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A Fascinating 'Other'
Bodies as Metonyms of 'a New World' in Lady Mary Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters*

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Written during travels in 1716-1718, after her husband was appointed Ambassador Extraordinary to the Court of Turkey, Lady Mary Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters* circulated privately in two manuscript volumes and became instantly successful.¹ Her unique vision of the Levant, as well as her strong sensitivity, were overtly praised by the finest intellectuals of the time.² Mary Astell, who first read the *Letters* in 1724 and immediately wrote a preface at the end of the second volume, also used them to speak about women's contribution to travel literature and to claim that

the World shou'd see to how much better purpose the Ladys Travel than their Lords, and that whilst it is surfeited with Male Travels, all in the same tone, and stuff with the same Trifles, a *Lady* has the skill to strike out a New Path and to embellish a worn-out Subject with a variety of fresh and elegant Entertainment.³

Astell's approach is in perfect harmony with the latest criticism on the ladies of the Grand Tour.⁴ According to Brian Dolan, in fact, in 1700 men's travel accounts "were preoccupied with conquest, connoisseurship and domestication of the wild, whereas women recorded more intimate experiences concerned with individual growth, liberty and independence."⁵

The 52 *Turkish Embassy Letters*⁶ are rich in topographical, architectural as well as artistic details about Holland, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Turkey, Italy and France. The writer's priority, however, is to provide her family, aristocratic personalities and intellectual friends (Caroline, the Princess of Wales, Lady Rich,

Lady Bristol, Alexander Pope and the Abbé Conti among others) with a vivid description of people, their culture and civilization.

Montagu's interest in new types of culture on the Continent is at one with her choice to respect and adapt to the main canons of the Age of Enlightenment: Beauty, Nature and Reason. An intellectual herself, she often used the Classics for comparison to facilitate communication with the reader.⁷ A short extract from the letter she wrote to Lady Mar, Montagu's sister, on 14th September 1716 offers a peculiar description of the Empress of Austria:

I was perfectly charm'd with the Empresse; I can-not, however, tell you that her features are regular. Her Eyes are not large, but have a lively look of sweetness, 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 sweetnesse 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; all that the Poets have said of the mein of Juno, the air of Venus, come not up to the truth. The Graces move with her; the famous statue of Medicis was not form'd with more delicate proportions; nothing can be added to the beauty of her neck and hands. Till I saw them, I did not beleive there were any in Nature so perfect, and I was almost sorry my rank here did not permit me to kisse them; but they are kiss'd sufficiently, for everybody that waits on her, pays that homage at their entrance and when they take leave. (265-266)

"I was perfectly charm'd with the Empresse; I can-not, however, tell you that her features are regular": the points to make about Montagu's description of the Empress can be found in her special reference to the aesthetic canons of the time, as well as with her interest in women and their inner world. Her confession of being fascinated by non-standard beauty, in fact, shows that the classical principles of "measure," "harmony" and "order" can be counterbalanced by demeanor and personality.⁸ It becomes clear, then, that the body discourse overlaps with that of soul, and that it opens up to new and more unconventional ways of life. The short passage that

follows, addressed to Lady Rich in September 1716, shows a surprising aspect of Austrian women, of their space in society and the control they had over relationships with men:

Here [in Vienna] are neither Coquets nor Prudes. No woman dares appear coquet enough to encourage 2 lovers at a time, and I have not seen any such Prudes as to pretend fidelity to their Husbands, who are certainly the best-natur'd set of people in the World, and look upon their Wives' Galants as favourably as Men do upon their Deputys, that take the troublesome part of their busynesse off of their hands, thò they have not the less to do, for they are gennerally deputys in another place themselves. In one word 'tis the establish'd custom for every Lady to have 2 husbands, one that bears the Name and another that performs the Dutys. [...] These sub-marriages gennerally last 20 years together, and the Lady often commands the poor Lover's estate, even to the utter ruin of his family. (270-271)

Travelling gradually takes Lady Montagu to the East. Quoting from Mary Astell, her "Path" is "New" because she dialectically confronts with countries and people almost unknown to her English contemporaries. Once in Hanover, in fact, in December 1716, she is ready to inform Lady Rich that she is "now got into the Region of Beauty":

All the Woman here have (litterally) rosy cheeks, snowy Foreheads and bosoms, jet Eyebrows and scarlet lips, to which they generally add Coal-black Hair. These perfections never leave them, till the hour of their Death, and have a very fine Effect by Candlelight; but I could wish they were handsome with a little more variety. (288)

Non-standard or more varied forms of aesthetics—this is what Lady Montagu, an Augustan *philosophe*, close to Alexander Pope and the Abbé Conti, seems to be looking for. Eager to experiment with different, more unusual models, her intention is also to act as a cultural operator in her homeland. The letter she wrote to Lady Mar

in January 1717, shows that paying close attention to women's bodies offers new insights into culture and fashion too:

The Hungarian Ladys are much handsomer than those of Austria. All the Vienna Beautys are of that Country; they are gennerally very fair and well-shap'd. Their dress I think extreme becoming. This Lady was in a Gown of Scarlet velvet, lin'd and fac'd with Sables, made exact to her shape and the skirt falling to her feet. The sleeves are strait to their arms and the stays button'd before, with 2 rows of little buttons of gold, pearl or di'monds. On their heads they wear a cap embroider'd with a Tassel of Gold that hangs low on one side, lin'd with sable, or some other fine fur. They gave us a handsome Dinner, and I thought their conversation very polite and agreable. (303)

Lady Montagu's love of fashion is combined with her curiosity about Oriental learning and customs. One of the letters she wrote to Alexander Pope when she was in Belgrade prepares the reader for her gradual passage to Turkey and shows how fascinated she was by Arabian poetry, as well as by women's social role in the Levant:

Achmet-Beg, [...] an extraordinary Scribe, which they call *Effendi*, [...] has explain'd to me many peices of Arabian Poetry, which I observ'd [...] gennerally alternate verse, and of a very musical sound. Their expressions of Love are very passionate and lively. I am so much pleas'd with them, I realy beleive I should learn to read Arabic if I was to stay here a few months. [...] I have frequent disputes with him concerning the difference of our Customs, particularly the confinements of women. He assures me there is nothing at all in it; only, says he, we have the advantage that when our Wives cheat us no body knows it. He has wit, and is more polite than many Christian men of Quality. I am very much entertain'd with him. (307-308)

Women's condition is one of the main issues in Montagu's correspondence from Turkey. The political remarks she made when she arrived in Adrianople on 1st April

1717 are immediately followed by those on Western prejudices about the social conventions in the country.⁹ Her visit to one of the city's *bagnios*, in fact, is important for two reasons: first of all, it shows her attraction to "otherness"; then, it enables her to introduce the feminine body as a new focus of attention in English contemporary culture.¹⁰

I went to the Bagnio about 10 a clock. It was already full of Women. [...] The first sofas were cover'd with Cushions and rich Carpets, on which sat the Ladys, and on the 2nd their slaves behind 'em, but without any distinction of rank by their dress, all being in the state of nature, that is, in plain English, stark naked without any Beauty or deffect conceal'd, yet there was not the least wanton smile or immodest gesture amongst 'em. They Walk'd and mov'd with the same majestic Grace which Milton describes of our General Mother. There were many amongst them as exactly proportion'd as ever any Goddess was drawn by the pencil of Guido or Titian, and most of their skins shineingly white, only adorn'd by their Beautifull Hair divided into many tresses, hanging on their shoulders, braided either with pearl or riband, perfectly representing the figures of the Graces. I was here convinc'd of the Truth of a Refflexion that I had often made, that if twas the fashion to go naked, the face would be hardly be observ'd. I perceiv'd that the Ladys with the finest skins and most delicate shapes had the greatest share of my admiration, thô their faces were sometimes less beautifull than those of their companions. To tell you the truth, I had wickedness enough to wish secretly that Mr. Gervase could have been there invisible. I fancy it would have very much improv'd his art to see so many fine Women naked in different postures, some in conversation, some working, others drinking Coffee or sherbet, and many negligently lying on their Cushions while their slaves (generally pritty Girls of 17 or 18) were employ'd in braiding their hair in several pritty manners. (312-315)

Lady Montagu's enthusiasm about "women's fashion to go naked" and the freedom they have in a space similar to a "coffee house" naturally leads her to a self-

renovation process. Although she does not seem ready to accept the “most considerable” lady’s invitation to undress and join the other bathers, she immediately shows her admiration for Turkish clothes. After enjoying the *bagnio* experience, in fact, she becomes critical about Western fashion and informs Lady Mar that she is “now in Turkish habit”:

[P]ray let me into more particulars. I will try to awaken your Gratitude by giving you a full and true Relation of the novelty of this Place, none of which would surprise you more than a sight of my person as I am now in my Turkish Habit, thô I beleive you would be of my Opinion that ’tis admirably becoming. I intend to send you my Picture. (326)

Wearing a caftan, a “robe exactly fitted to [her] shape” (*ibid*), she can see this “new World” from a different perspective and gradually appropriate its most peculiar aspects. Then, going against all prejudices, and implying that her attitudes toward sexual morality have already been challenged, she describes the Turkish *Ferigée* as a tool that women use to “follow their Inclinations” and escape from social pressure:

’Tis very easy to see they have more Liberty than we have. [...] Their shapes are wholly conceal’d by a thing they call a *Ferigée* which no Woman of any sort appears without. This has strait sleeves that reaches to their fingers ends and it laps all around ’em, not unlike a rideing hood. In Winter ’tis of Cloth, and in Summer, plain stuff or silk. You may guess then how effectually this disguises them, that there is no distinguishing the great Lady from her Slave and ’tis impossible for the most jealous Husband to know his Wife when he meets her. [...] This perpetual Masquerade gives them entire Liberty of following their Inclinations without danger of Discovery. [...] Upon the Whole, I look upon the Turkish Women as the only free people in the Empire. (328-329)

So Turkish women may be stark naked, covered in precious jewels or veiled, but they seem to know exactly how to take advantage of the country’s rigid moral rules that are imposed on them. Montagu overtly appreciates their conduct and instinctively

submits to the Eastern aesthetic canons. In her letter to Lady Mar, for instance, she proposes their “fine heads of hair,” “tresses,” “beautiful complexions” and “large black eyes” as icons of a higher beauty than in England:

I never saw in my Life so many fine heads of hair. I have counted 110 of these tresses of one Ladys, all natural; but, it must be own'd that every beauty is more common here than with us. 'Tis surprizing to see a young Woman that is not very handsome. They have naturally the most beautifull complexions in the world and generally large black Eyes. I can assure you with great Truth that the Court of England (thô I beleive it the fairest in Christendom) cannot shew so many Beautys as are under our Protection here. (327)

The repetition of nouns and adjectives related to the idea of beauty (“beauties,” “fine,” “handsome” and “fairest”) is semantically reinforced by the use of the adjective “natural” and the adverb “naturally.” The philosophical search for more syncretic cultural models, however, ends with the description of the “fair Fatima,” the Kahya’s Lady. Her physical qualities make Montagu so struck with admiration that she cannot even speak:

I confesse, thô, the Greek Lady had before given me a great Opinion of her beauty I was so struck with Admiration that I could not for some time speak to her, being wholly taken up in gazing. That surprizing Harmony of features! that charming result of the whole! That exact proportion of Body! that lovely bloom of Complexion, unsully'd by art! the unutterable Enchantment of her Smile! But her Eyes! large and black, with all the languishment of the bleu! every turn of her face discovering some new charm! [...] To say all in a Word, our most celebrated English Beautys would vanish near her. [...] The lovely Fatima entertain'd me all this while, in the most polite agreeable Manner, calling me often Uzelle Sultanam, or the beautifull Sultana, and desiring my Friendship with the best Grace in the World. [...] I retir'd through the same Ceremonys as before, and could not help fancying I had been some time

in Mohomet's Paradiſe, ſo much I was charm'd
with what I had ſeen. (350; 352)

At the end of her letter to Lady Mar, Montagu writes that her description of Fatima shows her admiration for women's beauty "without any mixture of deſire or envy" (351). Apart from all poſſible Sapphic implications,¹¹ it ſeems clear, however, that her attention to the feminine body enables her to re-diſcuſs and revive the main Auguſtan principles in a cross-cultural environment. As has been ſeen, Nature is preſent in all her reflections. What becomes increasingly clear, particularly in the ſecond part of her correſpondence, is the neceſſity to uſe it as a theoretical tool to represent Turkiſh civilization.

Again, women are Montagu's focus of attention. Their bodies are ſeen (ſocially) from a biological perſpective and expected to be fruitful and fertile. For this reaſon, "[i]f [they] d[ye] unmarry'd, [they are] look'd upon to dye in a ſtate of reprobation" (364); "if [they] leave off bringing children, 'tis becauſe they are too old for that buſineſſ [...] and fly to all ſort of Quackerys to avoid [...] Scandall" (372). The Weſtern theological principle of moral purity and "vow of perpetual Virginitie" (365) ſharply contrasts with the Eaſtern civilization. Nature cloſely aſſociates the feminine body with childbearing and life. Montagu criticizes women's uſe of artificial methods to ſtay young, yet ſhe perfectly underſtands that they are fully and happily integrated in their ſocial ſyſtem. "What is moſt wonderful [for her, in fact,] is the exemption they ſeem to enjoy from the curſe entail'd on the ſex" (372).

Beauty, Nature and Reaſon. Turkey offers the writer new cultural stimuli, but it helps her to expreſs her ſtrong ſenſe of belonging to England too. Again, ſaying how the human body is treated means ſhowing the reader what is really poſitive about ſuch a different environment. One of the letters Montagu ſent to Lady Chiſwell on 1^{ſt} April 1717 is centered on the extraordinary reſults achieved by Eaſtern medical reſearch. The ſhort extract that follows centres on "invention of engrafting," a ſafe method to fight againſt ſmallpox:

The Small Pox so fatal and so general amongst us is here entirely harmless by the invention of engrafting (which is the term they give it). There is a set of old Women who make it their business to perform the Operation. Every Autumn [...] people make partys for this purpose and when they are met (commonly 15 or 16 together) the old Woman comes with a nutshell full of the matter of the best sort of small-pox and asks what veins you please to have open'd. She immediately rips open that you offer to her with a large needle [...] and puts into the vein as much venom as can lye upon the head of her needle, and after binds up the little wound with a hollow bit of shell, and in this manner opens 4 or 5 veins. The Grecians have commonly the superstition of opening one in the Middle of the forehead, in each arm and on the breast to mark the sign of the cross, but this has a very ill Effect, all these wounds leaving little Scars. (338-339)

A “patriot [...] well satisfied of the safety of the experiment,” Montagu is very clear about the necessity to take that medical treatment to England.¹² Furthermore, her strong belief in the powers of Reason enables her to see that, apart from new cultural models, Turkey can also give valid solutions to serious forms of illness.

Women keep their central position even in Montagu's last letters from Turkey. As has been seen, they have children as long as they are fertile; when they become older, some of them protect the new generations from illness and death.¹³ Yet, they are not different from men and can be tortured or barbarously killed. At the end of her stay in Constantinople in 1718, the “bleeding body of a young woman, naked, only wrapped in a course of sheet” provides a powerful image for Montagu to show her reader how murder is prosecuted in Turkey:

About 2 months ago there was found at day break not very far from my House the bleeding body of a young woman, naked, only wrapp'd in a course sheet, with 2 wounds with a knife, one in her side and another in her Breast. She was not yet quite cold, and so surprizingly Beautifull that there were very few men in Pera that did not go to look upon her, but it was not possible for any body to know her, no woman's face being known. She was suppos'd to be

brought in dead of night from the Constantinople side and laid there. Very little enquiry was made upon the Murderer, and the corps privately bury'd without noise. Murder is never pursu'd by the King's officers as with us. [...] One would imagine this defect in their Government should make such Tragedys very frequent, yet they are extreamly rare, which is enough to prove the people are not naturally cruel, neither do I think in many other particulars they deserve the barbarous character we give them. (407-408)

Her systematic opposition to violence is closely related to her faith in Reason and democracy.¹⁴ Although she seems to have been totally absorbed in Turkish culture, Montagu can still retain her objectivity. In the last letter she sent to the Abbé Conti before leaving for Tunis, however, what she defines as a "sensual declaration" is, in fact, a clear expression of her individual growth in that "new World, which provides a fitting conclusion to this paper":

[Y]ou see, Sir, these people are not so unpolish'd as we represent them. [...] I am allmost of opinion they have a right notion of Life; while they consume it in Music, Gardens, Wine, and delicate eating, [...] we are tormenting our brains with some Scheme of Politics or studying some Science to which we can never attain [...] We dye, or grow old and decrepid, before we can reap the fruit of our Labours. Considering what short liv'd, weak Animals Men are, is there any study so beneficial as the study of present pleasure? [...] I allow you to laugh at me for the sensual declaration that I had rather be a rich Effendi with all his ignorance, than Sir Isaac Newton with all his knowledge. (414-415)

NOTES

¹ Detailed information about the textual corpus, the nature, as well as circulation systems of Lady Mary Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters* can be found in Halsband, Robert (ed). *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, vol. I, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999, xiv-xx. As we read on pp. xiv-xv, in fact, "[they are] fifty-two in number [and] exist almost entirely in her own autograph as copied by her into two small albums. They are not the actual letters she sent to her friends and relations; they are, instead, a compilation of pseudo-letters, dated, and addressed to people either named or nameless. [...] According to her granddaughter, she extracted these letters from a journal which she wrote during the Embassy."

² As an upper class gentlewoman, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was not only well-acquainted, but also part of the *intelligentsia* of the time. She was a close friend of Congreve, Pope, Gay and Arbuthnot and wrote about the Scriblerians as a group. However, the problems she had throughout her writing career often resulted in the use of anonymous, transvestite and masqueraded authorship. Her *Turkish Embassy Letters* were a success, but considered scandalous and published posthumously. Among the writers and intellectuals who appreciated them were Edward Gibbon, Dr. Johnson, Hester Thrale Piozzi, Voltaire and Tobias Smollett. For a general presentation of Montagu's case in 18th century print culture, see Aslett, Moyra. *Pope to Burney, 1714-1779*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2003, 162-172. Stronger evidence of the success Mary Montagu had after her death is in the *Preface* to Halsband's authoritative edition of the *Letters*, v-vii; Desai, Anita. 'Introduction', in Jack, Malcolm (ed). *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, London: Virago, 1994, xix-xx; in Dolan, Brian. *Ladies of the Grand Tour*, London: Flamingo, 2002, 271-272; Nittel, Jana. *Wondrous Magic: Images of the Orient in 18th and 19th centuries in British Women Travel Writing*. Berlin and Cambridge: Galda and Wilch Verlag, 2001, 65-66; as well as in Beynon, John. 'Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's Sapphic Vision', in Golden, Philip and Ruppel, Richard (eds). *Imperial Desires. Dissident Sexualities in Colonial Literature*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, 22-23.

³ For detailed information about the relationship between Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Mary Astell, see Hill, Bridget. *The First English Feminist. "Reflections Upon Marriage" and Other Writings*. Aldershot: Gower/Maurice Temple Smith, 1986, 11-12; Perry, Ruth. *The Celebrated Mary Astell: An Early English Feminist*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, 270-271 and 275-277; Grundy, Isobel. *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, 241, 612, 625-26; as well as Springborg, Patricia. *Mary Astell. Theorist of Freedom from Domination*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 82. Astell's words are reported by Halsband in his authoritative edition of Montagu's *Complete Letters*, vol. I., 467; by Hill, 233-235; and Dolan in his *Ladies of the Grand Tour*, 272.

⁴ Criticism has focused attention on women's travels particularly in the last twenty years. The reader will also consider Ballaster, Ros et al. *Women's Worlds: Ideology, Femininity and the Woman's Magazine*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991; Melman, Billie. *Women's Orients: English Women and the Middle East 1718-1918: Sexuality, Religion, and Work*. London: Macmillan, 1995; Mills, Sara. *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*, London: Macmillan, 1991; Bermingham, Ann. 'Elegant Females and Gentlemen Connoisseurs: The Commerce in Culture and Self-Image in Eighteenth-Century England', in Bermingham, Ann and Brewer, John (eds). *The Consumption of Culture 1600-1800: Image, Object and Text*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995; Bohls, Elizabeth. *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics 1716-1818*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995; Dolan, Brian. *Exploring European Frontiers: British Travellers in the Age of Enlightenment*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000; and Doll, Dan and Munns, Jessica (eds). *Recording and Reordering. Essays on the 17th - 18th century Diary and Journal*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2006.

⁵ We are quoting from Dolan's *Ladies of the Grand Tour*, 11. On this particular aspect, however, see Jana Nittel's analysis on pp. 20-25.

⁶ *The Turkish Embassy Letters* were first included in *Letters of the Right Honourable Lady M[ary] W[ortley] M[ontagu], written during her travels in Europe, Asia and Africa to persons of distinction*

(with a preface by Mary Astell). London: T. Becket and P.A. de Hondt, 1763. For more recent editions see Pick, Christopher (ed). *Embassy to Constantinople. The Travels of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*. Introduced by Dervla Murphy. London: Century, 1988; as well as the one edited by Malcolm Jack. We shall refer to Halsband's *Complete Letters* for all further citations.

⁷ Lady Mary Montagu's use of the Classics was not only instrumental to have a closer relationship with the reader, but also a symbol of the cultural interests she shared with Alexander Pope and the Abbé Conti. For the influence of these cultural models on the body perception and representation in 18th century, see Salvaggio, Ruth. *Enlightened Absence: Neoclassical Configurations of the Feminine*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988, and Chard, Cloe. 'Effeminacy, Pleasure and the Classical Body', in Perry, Gill and Rossington, Michael (eds). *Femininity and Masculinity in Eighteenth-Century Art and Culture*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994, 142-161. Montagu's love of Greece, her later association with the poet Sappho and all homoerotic implications, instead, are core issues in Nussbaum, Felicity. *Torrid Zones: Sexuality and Maternity in Eighteenth-Century English Narratives*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, 143.

⁸ Montagu's search for new sources of inspiration and sensitivity was in perfect harmony with the trends of the time. For a lucid analysis of the intellectuals' desire to represent man's inner world of feelings in the Augustan Age, see Sertoli, Giuseppe. 'I testi nel tempo: il Settecento', in Franco, Marengo (ed). *Storia della civiltà letteraria inglese*, vol. II, Torino: UTET, 1996, 27-32.

⁹ Here is what Lady Montagu wrote to Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales on 1st April 1717: "The Country from hence to Adrianople is the finest in the World. Vines grow wild on all the Hills, and the perpetual Spring they enjoy makes everything look gay and flourishing, but this Climate, as happy as it seems, can never be prefer'd to England with all its Snows and frosts, while we are bless'd with an easy Government under a King who makes his own Happyness consist in the Liberty of his people, and chooses rather to be look'd upon as their Father than their Master." As regards the most common prejudices against the Turkish people, she admitted: "I am little acquainted with their ways, I cannot forbear admiring either the exemplary discretion or extreme stupidity of all the writers that have given accounts of 'em" (311-312; 328). For a detailed analysis of the socio-political dimension of the *Turkish Embassy Letters* and the support Lady Mary gave to the Whig party, see How, James. *Epistolary Spaces. English Letter Writing from the Foundation of the Post Office to Richardson's Clarissa*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003, 78-106.

¹⁰ Lady Montagu's contribution to change the visual centre of attention from women's faces to their bodies is pointed out and discussed in Beynon, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's Sapphic Vision*, 29-31.

¹¹ Again, Lady Montagu writes about Fatima on 10 March 1718. Her attraction to her beauty does not seem to have changed: "I went to visit [the fair Fatima] Yesterday, and (if possible) she appear'd to me handsomer than before. She met me at the door of her Chamber, and, giving me her hand with the best Grace in the World: You Christian Ladys (said she with a smile that made her as handsome as an Angel) have a reputation of Inconstancy, and did not expect, whatever goodness you express'd for me at Adrianople, that I should ever see you again; but I am now convinc'd that I have really the happyness of pleasing you, and if you knew how I speak of you amongst our Ladys, You would be assur'd that you do me justice if you think me your freind. [...] Fatima has all the politeness and good breeding of a court,

with an air that inspires at once Respect and tenderness; and now I understand her Language, I find her Wit as engaging as her Beauty. [...] I assur'd her that if all the Turkish Ladys were like her, it was absolutely necessary to confine them from public view for the repose of Mankind, and proceeded to tell her what a noise such a face as hers would make in London or in Paris. I can't believe you (reply'd she agreeably); if Beauty was so much valu'd in your Country as you say, they would never have suffer'd you to leave it. Perhaps (dear Sister) you laugh at my Vanity in repeating this compliment, but I only do it as I think it very well turn'd and give it you as an instance of the Spirit of her Conversation." (385-387). For a lucid discussion of Montagu's way of interacting with Fatima, of the pleasure she took in looking at her beauties, see Beynon, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's Sapphic Vision*, 26-27.

¹² In the introduction to the 1994 edition of the *Turkish Embassy Letters*, Anita Desai informs the reader that Lady Montagu's decision to involve herself in making known the Turkish method of inoculation against smallpox provoked a fierce debate in which physicians, surgeons and the Royal Society took part. For more details on this particular aspect of the writer's socio-cultural activity in her homeland, see pp. xviii-xix.

¹³ For the close connection between *pouvoir féminin et pouvoir médical* in Montagu's *Embassy Letters*, see Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. *L'Islam au péril des femmes. Une Anglaise en Turquie au XVIIIe siècle*. Introduction, traduction et notes d'Anne Marie Moulin et Pierre Chuvin. Paris: François Maspero, 1981, 84-85.

¹⁴ The short "digression" Lady Montagu made when she was in Belgrade on 12th February 1717 shows her rejection of war as a "plainer prooffe of the irrationality of Mankind": "[...] [W]e pass'd over the feilds of Carlowitz, where the last great Victory was obtained by Prince Eugene over the Turks. The marks of that Glorious bloody day are yet recent, the feild being strew'd with the Skulls and Carcases of unbury'd Men, Horses and Camels. I could not look without horror on such numbers of mangled humane bodys, and refflect on the Injustice of War [...]. Nothing seems to me a plainer prooffe of the irrationality of Mankind (whatever fine claims we pretend to Reason) than the rage with which they contest for a small spot of Ground, when such vast parts of fruitfull Earth lye quite uninhabited. 'Tis true, Custom has now made it unavoidable, but can there be a greater demonstration of want of reason than a Custom being firmly establish'd so plainly contrary to the Interest of Man in General? I am a good deal inclin'd to beleive Mr. Hobbes that the State of Nature is a State of War, but thence I conclude Humane Nature not rational, if the word reason means common sense, as I suppose it does." (305)

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