary continued in her love for writing (231-232, 254-255, 284).

*1761, left autograph copy of Embassy Letters with Reverend Benjamin Sowden with the verbal agreement that they be published posthumously (278-279).

*1762, after her death, Sowden sold the Letters to Lady Bute, her daughter, for five hundred pounds (287).

*May, 1763, Letters were published without Lady Bute's permission (288).

*1794, Lady Bute burned the diary her mother had kept from the time of her marriage until her death in 1762 (289).

As this catalogue indicates, Lady Mary's interest in and production of notable works were more than a minor part of her life. She made a substantial contribution to the body of literature produced during the eighteenth century.

Appendix II

Following is a complete list of the 52 Turkish Embassy Letters. Each entry has been numbered for easy reference and includes the name of the addressee, the date, and the city of origin. Robert Halsband, in The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (See Works Cited), disputes some names and dates on the originals and also occasionally provides names and dates when none are given. This information is enclosed in brackets. At the end of each entry are the page numbers where each letter can be located in Halsband's work.

1. Lady Mar, Friday, 3 August [1716], Rotterdam, 248-250.
2. [Jane Smith], 5 August [1716], Hague, 250-251.
3. [Sarah Chiswell], 13 August [1716], Nimeguen, 251-252.
4. Lady -----, 16 August [1716], Collen [Cologne], 253-254.
5. Lady Bristol, 22 August [1716], Nieurenberg [sic], 254-256.
6. [Anne] Thistlethwayte, 30 August [1716], Ratisbon [Regensburg], 256-258.
7. Lady Mar, 8 September [1716], Vienna, 259-261.
8. Alexander Pope, 14 September [1716], Vienna, 262-264.
9. Lady Mar, 14 September [1716], Vienna, 265-269.
10. Lady R[ich], 20 September [1716], Vienna, 269-272.
11. Mrs. T-----l [possibly Thistlethwayte but unlike other letters to her], 26 September [1716], Vienna, 272-274.
12. Lady X-----, 1 October [1716], Vienna, 275-278.

13. Mr. -----, 10 October [1716], Vienna, 278-279.
14. Lady Mar, 17 November [1716], Prague, 280-281.
15. Lady Mar, 21 November [1716], Lypsic [Leipzig], 281-284.
16. The Countess of -----, 23 November [1716], Brunswic, 285.
17. Lady Bristol, 25 November [1716], Hannover [sic], 285-287.
18. Lady R[ich], 1 December [1716], Hanover, 287-289.
19. Lady Mar, 17 December [1716], Blankenburg, 289-291.
20. Lady -----, 1 January 1717, Vienna, 291-293.
21. Lady Mar, 16 January 1717, Vienna, 293-296.
22. Alexander Pope, 16 January [1717], Vienna, 296-297.
23. Lady Mar, 30 January [1717], Peterwaradin [Peterwardein], 297-304.
24. Alexander Pope, 12 February [1717], Belgrade, 304-308.
25. The Princess of Wales, 1 April [1717], Adrianople, 310-312.
26. Lady -----, 1 April [1717], Adrianople, 312-314.
27. Abbe Conti, 1 April [1717], Adrianople, 315-321.
28. Lady Bristol, 1 April [1717], Adrianople, 321-325.
29. Lady Mar, 1 April [1717], Adrianople, 325-330.
30. Alexander Pope, 1 April [1717], Adrianople, 330-337.
31. [Sarah Chiswell], 1 April [1717], Adrianople, 337-340.
32. [Anne] Thistlethwayte, 1 April [1717], Adrianople, 340-344.
33. Lady Mar. 18 April [1717], Adrianople, 347-352.
34. Abbe Conti, 17 May [1717], Adrianople, 353-360.

35. Abbe Conti, 29 May [1717], Constantinople, 360-365.
36. Alexander Pope, 17 June [1717], Belgrade Village, 365-367.
37. Lady -----, 17 June [1717], Belgrade Village, 367-370.
38. [Anne] Thistlethwayte, 4 January [1718], Pera of Constantinople, 371-373.
39. Lady Mar, 10 March [1718], Pera of Constantinople, 379-387.
40. Lady -----, 16 March [1718], Pera, Constantinople, 387-391.
41. Lady Bristol, [10 April 1718], 396-403.
42. The Countess of -----, [May 1718], 405-412.
43. Abbe Conti, 19 May 1718, Constantinople, 412-415.
44. Abbe Conti, 31 July [1718], Tunis, 415-427.
45. Lady Mar, 28 August [1718], Genoa, 428-432.
46. Lady [Mar], 12 September [1718], Turin, 432-434.
47. [Anne] Thistlethwayte. 25 September [September, 1718], Lyons, 434-435.
48. Alexander Pope, 28 September [September, 1718], Lyons, 435-437.
49. Lady [Rich], 10 October [September, 1718], Paris, 438-440.
50. [Anne] Thistlethwayte, 16 October [September, 1718], Paris, 440-442.
51. Abbe Conti, 31 October [September, 1718], Dover, 443-444.
52. Alexander Pope, 1 November [September, 1718], Dover, 445-446.

Notes

[1]Some confusion is created because Lady Mary's future husband often is referred to as Edward Wortley, yet she chose to be referred to as Mary Wortley Montagu. Edward's father, the Honourable Sidney Wortley, was the second son of Admiral Montagu. He took the name of Wortley upon his marriage to an heiress of that name; therefore, his son, Edward, was referred to as Wortley or Montagu or Wortley Montagu (Halsband, The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu 8).

[2]The primary source for biographical information is Robert Halsband's The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. See Works Cited. Subsequent references to this work will indicate only page numbers.

[3]The term "feminist movement," as used here, should not be confused with the modern definition of the feminist movement. In eighteenth-century England, feminist issues were discussed with an appropriate Augustan attitude, even if the ideologies were contradictory. Such feminists as Mary Astell and Lady Mary were respected members of aristocratic society. They simply contributed input to the already established issues of women's roles. (Perry, Mary Astell 7-9).

[4]See Appendix II. The letters have been numbered and placed in chronological order for easy reference and internal citation.

[5]Internal citations on the Letters include the number of the letter as assigned in the Appendix and the page number(s) of the letter in Halsband's Complete Letters.

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