

RESTORATIVE EROTICA: “LET THE FRIEND, AND THE LOVER BE HANDSOMELY
MIXED”

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Lady Mary Wortley Montagu expected the people of Imperial Britain to respect her choices and her true identity, but because they didn't she was forced into the arms of another country, and furthermore women of other countries. Having empowered herself by transcending typical gender roles of the time, Montagu chose voicelessness in her travels abroad and did so not only to live outside of the elitist status she held in her homeland, but also to allow herself to be physically manipulated and dominated homoerotically, only to have her voice restored in very private letters to her homosexual lovers back home. However, the letters have been edited over time to blur the real experiences and true identity of Lady Mary. Restoration of Montagu's truth reveals many of the characteristics of the subaltern and calls for reconsideration of subaltern identity and theory.

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MIXED”

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by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Chapter One: Reexamining LMWM's Past	10
Chapter Two: Representing the Erotic Other	24
Chapter Three: Situating Montagu in the Politics of Pleasure	33
Chapter Four: Redefining Subaltern Sexuality	46
Conclusion	56
Works Cited	59

Introduction:

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was a feminist willing to test the ideological boundaries of gender roles and stereotypes in eighteenth-century British culture. Not only did she live an unconventional lifestyle as a woman to travel so extensively, but she also challenged the social expectations of passivity and femininity in many ways. Montagu's "life work" is considered to be her discovery of the smallpox inoculation and its subsequent introduction to England and the colonies and not the historical collection of letters that have been published several times under various authors and in a number of British Literature anthologies. Although Lady Mary is also well known for being the target of Alexander Pope's popular textual attacks, she should be credited with the unusually early transcendence of literal and figurative British boundaries through her sexual libertinism as well as the poems and private letters that spoke of her rare life experience.

Montagu was considered a very beautiful woman even after having her facial skin marred as a result of smallpox. She was married most of her life to a gentleman older than her, but her marriage wasn't known for its compassion or passion. Despite rumors of a seemingly platonic interest between Edward Wortley and Mary Montagu, the two had two children on whom she eventually tested the smallpox inoculation before introducing it to Britain. The literal and figurative benefits of the marriage between Mary and Edward coupled with her intelligence made it possible for Montagu to do rather extensive traveling for a number of years, but the travel wasn't necessarily a luxury, as it became a way to escape the differences between Mary's beliefs and those of her culture.

Through her artful use of language, Montagu took a position of social literary insurgency. She did not directly speak out against government or societal norms, but Montagu did use her writings to create a space in which she could openly share her "unconventional" sexuality and within which she could express it to her lovers. Even though the historical time period that her work was originally written

in she did not intend nor expect it to be read in a public arena, when it finally was it strongly represented some of the first erotic writings to have been written by a wealthy British woman. The interest in Montagu's life experience that led to the publication of her writing was simply based on her intellectual prowess, societal status, and extensive travels, but such an interest made it possible for her work to gain readership and value in the realm of literature. When her readers look beyond the geographical descriptions and small talk included in her letters, they find eloquent sentences meticulously drafted to transport raw emotion and sensual scenes to her lovers. Why she did this is not really important, though one can assume it was an act of romance to keep her lover titillated while away; a demonstration that even when intimate with beautiful, exotic women, she is still thinking of her love back home. However, due to the modifications of her words at the hands of family, friends, editors, and publishers, the truth of Montagu was altered. The changes imposed upon her letters especially resulted in a woman whose life and real contribution to literature and society were misunderstood and overlooked by biographers, historians, and literary enthusiasts.

There simply is not enough space here to account for Montagu's extensive involvement in the evolutions of literature, systemic societal structures, feminist thought, and sexual politics, so the objective of this essay is to explore the metaphorical and in many instances literal silent role Montagu assumed to ultimately have a place in these evolutions. Much further research can be done in each realm mentioned to unmask the extent of her role and its connections to the modern understanding of each subject. Some of these connections are mentioned here, but all deserve much more attention. These findings are extremely important because, unlike many authors, only Montagu's public life is discussed and her private life has been hidden for so long that it remains in the dark. However, most with experience in textual analysis would agree knowledge of an author's private life brings the true meaning and value to light, especially when writing for a private audience. Examining one's personal experiences

also provides a necessary contextual framework for understanding the individual's life within a public arena. Montagu certainly didn't set out on her adventures to change people's views. Rather she intended to question her views and those that existed in Britain by educating herself about other countries and cultures.

In a letter to her daughter, The Countess of Bute, Montagu literally instructs her child to raise her own daughter "indulged" in education and to find contentment and ease in the world despite her rank. The implication here is that it is clearly problematic to feel content with oneself given the status of the family and the expectations that accompany such status. Written just nine years before her death, Montagu leaves her granddaughter with two cautionary assertions. The first explains that her granddaughter is "not to think of herself learned when she can read Latin, or even Greek," both languages Montagu secretly taught herself, and based on the language of the letter assumedly left the young Montagu feeling she knew more about the world than she really did. She then adds the wisdom, "languages are more properly to be called vehicles of learning than learning itself...true knowledge consists in knowing things, not words" (Peterson & Brereton 558). This message embodies the very argument of this paper in that Montagu doesn't feel the need to rely on language to learn about the world. In fact, reflecting on her life, she seems to be acknowledging language as a hindrance, thus implying she prefers and values silence in her efforts to learn.

Montagu's second caution to her granddaughter is to hide the knowledge that she does obtain, because it "will draw on her envy, and consequently the most inveterate hatred of all her and she fools, which will certainly be at least three parts in four of all her acquaintance" (Peterson & Brereton 559). This skepticism and insinuated necessity for self-preservation likely resulted from difficult life lessons Montagu had to learn. As with most good grandparents, Montagu hopes to spare her grandchild from some of the pain she had to face as she discovered she was not accepted for who she was. In a sense,

Montagu wants her grandchild to conform by hiding who she really is and what she knows, but further in the letter, she connects it to their shared gender within a domineering culture, explaining, “the use of knowledge in our sex, besides the amusement of solitude, is to moderate the passions, and learn to be contented with a small expense which are the certain effects of studious life; and it may be preferable even to that fame which men have engrossed to themselves, and will not suffice us to share” (Peterson & Brereton 559). Montagu encourages the girl to keep her intellect to herself, as it will never redeem for her the fame it would a man. This is clear recognition of the pervasive and troubling effects the gender-biased society had on women, and especially those like Montagu who sought identity as an individual. This external struggle undoubtedly leads to internalization, which points back to her first cautionary advice of finding a way to be content within that society, something Montagu obviously found difficult.

In her writings, Montagu illustrates her willingness and desire to be physically, spatially, and vocally dominated by “Other” women, their behaviors, and their ideologies so to develop a better understanding of herself and the world around her after having been born into a prominent family in a dominant culture. Both her family and her culture played a detrimental part in shaping Montagu’s intimate messages and hiding “unusual” aspects of her private life prior to publication. Had Montagu’s readers been given the raw writings and been allowed to form their own conclusions, it is likely they would have discovered a woman who in her own way refused much of the oppression brought by the cultural institutions of imperial Britain. One can find in her story several acts of rebellion against gender-based expectations, but at first glance, it is not exactly obvious that Montagu often manipulated her traditional role in a way to ultimately facilitate a lifestyle that went against the cultural structure of the time. Not only did she do this in a marriage that better represents a well-executed business arrangement, but Montagu also allowed herself to be marginalized in a sense when she traveled to foreign countries where she did not speak any of the native languages.

Although it is demonstrated in her letters that she was often taken by the culture, history, and architecture of the countries to which she traveled, Lady Mary was even more enamored by the women she met along the way. In many instances, the dynamic in these meetings is unusual because she is moved from the superior female (but still considered the inferior gender) she was in Britain, to the inferior foreigner within the dynamic presented when in the company of a female who was native to the country visited and in a position to have authority over Montagu. This shift in roles left Montagu with little if any situational power and certainly without voice due to a language barrier, essentially at the mercy of the women she met. Body language and sensuality were the only devices through which Montagu could communicate in the immediate space, and the experiences left such an impression on her that what could not be expressed at the time was later written down upon reflection and shared with women back home as enticing erotic literature.

There is not just one example of such a situation in Montagu's travels; there is an extensive collection of them having been written over a span of years interrupted by trips back to Britain. Interestingly, Montagu - a self-educated woman who initiated her studies teaching herself two languages as she translated a classic work of literature - didn't seek to learn the languages of the countries she was to visit. Instead, it appears she chose to travel "voiceless," perhaps due to time constraints and other obligations, or an unlikely lack of interest in speaking with those she met, or maybe this oddity was because, as she confidently suggested to her granddaughter, she was content with silence and found experience-based knowledge to be much more valuable and authentic than knowledge acquired through language. It is through this silence Montagu contributes to Subaltern theory by demonstrating what can occur as a result of imposed silence (even if self-imposed) on an individual in a culture designed to systematically dominate over that person.

In many of Montagu's letters, she describes an erotic scene in which she is physically situated

below, under, or lower than the women admiring her and in some cases seducing her. This consistent spatial arrangement not only gives Montagu a position from which she can readily observe all of the women's features, but it also suggests her to be the prey, the "Other," the silent beautiful women who is far from home and completely out of her element. The seat she takes in these situations identifies her as vulnerable yet attentive and interested. Montagu was an intelligent woman who went after what she wanted. She probably had several objectives in mind, and appears to have lusted so deeply for some of the beautiful women who demonstrated a sexual attraction to her without reservation, Montagu's homoeroticism led her to instinctively and gracefully assume a sexually submissive position both literally and metaphorically, largely characterized in part by her inability to define her self nor her desires and intentions with the power of spoken language. This notion is crucial to understanding the way in which Montagu was able to benefit from the interactions with desirable, exotic women willing to take control. This complex dynamic excludes any opportunity for Montagu to distinguish herself as educated and wealthy (though the wealth was probably assumed based on her presence in a foreign country), as married to a man, as a consistent member of elitist circles, as a woman of power in Britain.

Montagu's silence in foreign lands gave her the platform to reconstruct her true identity without fear of judgment or social repercussion. Montagu's willful acceptance of her role as powerless and vulnerable in visits with women demonstrates her desire to unhesitatingly act on her authentic feelings of homosexual arousal and to explore and gain knowledge about aspects of sexuality and sexual politics in her own identity, the identities of other women, and culturally-defined identities. Abandoning her power and "unconventional" reputation in Britain with the exception of the freedom of financial privilege (as her other source of power -intellectual knowledge- has little worth without the medium of language with which to utilize it) and rebirthing herself as beautifully voiceless, as sexual vogue, as lacking any self-defined or socially-defined identity abstaining from developing the ability to

communicate in any way with the exception of the gaze, blush, smile, and touch.

Foreign Montagu benefited sexually upon submission to the native, dominant woman within the erotic space and remained there able to fully experience fantastic, spontaneous, and mysterious passion. In the inferior role, she could learn how to maneuver her body in homosexual spaces defined by other cultures. Using only her body movements and nonverbal cues, Montagu and her lovers created unusually sensual sexual unions. Her documented intrigue with several exotic women left her impressionable and passionately present. Montagu's repeated trysts over many years and with different women exhibit consistent homosexual interests and physical desires. This made for fantastic homosexual interactions and exciting erotic correspondence written to attend to the affections and physical needs of her distant female partner through pornographic language, imagery, and allusions.

Perhaps Lady Mary wanted to better understand the experience of the Other women and this was how she sought to do so. Or maybe her acts of rebellion and social insurgency in Britain put her in an unwanted dominant role among other women in her class and even some men of lower class. It is certainly arguable Montagu's true desires were to be treated with some sort of normalcy despite being intelligent, wealthy, and well-traveled; however, in order for that to happen, she had to escape the politics of Britain and enter into countries controlled and spaces negotiated by differing sexual politics and practices. It would only perpetuate a false identity were historians and readers alike to attempt any definitive determinations about Lady Mary's true motives when her life and work have been altered and even the alterations have been changed. With the appropriate theoretical framework and an attempt to restore truth to Montagu's life, one can begin to unveil her true identity and reveal her many eclectic contributions.

Montagu's unique preference to be on the periphery led to an experience marked by many characteristics associated with the subaltern. Her determination to find a space in which she could shed

her socially-constructed and largely predetermined image to be true to her self created the agency necessary to escape the colonial confines of British culture, learn about the experiences of other people, and gain meaningful knowledge about the world beyond restrictive imperial borders. These opportunities to see the world from the eyes of a mute, female “Other” and not a feigned identity designed to oblige the British brought Montagu contentment despite circumstantial tribulations, and inspired her to pen the adventures, beauties, and truths of her voyages for decades, leaving a legacy of insight and inspiration so others willing to look deeply may have an experience of ease.

Chapter One: Reexamining LMWM's Past

At a young age, Montagu developed an appetite for reading and writing, "two qualities," according to Amanda Napp's "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu," "unbecoming of a budding young noblewoman" (62). Her early interests separated her from the norm and bore the "masculine" image of Montagu as independent and individualistic. The masculine characteristics that defined Montagu's image at the time were only perpetuated by her self-educated intellectual accomplishments, involvement in exclusive writing circles as well as her interest in travel to learn about history and culture of other "inferior" countries.

In the many letters she penned over the course of her lifetime, Montagu wrote to various close friends, one who happened to be the sister of her eventual husband. The two women were known to have a very strong bond, but the closeness is said to have led to romantic feelings between the two. Miss Luyster's article "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu," explains that Montagu's affection for this friend, as manifested in her letters, is extravagant and exacting, like that of all girls in their first female friendship" (291-2). Although recipient names were removed from Montagu's private letters prior to publication, it is known Montagu wrote Anne Wortley frequently and often included romantic expressions clearly extending beyond a platonic relationship. Determined historian Lillian Faderman, in her attack on conservative historians or those interested in preserving tradition, argues that when researching the lives of historical women potentially exhibiting homosexual interests or behaviors, "biographers frantically searched for the hidden man who must have been the object of their subject's affection, even though a beloved woman was in plain view" (74). Montagu's unconventional interactions with Anne Wortley suggest her to be Montagu's secretive true love.

Furthermore, "Lady Mary's biographer admits that Mary's letters to Anne carry 'heart

burnings and reproaches and apologies' “ (Faderman 74). Montagu's marriage to Anne's older brother Edward is also described as “unconventional,” prompted after Montagu estranged herself from her father, intentionally abandoning all financial security upon the couple's elopement. In some of her earlier letters, “Lady Mary expressed a romantic vision of marriage based on mutual love and companionship, an idea which was at the vanguard of changing gender relations in her day. Despite those lofty ideals, her biographers conclude that her marriage was a loveless one, and indeed her correspondence with her husband bespeaks a cordial distance” (Secor 378). However, Montagu's notions of equality in marriage did not necessarily indicate she hoped for a male partner, and if she did hope to eventually wed a man as was expected, she had already determined and romanticized her role as one of equal importance in the relationship.

Napp's biographical article suggests Montagu's interest in her future husband, Edward, was one concerned more with position than with love. Already decided to get what she wants out of the tradition of marriage with the unusual expectation of an equal partnership, Montagu tested boundaries assigned to the female gender before she fully entered womanhood. Napp further supports the notion of a strategic marriage explaining, “Lady Mary found Wortley's political connections and financial success very impressive...and wealthy Wortley was an ‘ideal’ catch for a woman of Lady Mary's station” (Napp 61). Although the courtship between Lady Mary and Edward Wortley lasted several years and numerous rejections on the part of Montagu, Lewis Gibbs notes “the situation, in fact, had become decidedly delicate and rather trying; and the odd relationship would sooner or later come to an end or find a natural conclusion in marriage” (37). One can only pontificate about why Montagu would spend such a long time dating Wortley without a commitment if she saw such opportunity in wedding him as Napp asserts, unless of course she wanted to keep Edward close so she could continue to spend time with her intimate

friend inconspicuously.

Gibbs describes the relationship between Montagu and Wortley as “odd,” because Lady Mary’s connection to Edward was through his sisters, though they were much younger. When arranging to be in Wortley’s company, Montagu would meet with his two younger sisters also. This family gathering of sorts occurred over a period of seven years and admittedly having never been alone with Edward during that time, Montagu was much more likely to have created an intimate bond with one or both of the sisters than with an older man striving for political success (Gibbs 36-7). Montagu would socialize with the women publically, and she could also cultivate companionship with them alone. It was known the conclusion of marriage would elevate Edward into a new social stratum, but its symbiotic value would give Montagu, a woman of letters, access to a world she dreamt of exploring and recording.

Under the umbrella of British patriarchal hegemony, the equation was simple: Lady Mary needed a man, namely Edward with her father out of the picture, to help her move beyond the bounds of Britain. Edward’s strategic move to wed Mary to keep up appearances was the ideal prescription for his budding career. Srinivas Aravamudan’s article, “Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in the *Hamman*: Masquerade, Womanliness, and Levantization,” confirms such an assertion by noting that Edward Wortley’s appointment of Ambassador to the Sublime Porte, provided “a central focus of the travel letters” (69). Additionally, in his essay “Lady Mary’s Portable Seraglio,” Joseph W. Lew insists “Lady Mary’s rank enabled her to master normally masculine preserves of knowledge; but her descriptions were made possible by her position as the British ambassador’s wife” (434). According to Gail Hawkes’ *Sex & Pleasure*, “...the mature and educated individual, aware of self and of others, consciously reflects on the material sensations of worldly life and, in doing so, will act (in the pursuit of more pleasure and less pain)

to adjust material existence to this end” (112). Based on this information, one can easily conclude that the marriage between Edward and Montagu served to allow her the opportunities to travel, discover, write, and enjoy the company of other exotic and beautiful women.

Marilyn Morris’ “Transgendered Perspectives on Premodern Sexualities,” one of few essays willing to associate a sort of sapphism with Lady Mary’s lifestyle, confirms, “the protracted prenuptial negotiations became a battle of wills, and Lady Mary and Wortley’s eventual union increasingly resembled a business partnership with the pair spending progressively longer stretches of time living apart” (586). In reading of Lady Mary’s life, it is clear she and her husband never really existed within the same social circles, especially because Lady Mary often placed herself in the company of other unconventional women and openly homosexual men. Lord Hervey, in James R. Dubro’s biographical sketch, goes so far as to refer to her as “what we now unceremoniously call a ‘fag hag’ “ (93). This brings into question whether or not she ran in such social circles because she felt understood in terms of her sexuality as well as the inquiry of whether or not she sought sexual pleasure from the members of a such circle knowing the members shared a common interest in protection of sensual identities.

The assumption certainly isn’t that Montagu and Wortley had absolutely no romantic feelings toward one another, rather the more likely conclusion to be drawn involves the realization that though they may have felt compassion on some level for one another. The foundation of their relationship was built on a self-serving and thus superficial acknowledgement, whether spoken or unspoken, between these two individuals, in a time that would have shunned Edward for remaining single and Montagu for wanting to continue her educational pursuits. Also, women who were not married, especially ones as beautiful and educated as Montagu, were seen as “odd women” and “part of the ‘shrieking sisterhood’ of women who publicly agitated for rights”

(Phillips 33). Furthermore, Edward's sister Anne, with whom Montagu spent most of her visits, was inevitably drawn into the love affair as a sort of mediator, sharing correspondences of affection, while developing her own sense of self and sexuality.

Had Montagu been open about the development of feelings for Anne, not only would she have been condemned by an already judgmental British society, but she also would have forfeited the financial opportunity to leave her homeland. Montagu's marriage to Wortley served all parties involved, including Anne, having made it possible for Edward Wortley to achieve an improved social standing, Montagu to travel and write, and Anne to maintain her seemingly platonic relationship with her brother's wife, appearing as nothing more than an affectionate sister-in-law.

Another facet of Montagu's relationship with Edward involved a sort of agreement that she not do anything to make him feel uncomfortable or to compromise his increasingly good name, but that doesn't mean she didn't have such behaviors in secret (Gibbs 196). When Alexander Pope attacked Montagu, insisting she was a whore and a lesbian, it was the first time in her marriage that inappropriate behavior on her part came to light. Montagu's secret letters to Remond in addition to her supposed lesbianism served to be a cornerstone of Pope's lampoons. Likely firing back at her rejection of him with wit, Pope's charges of promiscuity were supplemented with rumors and accusations of Montagu's erotic relationship with Maria Skerrett. Although Grundy insists in her biography that no such evidence exists, one must refute with the acknowledgement of the clues left in the words that were not destroyed, the realization that some actually were intentionally destroyed by Montagu and some of her kin seeking to publish her work, and the actuality that "evidence" from an erotic tryst would not exactly be accessible to anyone other than those involved, especially contemporary historians (Grundy 269). It is

assumed that the best evidence, at least for biographers and historians, lives within the letters and writings by Montagu, and such proof could be rather easily hidden and/or destroyed. Clearly, whatever “agreement” supposedly existed between Montagu and Edward only seemed to have referenced public activities or affairs.

By all accounts, any heat that may have once existed between the couple was lukewarm within little time. Wortley likely found himself with no other option than to stand by his nontraditional and intellectually superior wife. Lewis Gibbs’ *The Admirable Lady Mary* retells the awkward relationship; “Mr. Wortley put the best face on the matter: he had made his choice, and if it turned out unfortunately had no one to blame but himself. He behaved with tolerance, and even with indulgence” (193).

One scholar interested in premodern sexualities, Marilyn Morris, points out the business arrangement-like qualities of Edward and Montagu’s relationship as one of unusual convenience and acceptance. Morris analyzes some of Edward’s writing to Montagu and points out, “the clandestine courtship she was conducting with Edward Wortley suggests that she had found a potential husband who accepted her masculine qualities” (585). To support such a claim, Morris includes an excerpt from one of Wortley’s letters to Lady Mary:

“ ‘I ever believ’d the compleatest Plan of Felicity that we are acquainted with, was to enjoy one woman friend, on Man, and to think it of little moment whether those that were made use of to fill up some idle hours were Princes or Peasants, wise or foolish, but rather to seek the Lower as less likely to work any change in a mind thoroughly satisfi’d that knew no want nor so much as a wish. Had I you, I should have at one view before me all the Charms of either sex met together. I should enjoy a perpetual succession of new Pleasures, a constant Variety in One. This is far beyond what I thought sufficient to make life Happy.’ “ (586).

Obviously, this telling segment can be read a number of ways, including as somewhat of a plea to convince Lady Mary that Edward would accept her as she was, despite her frequent acts of gender-based rebellion. Regardless of interpretations of why it was written, it clearly states his perception of her as an unconventionally masculine woman who can offer “the Charms of either sex met together.” Use of the word ‘charms’ connotes sensual likenesses and demeanors used to attract the “opposite” sex. However, the implication in the language of the letter insists Montagu’s personality and behaviors were enough to attract a man *or* a woman.

Most of Montagu’s biographers tiptoe around her lesbian relationships, but they all are willing to acknowledge that a life left in letters leaves much open to interpretation. Gibbs explains, “a biographer’s task is never simple, and letters, however numerous and revealing, always leave many gaps and much to be explained. At best they provide evidence which needs sifting, testing, and amplifying” (6). Gibbs, however, is blatantly inaccurate in his description of Montagu as having “no sense of mystery and very little of romance,” claiming that she wrote as a “detached observer,” when in fact she is very involved in the scenes she describes (7). The literary evidence shows that she is actually so consumed both physically and emotionally that she recalls specific details to record and send back to her lovers.

The list of contemporary biographers most devoted to seeking truths about Montagu’s life includes Robert Halsband, Isobel Grundy, and Elizabeth Bohls. Although all three of the individuals work to investigate Montagu’s relationship with her father, her conflict with Pope, and her later-in-life romantic interests, none is willing to address the notion that Montagu was very likely a woman who had changing sexual interests, likely felt somewhat insecure by her marred beauty resulting from illness, and was brilliant enough to use her position as vogue while abroad to initiate sexual intimacies that simply could not and would not have been as accessible

and/or acceptable at home in England.

Halsband, Grundy, and Bohls each portray Montagu's work as Sapphic at times, but do not further develop such an intriguing literary quality into any sort of hypothesis as to why the feature exists. In fact, Grundy dedicates only one paragraph in her considerably lengthy biography to Lois Kathleen Mahaffey's speculation of Montagu's lesbianism, only to immediately disregard the claim citing too little evidence (269). An examination of the facts surrounding her marriage, sexually liberating experiences and letters, and evidence of her true identity found in her other works, reveals Montagu's life to be one that was led beyond the bounds of sexual norms in England at the time and certainly not one that would be widely accepted, even in modern society, as worthy of literary prestige. It may be for this reason that biographers have chosen to gloss over Montagu's bisexual preferences and libertine sensuality. Or, perhaps her biographers chose to join the legacy of keeping Montagu's true identity secret, only interested in seeking praise for her prolific writing and not for her brazen efforts to act on her desires, to share them with lovers, and to literally document her immense role in changing gender roles and sexual norms throughout Europe. As Macbeth asserts, "the re-considering of the past and the re-articulating of its struggles is the effort of many a modern historian. More particularly even of the feminist historian, who often must re-write the absent women in history, or are forced to try and separate real women from the misogynistic perception of their time" (9). Historians acknowledging Montagu's literary brilliance and value have fallen short of exploring her life through a feminist lens.

Halsband's biographical sketch, given as a preface to a collection of Montagu's writing, is at least *willing* to acknowledge the myriad information and interpretations to be gotten of Montagu's letters, essays, and poems. He and Grundy collaboratively develop a bracketing

system to denote “doubtful readings” (4). This acknowledges that what can be gathered of Montagu’s life is still in question to two of the people who have most studied her in the world of academia; this insinuation makes it possible that the editors of her work have simply capitalized on its literary quality and avarice, rather than examined it for evidence of a potentially condemnable lifestyle. However, it should be noted, that even Halsband and Grundy have worked from a collection released to them by a descendant of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, likely to have been manipulated to meet the desires and needs of British readership (5). It should also be noted that in the anecdotal introduction to the same collection, Halsband and Grundy glossed over the role of Anne Wortley and her relationship with Montagu. This is significant because by all accounts Anne played a crucial role in Montagu’s relationship with Edward and was likely the woman with whom Montagu first developed a sexual relationship, even if, for all intensive purposes, that relationship was nothing more than the typical passion practice-run so common of unwed yet marriage-aged British women at the time.

One interesting claim of Montagu’s biographers is that the expressive letters written by Anne Wortley to Montagu is they were written from letters originally drafted by Edward. The problem with this theory is one cannot definitively prove that Anne Wortley did not in any way alter what her brother supposedly wrote to better meet her own personal needs, that she did not write them with the intension of expressing her own feelings (that happened to echo those of her brother), and that Montagu read them under the impression that they were from Edward. The evidence in Montagu’s letters responding to Anne Wortley indicates she speaks directly to Anne and not to her brother, and that the use of compassionate language exhibits an obvious lusting for another woman.

In her article, “Who Hid Lesbian History?,” Lillian Faderman argues that Montagu

biographers have chosen to overlook the object of her affection even though “there is reason to suspect lesbian attachments” (74). Historians throughout European society have chosen to overlook the notions of same-sex relations, argues Faderman, and as a result, the obvious object of Montagu’s affection, Anne Wortley, has been dismissed. Such historians have dismissed Montagu’s emotional letters to Anne Wortley as nothing more than an attempt to prove to her husband that she was intelligent and noble, since he would be intercepting her letters to his sister (Faderman 75). However, Montagu’s opportunities abroad are paralleled with her same-sex space, because when her husband appears or his schedule requires travel from one place to another, Montagu’s letters, and thus same-sex space, are cut short. Lew finds that in Montagu’s letter describing the Turkish bathhouse, letters “his [Edward’s] name suffices to destroy the sanctity of feminine space; it cuts short both Lady Mary’s visit and this letter, sending her off to a symbol of patriarchal power, art, and knowledge: Justinian’s church, cold and sterile, a ‘heap of stones’ “ (445). In all of her letters to women, Montagu sought to protect the womanly space; her outspoken agitation with any interruption, especially a masculine one, defines her desire for the exclusive company of females.

Although Anne Wortley died before Montagu’s marriage, Lady Mary’s same-sex interest did not stop there, because her marriage of opportunity was hardly satisfying. Luyster notes, “Mr. Wortley’s frequent and prolonged absences in London were very distasteful to the young wife. She reproaches him for seldom writing” and “she appears often dejected and unhappy” (Luyster 294). According to one biographical sketch, many question whether or not the two ever even loved each other, stating that Montagu’s “relations with her husband are, in fact, a matter of difficulty from first to last, sometimes because the evidence is so very odd that it is hard to know what conclusions to draw from it, and at other times because there is scarcely

any evidence to be had” (Gibbs 9).

In her biography *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, Isobel Grundy explains that after the courtship resulted in marriage between Edward and Lady Mary, her letters would describe Montagu’s pleasant surprise in her relationship when she only expected to find matrimonial mediocrity (58). Grundy perceives this response as “rapturous” and doesn’t even address the possibility that Montagu’s “rapturous” response may be to the opportunity of the situation rather than the quality of the marriage, seeing that she did use the consecration to distress her own father. The best remaining representations of the relationship are the letters she wrote to her husband, and many of her “love letters” to Edward read like casual formalities and adherences to marital expectations rather than the expressions of companionship, tenderness, and even eroticism that can be found in her letters to other women.

Lew argues, depending on the gender of her recipient Montagu fashioned her discourse, as if speaking two different gender-based languages. Montagu made this determination based on the “assumption that her female readers will be interested in stories about contemporary women, while male readers prefer reading about the distant past or the present Orient...” (Lew 435). Additionally, in Montagu’s writings to women, she plainly states, “I am your affectionate sister” (Letter I). Montagu’s tender and purposeful words leave nothing open to interpretation, and it is quite doubtful that she censored her letters to her partners whom were not related to her husband. In another letter, she suggestively writes, “Adieu, my dear S. always remember me; and be assured I can never forget you, &c. &c” (Letter III). As a clever and purposeful writer, Montagu’s affections and intentions are hardly hidden in the semantics when seen within a greater contextual framework.

Montagu’s letters have been published by various editors, with moderately changing

commentary over time. The first to lay hands on the letters was John Cleland, author of *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*. Naturally, Lady Mary's daughter was concerned to learn that a stranger had hold of her mother's life work. However, the letters ended up in his possession as a result of Montagu's bestowal of a copy of the letters to the minister of the English Church at Rotterdam. This fact is especially significant coupled with the knowledge that Montagu actually signed off on the letters before giving them over, indicating that she did want them to be published as she neared death, perhaps because she realized the role she could have in the deconstruction of gender roles and images of sexuality at the time (Halsband & Grundy 33). Maybe Montagu felt she could finally reveal her true identity in Britian, the one she had only been able to express abroad. Even if Montagu did not want to leave her mark on the British society as an agent of change, her volunteering of the letters with a signature as seal-of-approval for publication further validates the theory that Montagu was willing to let her same-sex desires, experiences, and erotica be accessible to the learned community in Britain, regardless of whether or not she realized the keystone quality of her work in the sexual and textual evolutions taking place in England.

When Montagu's great-grandson, Lord Wharncliffe, reworked the collection in 1862, he revisited them with the objective of making them more genuine (Luyster 289). This edition of the letters, however, was the third time they had been published. If the letters were not published with candor until the third time around, the implication is that the first two publications were misrepresentative, as Wharncliffe's objective was to restore and preserve authenticity.

In fact, *The North American Review* insists, "the first memoir, which appeared after her death was imperfect and doubtful of authenticity. That of Lord Wharncliffe, published almost a century later, though fragmentary, is much more satisfactory" (289). Luyster's explanation of

Wharcliffe's interest in re-examining his great-grandmother's recorded life is "the desire to know something of the private life of a writer who has greatly pleased or instructed us [that] is insatiable" (289). His pursuit of authenticity may have better expressed Montagu's discoveries, but it did not set out to reveal her frankness about her homoerotic tendencies.

Also, one must consider the obvious financial opportunity of releasing the letters under a "new and improved" guise that likely appealed to Wharcliffe, especially if coupled with a chance to "fragment" the work in a deceptive way so to retain the honor of the family. Although her grandson argued the importance of revisiting her life in letters, he pulled the letters in his collection from that of Mr. Dalloway, a man who had already demonstrated his power through textual manipulation, having removed portions and edited sentences, thus robbing the works of Montagu's true voice. It is unsure what parts he would have chosen to remove and his motives behind the exclusions. If true representations of Montagu's experiences were already missing, Wharcliffe's edition was nothing more than an exercise in futility, because he could not possibly have revisited *her* life; rather, he revisited *Dalloway's* selections and snippets of her life. This pattern pervasively contributes to the destruction of Montagu's real identity and work, thus making it necessary to reconstruct both through a textual analysis situated within historical and contextual framework.

Chapter Two: Representing the Erotic Other

Close textual analysis of Montagu's poetry and letters reveals a very passionate woman who has found women to be more receptive to her emotional and physical needs. Something very significant in the writing is there only seems to be judgment passed on the shortcomings of men, but there are not any indications that Montagu weighed and measured the women she encountered as would have been expected of a high-ranking Brit at the time. In fact, it appears as though Montagu was even more interested in how the foreign women perceived her and her culture. Although there is evidence Montagu submitted emotionally to the women she encountered in her travels, the unquestionable proof lies in her recording of the trysts to be sent to her partner(s) and allow for a sharing in the stimulation. This chapter focuses on Montagu's words from various editors and aims to demonstrate that she was in fact sexually interested in women and willing to submit to them emotionally and physically. Such submission, much of it involuntary due to the language barrier, should be considered when assessing Montagu's role as subaltern as discussed in chapter three.

One of Montagu's most suggestive pieces is not actually a letter, but a poem titled, "The Lover (1721-5)." Only two lines into the poem, Montagu writes, "Take, Molly, at once the Inside of my Breast:/ The stupid Indifference so often you blame/ Is not owing to Nature, to fear, or to Shame" (DeMaria 699). The lines do not just ask another woman, Molly, to take the love that Montagu has for her; they also seem to defend her same-sex feelings by offering the explanation that they are not the result of nature, fear, or shame. The authentic feelings of love, suggests her explanation, are the byproduct of just having known the woman, Molly. It is almost as if Montagu aims to convince, seduce, or perhaps even plead with "The Lover" when she writes, "I know but too well how Time flies along,/ That we live but few Years and yet fewer are young"

(DeMaria 700). As the poem continues, Montagu expresses that she does not want to be cheated in love, even if her love for Molly is short-lived.

Montagu insists that she will not regret having entered the relationship, as she writes, “But I hate to be cheated, and never will buy/ Long years of Repentance for moments of Joy” (DeMaria 700). Montagu then explains, that women are more desirable partners than men, because in women, she can “find/ Good sense, and good Nature so equally joined.” In the same stanza she explains that she would seek companionship and intimacy in a man, if she could find one who isn’t “stupidly vain,” “lewdly” designed, or “over severe,” won’t meanly boast, and, on a much more erotic level, will contribute to her pleasure and not simply value his own (DeMaria 700). These offerings are vital to her poem to a female lover – and her entire collection of writing - because they are a detailed, and quite rational, justification for her same-sex desires, inclusive of both her emotional and physical needs.

Furthermore, Montagu’s poem insists that a male partner would not be joyful company, nor would he be faithful, whereas a woman would “never be fond of any but me [Montagu].” Interestingly, she acknowledges that the social decorum of the time welcomes relationships comprised of men and women, but “when the long hours of Public are past/ And we meet with Champagne and a Chicken at last,/ May every fond Pleasure that hour endear,/ Be banished afar both Discretion and Fear” (DeMaria 700). Montagu’s openness about her preference for homoerotic love and companionship is brilliantly framed within the context of how her predilection might be changed if she could find a man who could treat her the way a woman does; this makes her sophisticated verse difficult to interpret for the untrained British eye.

Montagu’s attraction to the women, specifically the Turkish women she encounters in her travels, is not just a physical craving; it is a yearning for an emotional connection to a present

and compassionate being, as demonstrated in her poem “The Lover (1721-5).” Anna Secor’s “Orientalism, Gender and Class in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s Letters” explains, “...for Montagu’s life and letters are a testimony to her own tenacious quest for a personal sort of liberty, both intellectual and sensual in nature, which was difficult for her to achieve within the constraints of her society” (376). According to Ahmed K. Al-Rawi’s article, “The Portrayal of the East vs. the West in Lady Mary Montagu’s *Letters* and Emily Ruetten’s *Memoirs*,” “Montagu criticizes the Western preoccupation with emotionless rationalism, preferring the spontaneity and naturalness seen in the East” (19). Montagu’s observations apply to both men and women; she writes about Fatima as having “all the politeness and good breeding of a court; with an air that inspires, at once, respect and tenderness...” (Letter XXXIX). Montagu’s fixation on Fatima results from finding a striking partner willing to meet both her emotional and physical needs.

Detailed accounts of physical beauty lend themselves to homoeroticism, as she seems enamored by just about all of the exotic women. Upon her first arrival to Vienna, she describes the beauty of the empress as “her complexion the finest I ever saw; her nose and forehead well made, but her mouth has ten thousand charms, that touch the soul. When she smiles, 'tis with a beauty and sweetness that forces adoration. She has a vast quantity of fine fair hair; but then her person!—one must speak of it poetically to do it rigid justice;” further, and more sensually, declaring that “nothing can be added to the beauty of her neck and hands. Till I saw them, I did not believe there were any in nature so perfect, and I was almost sorry that my rank here did not permit me to kiss them” (Letter IX). Not only does this letter document Montagu’s desire to kiss the women, but also her “rank” as a hindrance to her ability to do so. It serves as only one of the many examples of Montagu finding the women abroad as much more kind and accepting than the women back home.

In the Turkish bath, she notes that the women “received me with all the obliging civility possible. I know no European court, where the ladies would have behaved themselves in so polite a manner to a stranger” (DeMaria 693). Montagu further contrasts the Muslim women with European women writing, “I believe in the whole, there were 200 women, and yet none of those disdainful smiles, and satiric whispers, that never fail in our assemblies, when anybody appears that is not dressed exactly in fashion” (DeMaria 693). Montagu’s disgust with the result of British colonization of social behavior is one of disgust, and it explains her disinterest in emotional and physical bonds with most English women.

Montagu is open about her admiration of the physical beauty of the Turkish women, as she is even open with her “sister” – a term loosely used to acknowledge filial relation or womanly companionship. Opening a letter with the explanation that her head “is so full of entertainment... that ‘tis absolutely necessary, for my own repose, to give it some vent” (DeMaria 694), she explains that the lovely Fatima left her speechless; “I could not, for some time, speak to her, being wholly taken up in gazing” (DeMaria 696). She says, “I took more pleasure in looking on the beautiful Fatima, than the finest piece of sculpture could give me.” Montagu goes so far as to visually examine Fatima for any kind of flaw, but she isn’t able to find one. Montagu’s sharing with her “sister” of such an experience isn’t to shock or shame her, but to give her an honest representation of her experiences. The letter ends, “I wish it would give you part of my pleasure; for I would have my dear sister share in all the diversions of” (DeMaria 697). The close of the letter suggests much more than Montagu wanting her close friend to share in sight-seeing.

In a much more popular and shocking letter addressed “To the Lady ---,” Montagu depicts her first visit to a Turkish bathhouse. It is in the bathhouse that Montagu seductively uses her role as the erotic “other.” She enters the bathhouse in a habit and, for some time, does not

undress herself in the company of all of the nude women. Lew writes, “Retaining her habit does not merely allow Lady Mary to maintain the physical signs of her rank; it also reminds her and the bathing women of her Englishness” (442). It is during this demonstration that “she has painted a tableau for her reader, who can mentally see her among the two hundred women. As the only clothed figure, she draws attention to herself, but preserves her opacity” (Lew 442). As a writer, Montagu certainly understood the power of word choice, and her depiction of the scenario creates anticipation and arousal in the mind of the reader, offering what is essentially her submission to a striptease.

Montagu writes, “they being all so earnest in persuading me, I was at last forced to open my skirt, and show them my stays, which satisfied them very well” (DeMaria 694). Her wording of the scene expresses such shock and pleasure, that Montagu states, “I was here convinced of the truth of a reflection that I had often made, *that if it were the fashion to go naked, the face would be hardly observed*. I perceived that the Ladies of the most delicate skins and finest shapes, had the greatest share of my admiration, though their faces were sometimes less beautiful than those of their companions” (DeMaria 693). Montagu is clearly taken by the bodies of the women. Aravamudan astutely points out about the hot and sticky bathhouse scene, “in this sexual traffic, the autobiographer invents a script, plays a role, and peddles an effect, all the while silently disclaiming her moral liability” (84). It is reasonable to assume that Montagu, as an intelligent and worldly woman, knew exactly what she was getting herself into by going to the bathhouse, and more importantly, by staying there.

According to Alan Edwards and R.E.L. Masters’ *The Cradle of Erotica*, “sapphism and lesbianism is rampant” in the bathhouses of Arabia, as represented in *Arabian Nights*: “...and she herself loved to mount the young female slaves. Above all things she loved to tickle and rub

herself against these virgin bodies” (282-3). Although her personal descriptions are a bit subtler, it is clear that even after the death of Anne Wortley, Montagu’s erotic thoughts, experiences, and productions continue.

Montagu’s sexy descriptions are not exclusive to her visits to the Turkish bathhouse. In a letter from Hanover, she writes, “I am now got into the region of beauty. All the women have (literally) rosy cheeks, snowy foreheads and bosoms, jet eye-brows, and scarlet lips, to which they generally add coal-black hair. Those perfections never leave them, till the hour of their deaths, and have a very fine effect by candle light” (Letter XVIII). Montagu’s eroticism is most predictable when considering the female recipients of the letters. Viewing women in such a way and expecting recipients to appreciate such meticulous descriptions reveals a mutual homoerotic desire between the correspondents.

Some women with whom she corresponds are eager to learn of history and make material requests, whereas as others, such as “The Countess,” are consistently given accounts of a sexual nature. In one such letter, Montagu describes a visit to a sultana. She prefaces the tryst by explaining that the sultana appeared even more beautiful than their last visit, and during this one, she is

“now convinced that I have really the happiness of pleasing you; and, if you knew how I speak of you amongst our ladies, you would be assured, that you do me justice in making me your friend. She placed me in the corner of the sofa, and I spent the afternoon in her conversation, with the greatest pleasure in the world.—The sultana Hafiten is, what one Would naturally expect to find a Turkish lady, willing to oblige, but not knowing how to go about it; and 'tis easy to see, in her manner, that she has lived excluded from the world.”

(Letter XXXIX) □

Montagu's use of words such as "placed" and "greatest pleasure" are sexually suggestive, and when put into the contextual framework of two beautiful women unable to speak one another's language with fluency proposes much more than just an afternoon of enjoyable chatting.

In the same letter, Montagu revisits the time she spent with the beautiful Fatima, and in what seems to be a comparison of the two women, reminds the countess of just how fair Fatima found her. She highlights a conversation in which she and Fatima essentially go back and forth about who has a more beautiful face (Letter XXXIX). Not only does this demonstrate how enamored she is by the physical beauty of Fatima, but how willing Montagu is to admit to certain chosen audiences just how obsessed she is with the female form. In fact, she often expresses the desire for an artist to come and paint pictures of the women and their beautiful slaves. Montagu writes, "I fancy it would have very much improved 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..." (DeMaria 692). Her descriptions of the women as nude and in various poses facilitate an arousal in the reader, but within the scope of social correctness and without an obvious admittance to same-sex desires in the case her husband were to read the letters. Surely one might view her longing for a painting or sculpture of the women to be nothing more than an appreciation for beauty, but if viewed through the lenses provided by her other writing and the historical information that exists, it is clear that Montagu lusts for women -especially the Turkish, Muslim women- and seeks to share her experiences with others who may have homoerotic interests.

Lew writes about the bathhouse scene, “the reader of the letter sees not merely the spectacle of the two hundred and one women (Lady Mary as the "one") but also the fantasized male artist watching the spectacle, learning from it, and later reproducing it-as Ingres actually did” (443). Secor adds, “the invoked gaze is detached, but nonetheless the scene is sexualized by the invisible male painter because his mention reiterates the ‘forbidden’ nature of the space, and this prohibition is itself linked through the discursive chains of Orientalism to the supposed sensual hedonism of the women” (391). Montagu and the women she encounters in her travels have symbiotic sexual offerings as they undoubtedly viewed one another as a sexy vogue or erotic other.

This is where Montagu’s role in the sexual evolution that was occurring in society and in the literature began to take place. Her sexual libertinism with exotic women while being perceived as an exotic other herself gave Montagu fascinating material to author that after publication - even if lacking some authenticity- serves as vital recordings of sexuality in foreign countries during the eighteenth century. Hawkes explains, “what individuals did not or could not do in practice they could experience vicariously, and were encouraged to do so, through the widely available range of erotic literature...” as heterosexual pornography began to emerge in Britain (114). Montagu’s willingness to create her own private form of homosexual erotica still tested the standards that governed the chase for sexual pleasure.

Chapter Three: Situating Montagu in the Politics of Pleasure

In order to understand the politics behind the rejection of Montagu's lifestyle and work, one must look into the global and local historical frameworks used to understand and represent sexual behaviors. Since erotic tendencies were largely considered perverse in Montagu's native society consisting of a Christian majority, it is to be expected that writing similar to hers was also perceived negatively, as one of its primary functions is to offer the opportunity of sexual pleasure through text. According to John Money, "eroticism embraces sexual union, but much more as well, but especially in imagery including verbal ideational imagery and fantasy. For the church, sexual passion in marriage was sin enough, but eroticism reached far beyond the constraints of marriage and so was even more sinful" (380). The imperial motherland was so aggressive in maintaining its Christian culture that it inevitably forced those within the country holding different beliefs into acts of emotional, spiritual, and physical insurgency.

This chapter explores the evolution of sexuality and sexual politics both locally and globally and develops the context for understanding Montagu's need to vacate her culture for that of another to reveal her true homosexual identity. In doing so, this chapter discusses the vast changes occurred over time in the notions revolving around appropriate sexual interests and activities. Placing Montagu's experience within a much larger historical framework exhibits how and why her travels facilitated opportunities for her that would have never occurred in colonial Britain.

In his work, *The Use of Pleasure*, Michel Foucault analyzes the shifts that have occurred within human society with regard to desiring and seeking pleasure, as perceptions of sex have changed drastically from the Greeks to what is now familiar in the Christian tradition. His studies address the notions of sexual pleasure as filthy or negative in modernity and works to define the

evolution within thought and principle that led to such ideas. While discussing the moral problematization of pleasure, Foucault takes a look at ancient societies and explores the ideologies that determined what was and was not appropriate in the realm of human relations. Four thousand years ago, sex was viewed as a romantic expression and social function that wasn't necessarily reserved for true love or procreation. The ancient Greeks, known for hedonistic tendencies, didn't even attach a social stigma to an attraction between a grown male and a male child. Foucault points out that a man sexually attracted to a young boy was given no more regard than a father loving his son (Foucault 37).

Such a reality exists in very stark contrast to the pedophilic perversion with which it would be associated today. Women, boys, and slaves were thought to be the "passive actors" in a sexual dynamic, whereas the man (unless involved in relations with another man) was considered the "active actor" in Greek sexual ethics (Foucault 47). The Greeks viewed sex as a good thing, because, "sexual activity was perceived as natural (natural and indispensable) since it was through this activity that living creatures were able to reproduce, the species as a whole was able to escape extinction, and cities, families, names, and religions were able to endure far longer than individuals, who were destined to pass away" (Foucault 48).

This perception of desiring and acting on sexual pleasure is especially important when considering the evolution required to move the largely Christian school of thought to sex as only a use for procreation and not at all an enabler of desire and/or pleasure. Furthermore, Foucault's studies revealed:

"Greeks did not see love for one's own sex and love for the other sex as opposites, as two exclusive choices, two radically different types of behavior. The dividing lines did not follow that kind of boundary. What distinguished a moderate self-possessed man from one given to

pleasure was, from the viewpoint of ethics, much more important than what differentiated, among themselves, the categories of pleasures that invited the greatest devotion. To have loose morals was to be incapable of resisting either women or boys, without it being any more serious than that.” (187)

Although the passage pertains specifically to men, it may be worthy to note that Montagu, when teaching herself to read and write, used solely texts of ancient Greece and actually did so by translating them word-for-word. Even as she visited Greece later in life, Montagu would comment on the unending romanticism that flourished in Greece for over two-thousand years when other cultures seemed to change in the span of every twenty or so years (Aravamudan 74).

Through the evolution of civilization and the development of Christian principles, views on sex became much more critical of the motives behind the act and as a result, several guidelines were put in to place to perpetuate the values of the church within the home (Foucault 50). According to Foucault, “in the Christian doctrine of the flesh, the excessive force of pleasure had its principle in the Fall and in the weakness that had marked human nature ever since” (50). This undoubtedly had an effect on Montagu’s ability to express her homoerotic desires openly, as her native land of Britain was known to carry with it these Christian values to all countries, cultures, and peoples it sought to colonize.

Mindful to include the different theories of philosophers including Plato, Socrates, and Xenophon, Foucault finds common factual ground for the men when he synthesizes the fundamental differences between the Greek and Christian perceptions of the use of sex and pleasure. He writes, “...restricting ourselves to the case of Christian morality, this specification occurs within the framework of an overall system that defines the value of sexual act in terms of general principles, indicates the conditions in which it may be legitimate or not...this is an

instance of universal modality” (60). On the contrary he explains, “in the classical ethics, with the exception of a few precepts that applied to everyone, standards of sexual morality were always tailored to one’s way of life, which was itself determined by the status one inherited and the purposes he had chosen” (Foucault 60). Although much of the work done by early philosophers examines the man’s role in sexual relations, notions of homosexual relations are certainly not shunned, even when involving two women.

Barry Reay’s “Writing the Modern Histories of Homosexual England,” focuses on same-sex relationships in last three hundred years of British history. Reay asserts that interest in same-sex relations between women may have easily gone unnoticed in Britain, as the notion of “lesbianism” had not yet been developed in her lifetime (228). Women even as late as the twentieth century were expected to demonstrate a closeness that was characterized by hugging and kissing, and such closeness could easily facilitate the cultivation of emotional attachment, passionate desires, and even feelings of romantic dependency between the two women. For some reason, the mild sexual interactions between women were acceptable, but notions of romance and/or desires for relationships were not.

Along these lines and similar to Foucault, Reay includes, “these close relationships between women should not be seen as something separate to relationships with men but rather they were part of a culture where they could be preparation for marriages between men and women” (224). This notion would not exactly apply to Montagu, as she was already married to a man when writing many of her letters, but it does represent the atmosphere in England during her time and calls into question whether or not she feared shunning based on her homosexuality or adultery or both.

Richard Phillips' article "History of Sexuality and Imperialism" investigates Victorian England sexuality and applies it to modern sex politics. He discusses the finding that most countries did not rebuke same-sex relations until met with European colonial subculture. Interestingly, Phillips asserts, "colonialism was responsible not for homosexuality but homophobia, in the form of colonial laws and punishments for sex between men" (143). It was only after this "intervention" of sorts that private protests toward gays and lesbians went public in countries such as Jamaica, India, and Zimbabwe. Not only did Europe, and more specifically Britain, set the standard for sexuality politics, but its insidious and bigoted grasp manipulated other continents and cultures in the same way imperialism colonized the peoples of other lands. The British colonization of notions of sex and sexuality was just one more facet of the imperial threat.

Regarding same-sex relationships or homosexual relations, the Qur'an addresses the standard for Islam in the passage 26, lines 160-175. In the story of Lut (Lot), it reads "Of all the creatures in the world, will ye approach males, 'And leave those whom God has created for you to be your mates? Nay, ye are a people transgressing (all limits)!' They said: 'If thou desist not, O Lut! Thou wilt assuredly be cast out!' " (The Holy Qu'ran). The passage maintains that those who shamelessly act against nature will be cast out of God's paradise. This message doesn't allow for varying interpretations, but, as with many Qur'anic verses, is only expounded upon for men and not for women.

Leila Ahmed argues that the men and women of Islam have varying understandings of their religious fundamentals. Ahmed indicates that, "there are two quite different Islams, an Islam that is in some sense a woman's Islam and an official, textual Islam, a men's Islam" (93). This separation of understandings is not only the byproduct of the common illiteracy of Muslim

women, but more so the result of an Islamic tradition that keeps women out of the mosques. The men hear the orthodox lessons on a weekly basis reminding them of what it means to be Muslim and “what was or was not the essential message of Islam” (93). The women on the other hand were on their own, leaving the sacred religion and traditions open to interpretation. This is significant because it allowed for trysts such as those involving Muslim women and Montagu to occur with less fear of social stigma seeping in to the encounters.

Culturally, erotic needs were not necessarily condemned, as “habitual masturbation is so widespread among both married and unmarried Muslim females throughout Africa and the East that it is commonly regarded by menfolk as customary and matter-of-fact” (Edwardes & Masters 283). It is no wonder that the acceptable satiation of the female’s erotic appetite led to a blurring of lines, especially with the presence and popularity of the bathhouses. The bathhouses were so well-known for erotic activities, that even Muhammed said, “Whatever woman enters a public bath, the devil is with her” (Edwardes & Masters 282). With the social acceptance of woman’s sexual desires, but an essential religious banishment for those who sought female fulfillment, a very thin division existed in the female Muslim world between those who masturbated regularly and those who allowed a woman to do it for them.

Interestingly, the women found other ways to understand who they were in relation to God and to other human beings. This notion the women communicated to one another “through their being and presence, by the way they were in the world, conveying their beliefs, ways, thoughts, and how we [young women] should be in the world by a touch, a glance, a word” (Ahmed 90). Similar to the Turkish women in Montagu’s letters, this description of Muslim women portrays them as sensual beings. Though this doesn’t exactly lend itself to eroticism, it does suggest that Muslim women had their own interpretations of Islam as well as nonverbal methods for

communicating their beliefs and opinions, and this didn't seem to infringe on their sexual rights and liberties. Montagu's depictions of these women suggest that she has an observant eye to the nude features and forms seen in the bathhouse. Her choice to correspond about the women in the bathhouse initiates an unusual occurrence of erotic writing produced by a reputable woman who was already married to a man.

Montagu confirms Ahmed's findings when she summarizes the sexual surprise of all of her travels in response to an offered tryst in Vienna. She states, "one of the pleasantest adventures I ever met with in my life was last night, and it will give you a just idea in what a delicate manner the *belles passions* are managed in this country." She further describes the man's proposal; "whether your time here is to be longer or shorter, I think you ought to pass it agreeably, and to that end you must engage in a *little affair of the heart*.—My heart, (answered I gravely enough) does not engage very easily, and I have no design of parting with it. I see, madam, (said he sighing) by the ill nature of that answer" (Letter X). Although she turns down the offer of a male partner to enjoy during her travels, it is clear she presents as a sexual being to even be encountered in such a way. She concludes, "thus you see, my dear, that gallantry and good-breeding are as different, in different climates, as morality and religion" (Letter X). Such language indicates Montagu was certainly aware of the differing moral views in other countries, and found herself more aligned with those abroad.

Joanna DeGroot's "Oriental "Feminotopias?," explains that "...the seraglio and bathhouse scenes explore intimacies and erotic possibilities among women which challenge the sexual norms or assumptions of readers" (80). Whereas male writers of the time, Hill, Dumont, and Rycout, spoke of such intimacies as unnatural or immoral, Montagu's "expressions of homoerotic interest might be a possible private alternative, but became fraught with matters of

reputation and virtue if they entered the public domain (as Montagu found when attacked by Pope in the late 1720s and 1730s), their textual exposition both acknowledges and tests a cultural boundary” (De Groot 81). Montagu doesn’t pass judgment on the cultural nuances of the Turkish women’s lives, nor does she comment on the polygamy that was, in addition to homoerotic relations, certainly looked down upon in British society at the time.

In her article, “From Classical to Imperial: Changing Visions of Turkey in the Eighteenth Century,” Kathryn S.H. Turner points out that Lady Elizabeth Craven, another travel writer in eighteenth-century England, found fault with “Montagu’s highly favourable impressions of abroad, especially of Turkey, and especially of Turkish women” (114). British’s largely Christian society believed in monogamous marriage between a man and a woman, which is the fundamental reason same-sex desires and/or acts were frowned upon.

Secor brings in the important argument of another British writer when she states, “Nassbaum suggests that the British fascination with polygamy in the eighteenth century and ultimate rejection of it enabled the consolidation and definition of English sexuality and marriage in opposition to the uncontained and polygamous ‘other’ ” (384). Nassbaum’s analysis of travel narratives of the time also finds Montagu’s writing extraordinary with its homoerotic tendencies.

The reception of Lady Mary’s erotica in Britain was, for all intensive purposes, historically accurate. Lady Elizabeth Craven actually teamed with Lady Bute, Montagu’s daughter, in an attempt to suppress the publication of Montagu’s work, and they even argued that her letters had been written by a man. The prudish women claimed the letters had been forged by two male “wits” (Clark 113). This response was based on just how “uncharacteristic of the eighteenth century of which they are so often claimed to be paradigmatic” (Clark 113). The uncharacteristic

qualities of her travel writing aided Montagu's agency through the necessitation of travel and her epistolary discourse including sensual descriptions of other women.

In their article, "The Historical Response to Female Sexuality," John Studd and Anneliese Schwenkhagen explore the cultural, political, and scientific attitudes toward women with sexual desires leading up to the twentieth century. The writers argue, "Female sexuality was a particular source of anxiety for men" (107). Extraordinary measures were taken to condemn and ultimately put an end to the female libido, including the removal of major sex organs to relieve women of the "insanity" that resulted from menstruation, masturbation, and/ or nymphomania.

According to Studd and Schwenkhagen, "this horror of female sexuality was also shared and promoted by gynaecologists, who seemed to put white professional women on a pedestal of virtuous decency" (108). With such a discriminatory climate, it is no wonder that women with a sexual drive, especially toward individuals of the female gender, felt the need to explore sensuality abroad and hide it from most individuals back home. What is endlessly fascinating about Montagu, is that she did not allow herself to be constricted by the bogus assumption that women should not be sexual individuals, nor did she submit to the added societal pressure that she, as a woman of education and status, should be especially "virtuously decent." With medical procedures involving genital mutilation and even the removal of the clitoris being widely popular in Europe, used to cure women of the sexual desires that supposedly led to hysteria, mental insanity, epilepsy, and several other disorders, literary figures of the time only helped to enforce such theories by including heroines in their works who led promiscuous lives and were tragically and drastically punished for it (Studd & Schwenkhagen 109).

With such a negative outlook on women who have taken control of their own sexuality, it is improbable that these narrow views did not have an effect on anything written about such

subjects. It is perfectly reasonable to assume that the same perceptions shaped Montagu, her family, and her other publisher's ideas about how and when to publish her work. It is very likely Montagu's poetry and letters would have been overlooked for their literary value based simply on the historical context rather than the descriptive content. By the time Montagu was in the late stages of her life, she probably felt the sexual nature of her work would be better received.

Ros Ballaster's *Seductive Forms* explores three women writers of the early eighteenth century and their manipulation of fiction into seductress. Although Lady Mary is not included in this list, the work does offer insight into the objectives of her writing contemporaries. Ballaster explains how women writers exploited the division of masculine and feminine to "construct, against a short order of literary models, a specifically female writing identity for themselves" (30). Such an identity, one of intelligence, beauty, and agency, is present in Montagu's poems and letters.

Montagu is not known for writing fiction, as are the others, but her letters are "experimental texts [that] dramatize the seduction of the female reader...that offer[s] models for the female victim to come to 'mastery' of or resistance to the fictional text through the figure of the heroinized female writer" (30). Not only did Montagu arm herself against gender stereotypes with words, but she also used her poems and letters to seduce her recipients physically, emotionally, and intellectually. Through her metaphorical poems and detailed travel writings, Montagu unknowingly "heroinized" herself and gave her female readers the opening to also develop " 'mastery' of or resistance to" ideals of 18th-century womanhood (Ballaster 30).

In *Domesticating Egypt* Murray states, "instead of recording natural landscapes from afar, nineteenth century travels increasingly ventured indoors to describe in minute detail what they saw" (87). Montagu's letters that took the form of prose narrative but offered up erotica in

addition to educational and philosophical observations ultimately represented the form of the novel (overlooking, of course, the piecemeal recordings), as “a defining feature of the novel is that it does not belong to any single genre, yet participates in all genres” (Amigoni 9). Jean Vivies, in her timeline of English travel narratives, links the narratives to the novel, only differing in terms of causality and varying endings, stating that “there can be no denying, however, that travel literature has influenced the novel, providing it with structures, patterns, and motifs” (103). However, in the company of Mariana Stokes, Montagu was one of two women to publish travel writing prior to 1770, followed by about another 25 before 1800 (Thompson 33-5). Having been one of the first to present (posthumously, of course) such a series of descriptive letters, only to be tailed by another 25 women with somewhat similar but not as extensive writings, Montagu can be included with those accredited for the beginnings of the prototype for female fiction writing, even though her “descriptive fantasies” were taken for truth.

Furthermore, travelogue writers were also some of the first novelists, and the addition of very detailed writing is the agent through which this transformation occurred. For instance, when Montagu visits a Turkish harem, she so meticulously describes the atmosphere of the bath and then focuses in on the women and their slaves, giving extensive detail such as “she was dress’d in a Caftan of Gold brocade flowerd with Silver, very well fitted to her Shape and shewing to advantage the beauty of her Bosom, only shaded by the thin Gause of her shift. Her drawers were pale pink, Green, and silver; her Slippers white, finely embrodier’d; her lovely arms adorned with bracelets of Diamonds...” (Montagu 163-4). It is even arguable the picturesque account in the company of many others categorically shifts Montagu from the typical travelogue writer to early novelist.

Travel Writing: 1700-1850, edited by Elizabeth A. Bohls and Ian Duncan, seeks to use

a chronological and anthological approach to connect travel writings to the early novel. Including Montagu in the collection, Bohls and Duncan demonstrate that the transition from travel writing to novel involved a gradual gain in the legitimacy of fiction. At a time when the British Empire expanded immensely, exotic travel writers faced an obstacle that domestics did not: the supposition that fantasy had found its way into the ethnographic and geographic descriptions (xxiii). Interestingly, “in nineteenth-century European literature there is hardly an example of a female character who has what was called “a past”, or who has had an adulterous relationship, who survives to the end of the novel, regardless of the country of origin” (Studd & Schwenkhagen 109). The female characters of Twain, Dickens, Tolstoy, and Flaubert, in addition to many others, all “succumb to the contemporary need for punishment of female sexuality” (Studd & Schwenkhagen 109). With such an approach happening in the public realm and making its evident mark in literary representations, it is no wonder why Montagu felt the need to keep her trysts out of the British eye, nor should one be curious as to why Pope felt such a need to jump on the social bandwagon in his attacks on Montagu after being rejected by her. As in the literature, it is only the virtuous woman who lives to see another day. Perhaps Montagu had this in mind when she finally signed off on the publication of her letters only a short time before her natural death.

Chapter Four: Redefining Subaltern Sexuality

Montagu used her role as subaltern during her travels to capitalize on opportunities abroad and then to deliver them to the recipients of her letters. In part, this may have been a result of having a legitimate sense of control in her own marriage, and so Montagu may have sought to allow herself to be sexually dominated despite her relative British superiority. Subalternity, or the social debate of who does and does not have power in a given setting, typically distinguishes between the elitist and the oppressed. Montagu relinquished her power to a degree when she left home to travel abroad, leaving behind the role of the dominant elitist woman to the subordinate subaltern traveler. This quintessential role-play made it possible for Montagu's sexual partners to obtain the position of dominance in societies that only prescribed submission to women. Said's discourse on Orientalism is especially helpful here in understanding how Montagu's journey made it possible for her to use her dominance to act subordinate; "to have such knowledge of a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it" (Said 32).

John Beverly's theory of Subalternity, the struggle for power within different systems, is shown as having two main groups, the elite and the subaltern; the former having control over the representation of the latter, and therefore control over how the subaltern shapes its self-image (Macbeth 11). In her work "The Subaltern Female Struggle for Courtly Love in Medieval Spain and France," Verna Macbeth further explains subalternity as "power struggle dynamic often binary in relation to others" (9). Montagu's determination to vacate the English countryside for international adventures permitted her to create herself anew abroad. This chapter argues how Montagu reconstructed her identity as the subaltern in foreign countries despite her status back home as well as why such re-creation was necessary to facilitate the type of material she wanted to produce for her lover(s) in Britain. In doing so, theory of subalternity is explored and further

evolved to extend the theory beyond vast social and political implications where one is metaphorically without voice and into the private bedroom where Montagu was literally voiceless due to location and circumstance.

Leaving home as the elitist and uniquely educated woman to visit foreign countries governed by unfamiliar cultures and languages metamorphosed her into the mysterious inferior delivered from her privilege in Britain, thus creating the binary dynamic to best suit her needs – something that would've been impossible at home. If nothing else, Montagu's inability to speak the language of the actual subaltern made *her* the subaltern. The inversion of status, both socially and physically, masqueraded Lady Mary as exotically attractive, vulnerable, and freed of European homophobic hegemony. According to Macbeth, "cultural ideology is almost a form of shaping the mind of the public, or those who come in contact with the ideology, and thereby shaping the mind of the subaltern" (12). It is in this way that Montagu was able to shape the minds of the women she came into contact with on her journeys, but she also was able to be willfully manipulated by them and have her mind shaped even more so.

John Beverly confirms this theory, as he explains that the subaltern attempts to create a new identity that represents as authoritative. The "subalterns" that Lady Mary encountered abroad had the opportunity to develop this new identity or self-ideology in their relations with her that gives them the role of power in a dynamic through which Montagu gladly relinquishes control. Montagu then re-establishes her voice when she writes home, having capitalized on her literal episodic voicelessness to create erotic letters representing her sexual conduct with the women who dominated over her in a way that they likely wouldn't have been able to. This is incredibly significant because it exhibits the side of Montagu ignored through inaccurate textual analysis, and it demonstrates an unusual willingness of one Brit to be dominated by one from another

cultural setting during a time of immense British colonial power. This is just one more way Montagu's real voice has been overlooked or hidden, which brings into question whether or not Montagu remains voiceless in some respects today.

According to Rajani Sudan's *Fair Exotics*, "reading women's work without understanding how technologies of race and gender inform representation is a lot like imagining that one's desires originate from oneself. There is no 'outside' space in which to place the arena of women's work; to imagine that such writing is not a product of the same kinds of ideologies informing men's work is simplistic" (22). Although Sudan's work focuses mostly on the work of 18th and 19th century women writers, she discusses the role of the fair-skinned exotic, insisting the "figure negotiates encounters with foreign bodies and incorporates them within the province of a dominant (national) self (151)."

Going back through her life, "...critics of Montagu focused on Montagu's presumed lesbianism or licentious description of the seraglio" (Al-Rawi 15). Although some historians and biographers are willing to acknowledge the potentiality of certain content as homosexual in Montagu's writings, there isn't much, if any, scholarship asserting her work to be appropriately classified in the genres of textual pornography or erotica. One of the closest arguments comes from Suvir Kaul's *Eighteenth-century British Literature and Postcolonial Studies*, in which he states Montagu's "description of the music and dance (probably belly-dancing) performed for her in this home registers female homoeroticism" (125).

Supporting Kaul's minimalistic observation, the language in Montagu's letters – especially the one he specifically references – clearly seeks to arouse the reader, man or woman, as she describes a scene that in her very own words, "the coldest and most rigid Prude on Earth could not have look'd upon [them] without thinking of something not to be spoke of" (XXXIII).

That “not to be spoken of” according to Montagu exemplifies the quintessential contention that she boldly writes of sensual scenarios, knowing full well that she is testing the limits of cultural norms while physically seducing her reader by sharing her own private moments of seduction. Because many of Montagu’s scenes involve one woman arousing another, it is safe to assume her intended audience is women and not men. After having taken the role of the Oriental in her travels, Montagu succeeds in perpetuating the sexual image of the exotic female subaltern, albeit British.

Interestingly, this reinvention of self produces what Victor Turner calls a liminal persona. In his essay, "The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure," Turner explains that those in the liminal space are "necessarily ambiguous, since the condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space" (94). In placing herself in such a space of ambiguity, Montagu denies the binary of either/or, as she makes it almost impossible for women abroad to categorize her.

This is significant because it creates the potential for the exotic women she encounters to relate to her, thus founding and forging a relationship, but it also deems her "unidentifiable" to a degree with regard to her elitist status in Britain. Surely the women she met were aware of her freedom, and therefore ability, to travel; however, the language barrier and simply her Caucasian presence among various ethnicities left much to the imagination and determination of her company. Unable to blend into the "network of classifications," Montagu existed abroad as the "voiceless" subaltern and liminal persona.

Gayatri Spivak's research concerning the ability of the subaltern to have a voice in history offers insight regarding the ‘false’ subaltern versus what she refers to as the 'true' subaltern and their textual representations. Interestingly, Spivak, in searching for the 'speaking

position' of the subaltern, ultimately determined that "for the 'true' subaltern group, one whose identity is its difference, there is no subaltern subject that can 'know and speak itself' " (Ashcroft, Griffins, & Tiffin 27). At first glance, this statement may seem contradictory to the notion that Montagu's lack of voice placed her in the subaltern space because she was aware she could not speak the language native to the countries she visited. However, Montagu's British background certainly made her "different" when socializing abroad, and she was only using her voice within the letters she wrote describing her "voiceless" sexual affairs.

Spivak's notions of the subaltern typically address women in developing countries who have been colonized through imperial power, and are therefore voiceless in two ways: 1. They do not have a local voice, and 2. They are not heard globally. This pervasive oppression leaves the "Third World" woman without any acknowledgement as a contributing individual and without any agency with which to contribute. The women literally lack a voice. Although Spivak refers to voice in metaphorical terms, her theory of subalternity can be applied to Lady Mary on the grounds that she literally had no voice in non-English speaking countries, and therefore became the Other in all social dealings.

As mentioned earlier, Spivak's work also focuses on those oppressed through colonization, and in this sense, though she speaks of women who have been literally restrained by the concrete and abstract confines of British Imperial colonizing, Lady Mary's sexuality also fell victim to colonization. This institution had many implications for her, as Lady Mary was essentially forced into the state of marriage to continue her education as well as empower herself in other ways, had to hide her authentic sexual interests from British society only to be revealed in letters, was considered "unconventional" simply because she did not fit into typical European notions of femininity, eventually succumbed to a self-imposed exile, and has had her real-life

story hidden by family members and historians alike. Spivak offers some interesting attempts to define the concept, mostly revolving around acts of insurgency, in which in the place of an utterance, the subaltern consciousness offers up the female as an insurgent (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin 28). In Mary's case, the insurgency begins with her reluctance to adhere to stereotypical norms as she grants herself agency through an education typically reserved for males. The agency she gained from reading and writing ignited self-respect and awareness, the desire to learn about other cultures, and motivation to see the world.

Notions of colony and the act of colonization don't just address physical territory. Although the commandeering of land usually comes first, the depths of colonization reach into people's beliefs and traditions, forever changing a culture and history. In this case, Montagu as woman was considered the physical territory of British society and eventually a British man. This physical oppression, as with any case, leads to emotional oppression in which a person begins to view the world through the lens provided by the colonizers. Perceptions of one's culture, history, and traditions become compromised by a changed –whether insidious or forceful- attitude and belief system. The result of controlled and/or brutally oppressed thought often manifests in a change in action. For Montagu, this is precisely what can be found in her life story. After she recognized the limitations put on her by British gender-based physical oppression, she must have realized that having been born a woman she was inherently bound to mental and sexual oppression. This is precisely why she can be considered colonized relative to British society and why she had to go abroad in an attempt to live true to her Self.

Of course this argument will raise issue with scholars on the basis of Montagu's social status in Britain. At home, she hardly embodies the orally smothered woman of the "third world." Spivak's discussion of the subaltern stems from the colonization of India in particular

and uses the term to refer to the woman who completely lacked autonomy in private and public life resulting from imperial forces, but especially in educational and political realms. In a more general sense, Spivak describes “subaltern classes” as the “social groups and elements...[that] represent *the demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those whom we have described as ‘elite’*” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin 26). Montagu, an educational and a financial elite in Britain, would find her status affected by temporary, situational marginalization when visiting foreign countries and unable to speak the native language, and thus face some realities of oppression she would otherwise never experience.

One further extension of this argument could be that Lady Mary sought to mirror her own colonization in the lives of the women she encountered in her travels. The issue with this is the incredibly negative connotation associated with colonization as well as the evil intent and/or self-serving motives. Although Montagu was in service of the Self, she did not seek to victimize nor oppress women, rather she sought to glorify them in her writings and private life. There simply is not any evidence Montagu imposed herself physically, emotionally, or spiritually on the women she encountered in the various countries. Nothing points to the idea that she sought to change the culture of the women, when in fact her letters express a desire to better understand them and the nuances of their cultures and lives. Additionally, just because she does not fit the typical image of the subaltern woman as defined by post-colonial theorists does not mean Montagu’s experience cannot be understood through employment of the concept. Therefore, for all intensive purposes, Montagu’s experience can be used to demonstrate that even the “elitist” British woman is marginalized based on her female gender, being robbed of a voice in influential and institutional social realms due to imperial pressures as exercised by British male society.

If Montagu did not intentionally put herself into a submissive spatial positioning of, she

certainly found opportunity in her “voiceless” role, reserving her “voice” or influence for written text. Since Montagu did have to confront frequent language barriers in her travels, she had to depend on the use of body language to communicate with the women, particularly with the beautiful Fatima, as will be seen in a later textual analysis. The sensual medium of nonverbal interaction quite possibly gave Montagu the opportunity to align herself with the subaltern in international power dynamics, thus paradoxically empowering herself in foreign countries among those viewed as subaltern by the British. Although Spivak's studies are associated with post-colonial theory, subaltern identification is still applicable to pre-colonial and colonial times. Montagu's perceived subaltern status granted her agency in both public and private affairs during her travels, and with that awareness, Lady Mary placed herself or was placed in the role of "voiceless" vogue, so to join the homoerotic sexuality-consciousness, and, certainly ironically, exercise her true voice in letters to her lovers based on physical interactions.

The intention is not to describe Montagu as some selfish opportunist, but rather an individual who was not bound by societal framework. Having grown up as a beauty and extended luxuries beyond those of the average British woman (and even some men), Montagu simply recorded her life in pursuits of happiness and truth and not of pleasing others. In his biography, Lewis Gibbs asserts Montagu was “candid by nature,” though he does go on to explain that she was essentially a victim of her own imagination, being unable to have an “eye for fine shades of probability” (30). Gibbs ultimately warns his readers that Montagu’s words cannot fully be relied upon (29). Such a claim can be handled two ways within the context of this argument. Either Montagu fantasized about the women on her travels and documented untruths among truths, or she attempted to put a positive spin on her courtship with Edward and other details about her life, only to find that true candor only had a place in her letters to confidantes.

Regardless, Montagu's experiences with identity oppression in Europe and vocal powerlessness abroad exemplifies that the aspects and characteristics of subalternity can be negotiated based on the individual, are not always relative to the experiences of other women around the world, and are determined by space and/or situation. Scholars should be remiss to lack understanding of one woman's actual experience based on the insistence of preserving a concept as abstract. Negotiating the metaphorical aspects of subalternity theory with literal oppressive forces evolves the theory into a more useful and practical lens through which one can view the lives of all people affected by emotional or physical colonization.

Conclusion:

Maintenance of eminent worth through sex made it easy for the male, typically considered the sexual aggressor or dominator, to establish and perpetuate authority. Foucault makes the connection between dominance in the sexual realm and dominance in the social realm. He states, "...imagine a code based on this analogy – so familiar to the Greeks – between positions in the social field (with the difference between "the first ones" and the others, the great who rule and those who obey, the masters and the servants) and the form of sexual relations with dominant and subordinate positions, active and passive roles, penetration carried out by the man and undergone by his partner" (210). This very obvious connection must be considered when addressing the psychoanalytical understanding of Montagu's decisions to remain homosexually anonymous, to hide some of her letters from publication, and to use her position of intellectual and financial dominance to place herself in the subordinate position abroad.

Gail Hawkes' *Sex & Pleasure* explores the notions of bodily and materialistic pleasures explaining, "the eighteenth century was an epoch that seemed to value and promote bodily, and especially sexual, pleasures like no other since the time of classical antiquity" (112). Although written after the fact, Hawkes insists that Foucault's assertion that sexual desire was directed toward the "other" actually developed in the nineteenth century, rather than the eighteenth century, as there were " 'mixed feelings' about enlightened sexual pleasure which characterizes this period" (112). However, the bodily pleasures seemed to be reserved for a married Christian man and woman, and restricted by Church-imposed guidelines of what is morally appropriate.

As a traveler, Montagu was at times able to abandon Christian culture for that of Muslim women left to make their own determinations about sexuality, which enabled her ability to engage in the acts she wrote about. Abroad, she could observe the female "other" and record her

experiences and impressions in what she thought would remain private letters. Montagu's family was against the publication of the letters, seeking to keep her thoughts hidden and potentially exhibiting a sort of shamefulness for the secret thoughts of a loved one. Napp's biography states, "despite her family's wishes that her letters not be published for fear of public humiliation, thieves got hold of the narratives and soon published them" (64). Perhaps the Montagu family wanted to pay its respects by keeping her letters safely tucked away, or, conversely, maybe they had something to hide. Montagu had no reason to be embarrassed by her honest letters to family and friends, and her life's work should be reassessed for her true intentions and desires.

Montagu was a woman of good morals who simply wanted to remain true to her body and sexuality. Even when she was attacked by Alexander Pope, she didn't lash out in a vengeful way. Perhaps (and suggestively) she did not mind being in the subordinate role in her carnal dealings. This subversion appears to have been her preference. It also could have been the result of growing up in a very controlling patriarchy. Regardless, the opportunity to travel is precisely what allowed Montagu to become the seemingly inferior "other" –even if temporarily- and not just fulfill her homoerotic needs, but also to involve her lovers in what would otherwise be improbable experiences through the writing of detailed, pornographic letters. Montagu's inability to physically embrace her same-sex desires within British borders forced her to reach beyond the English-speaking community for sexual encounters, preserve those she did have, detail the trysts in erotic letters for her lovers, and should play a pertinent role in the history of sexuality and sexual text in Europe.

In the words of Lillian Faderman, "Women's lives need to be reinterpreted, and we need to do it ourselves" (76). Although some scholars argue that Montagu, as an Orientalist writer, sought to further the notions of appropriate cultural norms and the social constructs of marriage,

sexuality, and patriarchy, they fail to acknowledge her descriptions as positive and respectful, if not envious of the lives of women she encountered abroad. Secor supports the claim when she states, “Montagu’s strongest intervention in the predominant Orientalist tropes of her day is her argument that Turkish society allows women greater freedom than they enjoy in the West” (391). Irritated with many of the superficialities in the British social realm, Montagu sought new ways and new women on her journeys, not to objectify the “other.” Upon Montagu’s travels, “the subject inhabits the position of both desiring subject and an object, thereby reconfiguring itself” (Aravamudan 69). Using her beauty, money, and wit, Montagu put herself into sensual situations knowing that not only was she full of desire, but that she was also desirously exotic. In order to avoid personal or public scandal, Montagu had to reinvent herself in foreign countries, leaving only the impression of the language of her body and the soft pornographic descriptions scripted for her lovers. Cultivating an understanding of Montagu’s choices through an evolved theory of subalternity as one put in a voiceless subordinate position within a power dynamic only to be recognized, if at all, through acts of insurgency, makes clear why she would so readily relinquish what status she did hold in imperial Britain to escape sexual colonization as a passionate vogue.

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