

# From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu

Researcher: Jillian Rubman

Main Supervisor: Adelina Sánchez Espinosa

Support Supervisor: Jasmina Lukić

Universidad de Granada

Instituto de Estudios de la Mujer

2012



## **GEMMA Consortium information:**

**Title:** From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu

**Researcher:** Jillian Rubman

**Main Supervisor:** Adelina Sánchez Espinosa

**Support Supervisor:** Jasmina Lukić

**Submission location:** Instituto de Estudios de la Mujer de la Universidad de Granada

**Submission year:** 2012



CENTRAL  
EUROPEAN  
UNIVERSITY



## **Abstract**

Scholars have long struggled to fully explain the eighteenth-century poetic war between Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Alexander Pope. These two writers and intellectuals became magnets for gossip, praise and opprobrium when their years of friendship shifted into a sensational battle of verses. Each poet's most sensitive struggles became prime topics for display before the public and the royal court; Montagu's gender struggles and Pope's disability were two favorite targets of attack. Today the question that still plagues studies of both writers is what caused the poets' bitter altercation. This study takes on that challenge by examining both the poets' early correspondence and their hostile verses through the lens of two targeted theories: Feminist New Historicism and Close Reading. Ultimately, this approach offers two levels of explanation regarding the poets' enmity. First, the personal disappointments from the poets' early friendship and their willingness to put private knowledge to public use in their attacks must have contributed to their later hatred. Second, both poets were sociohistorically situated to wreak the greatest possible damage to the other's reputation, and awareness of that vulnerability probably bolstered that hatred with a layer of fear. These findings may move future scholarship on Montagu and Pope from a reluctant dependence on implausible theories towards consideration of both writers as subjects responding to the systems of power and oppression that shaped their sociohistorical moment.

## **Resumen**

Desde hace tiempo los eruditos se han esforzado por explicar la guerra poética entre Lady Mary Wortley Montagu y Alexander Pope. Estos dos escritores e intelectuales atraían cotilleo, elogio, y oprobio cuando sus años de amistad se convirtieron en una batalla pública de versos. Los puntos más vulnerables de cada poeta se hicieron blancos principales para exponer ante el público y la corte real; los problemas de género de Montagu y el impedimento físico de Pope eran dos tópicos favoritos para atacar. Hoy en día la cuestión que todavía aflige a los estudios de estos escritores es qué causó la pelea encarnizada entre ellos. Esta investigación se enfrenta a ese desafío examinando la correspondencia de los años de su amistad y los versos hostiles de la década después a

través de las reformulaciones feministas de dos teorías: Nuevo Historicismo y "Close Reading". Al final, esta metodología ofrece dos niveles de explicación respecto a esta enemistad histórica. En primer lugar, las desilusiones personales desde su amistad original y su disposición a aprovechar el conocimiento privado en el contexto público de sus ataques debe haber contribuido al odio. En segundo lugar, los dos poetas estaban bien situados sociohistóricamente para causar el mayor daño posible a la reputación del otro, y es probable que la consciencia de esa vulnerabilidad aumentara ese odio con miedo. Estas conclusiones tienen el potencial de mover los estudios futuros sobre Montagu y Pope desde una dependencia de teorías improbables hacia la consideración de los dos escritores como sujetos que respondían a los sistemas de poder y opresión que daban forma a su momento sociohistórico.

## Acknowledgements

I would particularly like to thank my advisors Adelina Sánchez Espinosa (Professor of English Literature at the Universidad de Granada and General Coordinator of GEMMA) and Jasmina Lukić (Professor and Head of the Department of Gender Studies at Central European University) for their support of this project and for expanding my understanding of feminist literary theory.

My deepest gratitude also goes to my parents, whose enthusiasm for this research and encouragement throughout my studies has been, and will always be, valuable beyond measure.

I am also sincerely grateful to Sue Lanser (Professor of English, Women's and Gender Studies, and Comparative Literature at Brandeis University) for her kind guidance and support even two years and thousands of miles beyond my graduation.

Additionally, this project would not have been possible without the funding provided by a 2010-2012 Erasmus Mundus Master's scholarship.

# Table of Contents

<b>I. Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>Past Research</i>	2
<i>Argument</i>	5
<i>Methodology</i>	7
Feminist New Historicism	7
Feminist Close Reading	11
<i>Project Summary</i>	12
<b>II. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Anxiety of Authorship</b>	<b>14</b>
<i>Women and their Public</i>	14
<i>Montagu's Publishing</i>	16
<i>Beyond Authorship: Montagu's Wider Reputation</i>	21
<b>III. Pope, Politics and Disability</b>	<b>25</b>
<i>Pope and Deformity</i>	27
<i>Misfits and the Ideology of Form</i>	28
<i>Politics and Papists: Catholicism in Early Hanoverian England</i>	33
<b>IV. The Early Letters: Montagu's Journey to Constantinople</b>	<b>40</b>
<i>Historicizing the Poets' Epistolary Collections</i>	40
<i>Valiant Adventurer and Sentimental Swain: Exploring the Poets' Epistolary Personae</i>	43
<i>Early Conflict: A Collision of Sentiments</i>	49
<i>Returning Home</i>	52
<b>V. Turning Point</b>	<b>53</b>
<i>Growing Apart</i>	53
<i>The Falling-Out: Rumors and Speculation</i>	56
<i>Behind the Scenes: Roots of the Conflict</i>	63
<b>VI. Poetic Justice</b>	<b>65</b>
<i>Reputation, Power and Vulnerability</i>	65
<i>Pamphlets and Poetry as Vehicles for Satire</i>	70
<i>Poetic Altercations</i>	72
The Dunciad	72
"A Pop upon Pope" and One Epistle to Mr. A. Pope	76
Epistle to Bathurst	77
The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace	78
Verses Address'd to the Imitator of Horace	80
"To Ld. Hervey & Lady Mary Wortley"	87
Sober Advice from Horace	87
Epistle to Arbuthnot	89
Epistle to a Lady, on the Characters of Women	91
"Pope to Bolingbroke"	92
<i>Timeless Notoriety</i>	93
<b>VII. Conclusions and Future Research</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>103</b>

## I. Introduction

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762) and Alexander Pope (1688-1744) were celebrities of their time, towering figures who glittered at the forefront of eighteenth century intellectual and literary life. Both were famous for their poetic brilliance, at the same time as they became infamous for their seeming disregard of societal expectations. Pope's popularity was particularly exceptional; as Voltaire wrote during his travels in London, "A picture of the Prime Minister hangs over the chimney of his own closet, but I have seen that of Mr. Pope in twenty noblemen's houses" (Voltaire 116).<sup>1</sup> In the meantime, after an inadvertent authorial debut when friends circulated her verses while she was laid up with smallpox, Montagu's life and writings remained popular subjects of study and gossip in London for decades. Today Pope is still remembered as one of the greatest poets of the eighteenth century, and while Montagu's poetry has only recently been "rediscovered," the *Turkish Embassy Letters* that she wrote during her 1716-1719 journey to Constantinople have been consistently admired since their publication in 1763.

Pope's work has long been a favorite topic of literary scholars, and scholars as far back as Byron have made Montagu the subject of biographical research. However, one mystery still hovers at the forefront of studies of the two writers. During Montagu's early journey to Constantinople, she and Pope were close friends made even closer by their expansive correspondence. Pope's letters to her carry hints of romantic fondness rolled into vast quantities of eighteenth-century gallantry; in the meantime, Montagu's combine a travelogue style with extensive diversions into the "Oriental learning" that she hoped would most interest him. Within a decade of her return to England, however, the terrain had shifted. They had moved to opposite sides of a growing political divide; Lady Mary's assertiveness and "unfeminine" ambition had become increasingly evident; Pope's mistrust of fellow writers had grown as he became the subject of increasing numbers of lampoons. In 1728, Pope published a poem that accused Lady Mary of publishing texts—probably more of the many lampoons that made him their primary

---

<sup>1</sup> This essay's in-text citations and bibliography are formatted according to MLA style, as defined by the online MLA Formatting and Style Guide produced by Purdue University. For more information, see the Purdue Online Writing Lab: <<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>>.

target—and passing them off as the work of another writer. Around the same time he may have reworked a poem that had praised Lady Mary to present her instead as the garish foil to another woman's perfections.

While scholars have yet to offer a definitive explanation for the writers' falling-out, the consequences of the conflict are more easily observed: by the end of the 1730s, Montagu and Pope were widely known to be bitter enemies. Throughout the decade following Pope's 1728 lampoon against Lady Mary, the poets' private grievances buzzed through court gossip and through London's presses. Each writer's gender, in addition to Pope's disabilities and Montagu's family troubles, soon became fair game in their poetic attacks. Even lampoons that they had withheld from the public probably became sources of scandalous gossip after calculated circulation in manuscript form at court. What had begun as friendship ended as a hatred that has provoked shock and stirred curiosity for centuries, because of both the viciousness of the attacks and the mystery of their original cause.

In her discussion of Pope's early worship and later hatred of Montagu, Isobel Grundy suggests that a deeper understanding of the poets' falling-out "could probably emerge not from hunting a particular moment or particular event, but only from clearer and bolder thinking about the working out of gender issues" (*Comet of the Enlightenment*, xviii). This research will engage with that challenge, examining the poets' known works, their publishing histories, and their identity construction through the lens of their severely marginalized and heavily gendered social and authorial positions. By analyzing the poets' relationship from their early letters to their eventual lampoons, this research will open new avenues towards understanding the interactions and literary production of two intellectual celebrities whose lives and writings have fascinated readers for centuries.

### **Past Research**

Alexander Pope has long been the focus of exhaustive scholarly study, with new biographies appearing regularly during the two centuries since his death. In recent decades Pope scholarship has shifted from a strong emphasis on biography and

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*



aesthetics to studies of his selfhood in terms of religion,<sup>2</sup> sociopolitical positioning,<sup>3</sup> and even his disabilities.<sup>4</sup> Many scholars have considered Pope's central role in the pamphlet wars of the early eighteenth century. Some reduce the decades of animosity to the simple epithet of his "war with the Dunces," an appellation stemming from Pope's disdainful characterization of his rivals in his 1733 *Dunciad* (Maner 558).<sup>5</sup> Joseph V. Guerinet's 1969 collection of pamphlet attacks against Pope makes a more intensive sojourn into this territory, meticulously documenting the hundreds of pamphlet attacks made against Pope from 1711 until his death in 1744. Maynard Mack's 1986 biography of Pope also delves into these pamphlet wars.

While Montagu has not been the subject of such extensive study as Pope—as scholar Donna Landry notes, a Montagu industry has yet to be established (314)—she has attracted interest in the literary world ever since the posthumous publication of her *Embassy Letters* in 1763. In recent years scholars including Cynthia J. Lowenthal, Robert Halsband, Mary Jo Kietzman, and Joseph W. Lew have explored her role as a groundbreaking travel writer and epistolary stylist.<sup>6</sup> Montagu's letters have also taken center stage in debates over whether she can be considered to be a feminist or "proto-feminist," with scholars like Srinivas Aravamudan and Lisa Low arguing for Montagu's relatively progressive approach to the "East" while others like Meyda Yegenoglu describe her as having assumed a masculine, patriarchal stance in her approach to Turkish women during her travels.<sup>7</sup> Isobel Grundy, who also produced a comprehensive

---

<sup>2</sup> See "Alexander Pope: Erasmian Catholic" (1973) by Chester Chapin, "Pope's *Essay on Man*: Oblique Light for a False Mirror" (1967) by Nancy Lawlor, and "Pope and his Church" (1960) by Patrick Crutwell.

<sup>3</sup> See "Alexander Pope: The Political Poet in His Time" by Howard Erskine-Hill (1981) and *The Imaginative World of Alexander Pope* by Leopold Damrosch (1987).

<sup>4</sup> See "The influence of chronic illness upon the writings of Alexander Pope" (1989) by E. M. Papper and "The 'Truest Copies' and the 'Mean Original': Pope, Deformity, and the Poetics of Self Exposure" (1993) and *Resemblance and Disgrace: Alexander Pope and the Deformation of Culture* by Helen Deutsch (1996).

<sup>5</sup> Examples of such works include "Pope, Byron and the Satiric Persona" (1980) by Martin Maner, "Alexander Pope and the Lyrical Cry" (1923) by Francis Bickley, and "Pope's Social Satire: Belles-Lettres and Business" (1952) by Hugo M. Reichard.

<sup>6</sup> See *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Eighteenth-Century Familiar Letter* (2010) by Cynthia J. Lowenthal, "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu as Letter-Writer" (1965) by Robert Halsband, "Montagu's Turkish Embassy Letters and Cultural Dislocation" (1998) by Mary Jo Kietzman, and "Lady Mary's Portable Seraglio" (1991) by Joseph W. Lew.

<sup>7</sup> For arguments in favor of Montagu's progressive stance see "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in the *Hammam*: Masquerade, Womanliness, and Levantinization" (1995) by Srinivas Aravamudan, "Feminism against the East/West Divide: Lady Mary's 'Turkish Embassy Letters'" (1995) by Teresa Heffernan, and

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

biography of Montagu in 1999, offers evidence of what may be considered Montagu's feminist leanings in the poem "Epistle from Mrs. Y--- to her Husband" (1724).<sup>8</sup> Few scholars have made extensive explorations of Montagu's pivotal role in the historical eradication of smallpox through introducing inoculation to England, with Fenno, Grundy and the earlier biographer Robert Halsband emerging as rare exceptions to this trend.<sup>9</sup>

Halsband and Grundy have also been notable in their detailed discussions of the theories and speculations surrounding Montagu and Pope's falling-out. Grundy's biography of Montagu explores the roles that Pope took on and assigned to Montagu in their early letters. She also discusses the poets' eventual altercations. Her analysis draws on the work of Valerie Rumbold, whose book *Women's Place in Pope's World* (1989) offers a thorough and fascinating study of Pope's interactions with women throughout his lifetime and the influence of various women upon his works. Rumbold demonstrates how Pope's interactions with Montagu fit the pattern of his interactions with other women, particularly in terms of how the writers' friendship and falling-out mimic elements of Pope's earlier friendship with Teresa Blount. Like his interactions with Teresa, Pope's relationship with Montagu likely marked a turning point in his transition from praising impressive women using imagery of the sun to preferring those to whom he can relate the imagery of the "'mild', 'sober', 'serene', 'Virgin'" moon (Rumbold 132).

Many other scholars and writers over the years have ascribed the poets' enmity to a moment of spurned passion. The story proffered by Lady Louisa Stuart, Lady Mary's granddaughter, was that conflict erupted when Pope declared his love for Lady Mary and she responded with laughter. This tale has proven popular with writers and researchers, with biographers as early as Lord Byron reporting it as truth.<sup>10</sup> While

---

*Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (1991) by Lisa Low. For arguments against her "proto-feminism," see Meyda Yegenoglu's "Supplementing the Orientalist Lack: European Ladies in the Harem" (1992).

<sup>8</sup> See "Ovid and Eighteenth-Century Divorce: An Unpublished Poem by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu" (1972) by Isobel Grundy.

<sup>9</sup> See "New Light on Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's Contribution to Inoculation" (1953) by Robert Halsband and "Chapter 13: Inoculation: 'pull'd about and solicited'" in *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: Comet of the Enlightenment* (1999) by Isobel Grundy.

<sup>10</sup> See "Lord Byron, Literary Detective: The Recovery of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's Long-Lost Venetian Letters" (2011) by Arden Hegele.

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

modern biographers focusing on each poet have asserted the implausibility of this theory, many writings still cite this story as rumor if not as fact—probably because scholars have yet to settle on an alternate explanation for the intensity of the writers’ later hatred.<sup>11</sup>

The question that has provoked the most speculation in studies of the poets’ relationship is the depth of the animosity displayed in their respective literary lampoons. This intensity is one point on which scholars seem universally to agree, though some expose a scholarly bias towards one actor or the other within the conflict. Rumbold describes how Pope’s attitude towards the beautiful, intellectually challenging Montagu is “so violent and lasts so long that it exposes the structure of his feelings about such women more clearly than any other single encounter” (131). Guerinot cites Montagu’s verses as demonstrating “a full command of the rhetoric of hate” (226). Mack declares Lady Mary’s hatred of Pope to be “increasingly psychotic” (555), and says that her poetry conveys “that thickening carapace of cynicism with which, like the hermit crab, she had grown accustomed to shielding her softer feelings” (561). In her chapter “Female Wit,” Rumbold presents twenty separate instances of Pope’s attacking Montagu in print under her longtime pseudonym Sappho, and in her Montagu biography Grundy offers effective biographical analyses of Montagu’s three verse responses (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 330-2, 367, 338-42). Only one of these responses reached print, and that anonymously, leading Mack to join Pope in disparaging Montagu for ducking behind a cloak of anonymity in her attacks (560).

## **Argument**

This research will differ from earlier considerations of the poets’ relationship partly in its extensive analysis of their letters as a basis for understanding the earlier stages of their relationship. These letters show that each constructed a role for the other that contrasted sharply with the actual personality at play. Montagu hoped that Pope could work against the social norms of the time and view her as an intellectual

---

<sup>11</sup> For modern biographers’ discussions of the implausibility of this story of the writers’ initial conflict, see Grundy, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: Comet of the Enlightenment*, 274; Mack 554-556; Rumbold 143. For modern scholars citing this explanation, see “The ‘Truest Copies’ and the ‘Mean Original’: Pope, Deformity, and the Poetics of Self-Exposure” (1993) by Helen Deutsch, and “Alexander Pope, Lady Mary Wortley, and the literature of social comment” (1998) by Donna Landry.

equal and collaborator. At the same time Pope constructed an equally improbable role for her: that of a sentimental, hyperfeminine intellectual whose mind and body could each offer pleasure to him in his role as male spectator. The disillusionment which each suffered with regards to the other's personality in the years following Montagu's return to England would establish a strong sense of mistrust between the two.

The letters also reveal the poets' shared knowledge of each other's vulnerabilities. Pope's writings were a showcase of frustrated efforts to appear masculine according to the standards of the time, and dwelled extensively on the disability that was utterly intertwined with his gender performance. While Montagu's letters focused on her intellectuality and literary ambitions, they also demonstrated her ambivalent feelings towards her gender, her family and the position in the public eye that was effectively guaranteed to her by virtue of her family and class. While the initial trigger to the poets' falling-out cannot be pinpointed, what can be established with some certainty is that the poets' early friendship produced both mutual disillusionment regarding the other's character and an intimate knowledge of the other's vulnerabilities.

During their later poetic conflict, the letters, verses and pamphlets that the two writers produced reveal their mutual concerns about their social and authorial reputations. These reputations were largely based on in each writer's positioning within intersecting spheres of marginalization. As a woman and aristocrat, Montagu absolutely did not want her name associated with the grimy world of public literary production. Scholar Ruth Perry even suggests that Montagu planned the posthumous publication of her *Embassy Letters* only at the urging of her friend Mary Astell (435). By contrast, Pope was adept at manipulating public perceptions through publication, but as a Catholic suspected of Jacobite sympathies he could face severe consequences if he became too notorious among influential figures at court. However, Montagu's influential position at court and Pope's power in shaping public attitudes meant that each was in an ideal position to deliver insults in a forum where the other was intensely vulnerable.

Many past theorists have sought motivation for Pope and Montagu's intense hatred of one another in some specific moment that could have acted as a trigger for their falling-out. The idea that Montagu spurned Pope's romantic advances in some form has offered the most persuasive explanation for the majority of theorists, despite the convincing refutations of this story presented by Rumbold, Mack and Grundy. This

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

essay will analyze the writers' lives and literary production within a feminist historicist framework in the hope of opening new avenues for future studies of the poets' literary relationship. Montagu and Pope's early friendship and their later sociopolitical placement left each uniquely positioned to wreak havoc on the other's life in the spheres where the other's marginalized identity produced the greatest vulnerability. Their friendship had left each with a deep understanding of how to most effectively hurt the other, especially because both struggled with the limitations of gendered social expectations during their time. In the meantime, their social and political positioning later in life guaranteed each the most effective possible method of delivering such insults. This essay proposes that while the writers' initial falling-out was likely based on something so small as a transferred compliment or the suspicion of a lampoon, each writer's exploitation of both the intimate knowledge garnered from their early friendship and the other's sociopolitical vulnerabilities would provide plentiful basis for a small-scale conflict to balloon into the bitter literary battle that would remain infamous for centuries after their deaths.

## **Methodology**

The works and relationship of Montagu and Pope took shape at a particular historical moment and within a complex web of interconnecting social circles, ideas, and ideologies. By carrying out explicitly feminist applications of New Historicism and Close Reading, this investigation seeks to analyze the poets' literary works with close attention to both the details of the works and the context of their production.

## **Feminist New Historicism**

New Historicism became widely known after Stephen Greenblatt coined the term "New Historicism" in his 1982 collection of essays *Renaissance Self-Fashioning from Moore to Shakespeare*. This analytical method, also sometimes called "Cultural Poetics," was extremely appealing to scholars who had been skeptical of the ahistorical methodologies central to literary analysis within previously dominant methodological approaches like Structuralism, Poststructuralism and Deconstructionism. New

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

Historicism balked the examples of those mainstream predecessors by emphasizing the historical situatedness of experience and knowledge.

New Historicism was not without its antecedents, though. In “History as Usual? Feminism and the ‘New Historicism’” (1988), Judith Newton destabilizes popular assumptions regarding New Historicism’s innovativeness, pointing to the overwhelming influence of feminist theory in creating and shaping New Historicist approaches. She shows that New Historicism finds its basis in many concepts central to feminist historical and literary theory: the lack of a universal human essence, the impossibility of objectivity, subjectivity’s basis in cultural codes, and representation’s power to shape consciousness (88-89). Tracing the evolution of feminist theory from feminists’ break with androcentric scholarship in the late 1960s, she explores the early methodological framework of “New Women’s History,” which emphasized “the construction of subjectivity, representation, role prescription, ideas, values and psychology”—and made gender a central point in each of these angles of approach (Newton 100). She also questions why credit for that same range of theoretical breakthroughs is generally allocated to male New Historicist theorists despite their development within gender theory.

Feminist literary theory and New Historicism overlap on extensive theoretical grounds. Historically, feminist critics preceded New Historicists in encouraging the reading of literary texts in relation to non-literary and social texts (Newton 104-105).<sup>12</sup> However, in modern academia Feminist and New Historicist theorists often found themselves at odds, with proponents of each “keeping their mutual distance, [and] relegating each other to a kind of non-presence” (Dimock 601). Feminists struggled with New Historicism’s reluctance to consider gender a viable category of analysis and its implicit acceptance of “the totalizing power of hegemonic ideologies, ideologies implicitly informed by elite male values” (Newton 118). In the meantime, historicists criticized feminist approaches as insufficiently historical (Fleissner 45).

Judith Newton’s article closes with a call for cooperative approaches that productively combine feminism and new historicism. Feminist theory offers an

---

<sup>12</sup> A notable example is Lillian Robinson’s 1970 exploration of the class implications of modern categories and standards of literary analysis: Lillian S. Robinson, “Dwelling in Decencies: Radical Criticism and the Feminist Perspective” (1970), in *Sex, Class, and Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978): 5.

opportunity to destabilize New Historicism's implicit acceptance of hegemonic ideologies, adding to New Historicism's effectiveness by furthering understanding of texts as products "imbricated in a historical and materialist constellation in which social and psychological factors, collective and private impulses commingled" (Kaes 151). Alternately, Wai-Chee Dimock's "Feminism, Historicism, and the Reader" discusses New Historicism's utility for feminist scholars, noting that gender is "most useful as an analytic category when it is seen as a temporal (and temporary) construct, when it is understood to be constituted in time and constrained by time" (620). She joins Newton in responding to the strained ties between feminism and new historicism by recommending the integration of gender into historicist approaches. Both her and Newton's conclusions suggest that history and gender are most effective as categories of analysis when they are recognized as mutually constituted.

This investigation will take these calls for the combination of Feminist and New Historicist theories as the impetus for a Feminist New Historicist methodology that integrates gender as a category of analysis in the study of historically defined social systems and ideologies. The project also acknowledges the widening grounds of modern feminism by recognizing disability and poverty as categories of oppression that merit analysis. A Feminist New Historicist framework for this research will enable the use of historically specific gender theory alongside biographical, political, and bibliographical investigation to analyze how Montagu and Pope functioned as subjects within their specific sociohistorical contexts.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Alexander Pope functioned within and reacted to a particular social and historical universe. This investigation will explore their lives and works primarily through the interrelated texts in which they appear, whether because they produced these texts or because they figured prominently in them. As per both Feminist and New Historicist frameworks, these two writers did not stand alone, but rather were heavily influenced by events, politics, and popular discourses within eighteenth century English society. Feminist theorists particularly emphasize intersectionality as a keystone in identity construction. This concept offers the opportunity to situate authors' identity construction within a complex web of intersecting spheres of marginalization and privilege. For example, while Pope was socially and intellectually privileged by the fact of his being male in an intensely

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

patriarchal society that offered greater opportunities for learning and social power to men than to women, he was simultaneously marginalized physically and socially by his disabilities and politically by his Catholicism and Jacobite sympathies. Alternately, Montagu's class and wealth were empowering at the same time that they reinforced society's strict limits on her gender performance. She was fortunate in not facing consistent economic struggles, but her aristocratic background severely limited her comfort with and opportunities for authorship.

Furthermore, with a Feminist Historicist methodology in mind, considering the two writers in relation to one another becomes an adept approach to analyzing the life and works of each. As Jeffrey Weeks describes, "The idea of the unencumbered self is an illusion. We realize our sense of self, our personal autonomy...in and through others" (Weeks 195).

Feminist and New Historicist theories regarding the individual as a subject are highly interrelated with the work of French theorist Michel Foucault. Many of Foucault's works discuss how the seemingly self-evident truths that determine acceptable discourses within society are actually historically determined. In this context, discourse may be understood as the "language in action which allows subjects to make sense of the world" (Danaher x). One becomes a subject of and subjected to discourse by locating oneself in the position from which discourse makes the most sense; through this process one accepts (subjects the self to) the discourse's meanings, power and regulation. Foucault carries out complex analyses of the intricate webs of social, power and historical relations within which subjects function in works including *Madness and Civilization A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1964), *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1970), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977), and *The History of Sexuality* (1984). Montagu and Pope's relationships with their societies will be examined partially through the lens of expectations and stereotypes arising from discourse in their society. Through much of their engagement with discourses on femininity, masculinity, and disability, for example, Pope and Montagu both became subject to the meanings, power, and regulation that ultimately made them vulnerable to one another's machinations.

Althusser's concept of ideology is often connected with Foucault's theories of discourse and power. In Althusser's terminology, ideology is "a system of the ideas and

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*



representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts, according to the case) which dominate the mind of a man or a social group" (Althusser, *"Lenin and Philosophy" and Other Essays*, 158). Ideology exists in relation to individuals; it is a representation of "the Imaginary Relationship of Individuals to their Real Conditions of Existence" (Althusser, *"Lenin and Philosophy" and Other Essays*, 162). Althusser also insists on the materiality of ideology, stating that it always exists within apparatuses and subjects even as it is realized through them. He explains this seeming paradox by stating, "The ideology of ideology thus recognizes, despite its imaginary distortion, that the 'ideas' of the human subject exist in his actions" ("Ideology," 168).<sup>13</sup> Ideology thus always already exists as a product of and framework for individual subjects.

Ideology's influence on individuals in society may be analyzed contextually in terms of its role constituting individuals as subjects within societies through interpellation. Through the process of interpellation, ideology converts the pre-ideological individual into a subject. This essay will consider Foucault's concept of "discourse" as part of the process of ideological interpellation. Interpellation leads individuals to view themselves as free agents with control over their own actions when they are actually enmeshed in complex systems of ideological constraints. This concept of ideological subjection can lead New Historicist studies to attribute minimal agency to the individual. Feminist theory can offer a more balanced approach to questions of subject agency, since gender theory's longtime focus on individuals affecting change has prevented any such deprecation of the subject and human agency. Instead, feminist politics and theory conceptualize a self "which is a self but which is at the same time multiple, contradictory, and in process" (Newton 99).

### *Feminist Close Reading*

This essay's approach will primarily utilize New Historicism and feminist criticism. Within these frameworks, however, it will make significant use of the technique of close reading that arose from New Criticism. Close reading has traditionally been posed as incompatible with historicist approaches; it was interpreted

---

<sup>13</sup> For further exploration of the paradoxes within Althusser's work, see: Warren Montag, "'The Soul is the Prison of the Body': Althusser and Foucault, 1970-1975," *Yale French Studies* No. 88 (Yale University Press: 1995): 62-65.

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

as “a close and detailed analysis of the text itself to arrive at an interpretation without referring to historical, authorial, or cultural concerns” (Bressler 263). Lentricchia and DuBois accordingly argue for the text’s placement through close reading as “the organic center of responses...[and] a magnet for our attention,” and describe contextual concerns as a chaotic periphery to this organic center (23). However, in “Feminist perspectives on close reading,” Jasmina Lukić and Adelina Sánchez Espinosa illustrate the potential for “recuperating” close reading by embedding the methodology within the larger framework of feminist literary studies. This essay proposes to take the transformation of close reading one step further, placing the methodology within the context of a gendered and overtly New Historicist theoretical approach.

Lukić and Sánchez discuss the history of close reading as a methodology before diving into how the approach can be reshaped and reinvigorated through incorporation into gendered and feminist methodological structures. They refer to Quayson’s assertion that literary “objects to be analyzed are assumed to be constitutively woven out of heterogeneities in the first instance, the task then being to indentify the specific *configuration* and *implications* of the coming together of these heterogeneities” (Quayson 127, quoted in Lukić and Sánchez 107). They discuss the relative invisibility of close reading within scholarship regarding feminist literary theory. Additionally, they explore close reading’s potential for supporting feminist and oppositional readings of literary texts. As per Lukić and Sánchez’s recommendations, this research will make use of close reading within the larger theoretical framework of feminism. This will allow an emphasis on the concrete realities of the literary text while avoiding any seeming necessity of relegating authorial and biographical concerns to the interpretative margins. As Lukić and Sánchez describe, interpretations of literary works’ immediate, literal meanings must consider both authorial context and readers’ sociohistorical positioning (116). As an approach, feminist close reading can thus offer a greater understanding of both the literary works and the heterogeneities within which they are imbricated in terms of both their production and their consumption.

## **Project Summary**

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

This investigation will make use of overtly feminist approaches to New Historicism and close reading to explore new ground regarding the works and relationship of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. This theoretical framework, enriched with the specific theories of Foucault and Althusser regarding discourse, subject positions and interpellation, offers a methodological avenue through which to explore the writers' altercation through their works and their sociohistorical context.

The first two chapters of this investigation offer overviews of the two writers' identities based on the overlapping spheres of oppression that both navigated in their lives and writing. Montagu's gender and class stood at odds with her interest in publishing and authorship, and made for a central element of her lifelong vacillation between trespassing social norms and projecting an image more in line with societal conventions. In the meantime, Pope's literary successes arose from a background of physical, religious, and political vulnerabilities that often hampered his ability to engage in typical gender performance. The fourth chapter will analyze the letters they exchanged between 1716 and 1719, placing particular focus on the highly gendered nature of the false roles each constructed for the other during their early epistolary friendship.

The last two chapters will focus on the most infamous portion of their interactions: their altercation and the events that followed. Accordingly, the fifth chapter will examine the known events and background tensions that may have given rise to the poets' later hatred. The sixth chapter will examine a selection of the poet's attacks, placing a primary focus on the power and vulnerabilities that accompanied their gender and sociopolitical positioning.

## II. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Anxiety of Authorship

*"I have made my selfe easy under all these mortifications by the reflection I did not deserve them, having never aim'd at the Vanity of popular Applause"*<sup>14</sup>

Montagu navigated the realms of accomplished writer, brilliant intellectual, and prominent aristocrat at a time when, for women, "the line between being spectacular and making a spectacle of oneself...[was] perilously thin" (Gonda 62). Her accomplishments, birth and connections effectively guaranteed her a constant space on the public stage, regardless of whether she viewed that space with desire or disinterest. As Grundy describes, London's media treated Montagu "not as an aristocrat but as a celebrity" (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, xix). Halsband notes that while there were other aristocratic women named Mary in London at this time, Montagu's "intellectual brilliance and her connection with Alexander Pope and his circle gave her the dubious honor of being recognized in print as *the Lady Mary*" (Halsband, "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu as Letter-Writer," 155). While she endeavored to shape her social and political positioning in London to her greatest benefit, Lady Mary navigated her assigned role with certain ambivalence. Behind all the brilliance of her famous letters from Constantinople, one can also read a certain relief at the distance Montagu was then enjoying from the "stark publicity" of her life in London (Landry 316).

### **Women and their Public**

Women's public positioning at this point in history was often precarious. As Caroline Gonda notes, women's presence in England's eighteenth-century public eye could not be interpreted as automatically conferring power upon them. Rather, the power of any woman on such a stage depended heavily upon that woman's interactions with an equally public audience (Gonda 68). Gonda's reference to the Gunning sisters, beautiful women who became aristocrats during the same era, aptly applies to Montagu as well: "For aristocratic women, one might argue, being in the public eye, being on display, is part of their duty as daughters or as wives...What their detractors complain

---

<sup>14</sup> In *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, Vol. 3, ed. Robert Halsband, 39.

of is their failures in decorum -- they become the Wrong Kind of Spectacle" (Gonda 66). Montagu was assigned the role of a spectacle by virtue of her birth and connections. Her assertive nonconformity was first made public through her elopement with Edward Wortley in lieu of the marriage her father had planned for her, and remained consistent through to the end of her life when she spent more than a decade traveling without her family through France and Italy. Such conduct made her constant target for the anxiety and anger of misogynists of the era (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, xix).

Even while determinedly shaping her life's path according to her own interests, Montagu maintained a strong disinterest in overt authorship. She produced literary works throughout her life, but a late letter shows Montagu moving from a skeptical exposition on women and witchcraft to discuss "the real devils who haunted me. I mean the nine Muses" (Montagu, *Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu...Vol. 3*, 268). Such sentiments imply that she saw her literary talents less as gifts than as liabilities. According to Grundy, Montagu "frequently expressed horror at the idea of writing for print" (Grundy, *Essays and Poems*, 172). Elizabeth Bohls describes Lady Mary as having "nourished a fierce and bitter ambivalence toward her own activity as a female aesthetic producer" (Bohls 24). Landry describes Montagu's aristocratic title as the dominant reason why she "spurned the vulgarity of the commercial marketplace," and presents Montagu's anonymous entrances into the realm of authorship as evidence that "her desire for applause and fame made her continuously seek it in devious ways" (Landry 317).

Women's publishing was not the norm in England during Montagu's time, though it would become more accepted among middle- and working-class women by the middle of the eighteenth century. According to statistical studies of women writers by Judith Stanton, 263 women published poetry between 1660 and 1800, but until 1760 an average of only seven women published poetry per decade (Backscheider xvii). A study by Roger Lonsdale examines the eighteenth century's increase in women's publishing: while only two women published collections of their poetry in the first decade of the eighteenth century, in the last decade more than thirty women published such collections (Lonsdale xxi). However, Montagu's class set her apart from the vast majority of publishing Englishwoman during her lifetime, when most still felt that "it was not fitting for a well-born woman to publish verses except in circumstances of the

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

most careful decorum and discretion" (Grundy, "The Politics of Female Authorship," 19-20).

### **Montagu's Publishing**

Montagu's was first revealed to the public as an author due to a friend's carelessness rather than Montagu's own intent. In December 1715 Lady Mary was struck with such a severe case of smallpox that many in the town thought she was dying. A letter from the Countess of Loudun during Lady Mary's recovery in January reveals the unfortunate events that had taken place during her illness:

Ly Mary is now very well, I do not think she ever was in danger, but the Town said she woud Die, tow days together upon which a frind of hers, (I do not know who it was) show'd a Poem that she had intrusted them with writ upon the Court I have not yet seen it but I'm told it is very prity and not a little wicked...the Princess has seen it, poor Lady Mary will not know how to come to Court again this wold put a body with a good asurance out of countenance, how will her modesty go through with it. (Halsband, "Pope, Lady Mary and the Court Poems," 244)

As with the public reception of her later poetry, concerns regarding Lady Mary's "modesty"—that is, her reputation—immediately shifted to the forefront after this misadventure. The poem in question, titled "The Drawing-Room," is a satire posed as a long and puritanical complaint against Princess Caroline for the "immoral tone and pastimes at her court" (Halsband, "Pope, Lady Mary, and the Court Poems," 243). The princess unfortunately was not known for her sense of humor; the revelation of this poem to its royal subject thus carried the potential to severely damage Montagu's position at court.

The situation only became more precarious when someone showed several other verses that were likely the fruit of collaboration between Montagu, Pope and Gay to Edmund Curll. This publisher was widely known as "a pirate, [and] a purveyor of smut and scandal" (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 109). He promptly published the three poems in a slim pamphlet under the title *Court Poems*. While the title page names no author, the newspaper advertising for the collection implies that Pope, Gay or Lady Mary is behind the work, though Curll was cautious about actually naming Montagu as a potential author in print (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 197-198). In the end, the circulation of Montagu's early verses and the publication of the *Court Poems* do not

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

seem to have had long-term ill effects on Montagu's reputation at court. However, these early indiscretions foreshadowed what would be a lifetime of writings and verses purveyed to the public that would endanger Montagu's "modesty" regardless of her knowledge or consent regarding their release.

The year after these authorial misadventures, Montagu departed with her husband to Constantinople. Both expected to start a new life upon their arrival; if not for the unforeseen diplomatic confusion that followed their arrival, her husband Wortley's ambassadorial appointment could have lasted until the end of his life.<sup>15</sup> Letters from friends and family before her departure and early in her journey imply that Montagu's determination to travel with Wortley rather than stay in England with their young son was seen as eccentric at best. Letters from Pope portray her as putting her husband's welfare before that of her son, and her friends and her sister Mar all seemed to feel that she would regret her decision (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 114-15). Montagu took the opportunity of this journey, however, to launch herself into a new literary realm: that of the travel writer. Her letters during the next three years would set her apart from a (predominantly male) tradition of English travel writers, as well as marking her out as a gifted intellectual of the time. Grundy's reference to Montagu's letters from Constantinople is particularly apt: "More than her *Spectator* essay, more than her eclogues, these letters constituted a bid for literary laurels" (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 200). Montagu's wit and courage shine through the letters; upon her departure from Vienna for the war-torn plains of modern-day Hungary, her parting salutation to Pope stands well apart from a standard farewell:

I think I ought to bid adieu to my friends with the same solemnity as if I was going to mount a breach...indeed, the weather is at present such, as very few ever set out in. I am threatened, at the same time, with being frozen to death, buried in the snow, and taken by the Tartars, who ravage that part of Hungary I am to pass. 'Tis true, we shall have a considerable *escort*, so that possibly I may be diverted with a new scene, by finding myself in the midst of a battle... How my adventures will conclude, I leave entirely to Providence; if comically, you shall hear of them. Pray be so good as to tell Mr. Congreve I have received his letter. Make him my adieus; if I live I will answer it" (Jan. 16, 1717; *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley-Montagu*. Ed. Lord Wharncliffe, 87)

---

<sup>15</sup> For more information on Wortley's ambassadorial recall see Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 78 and Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 153-158.

Montagu's liberal attitude towards foreign cultural practices would also serve her well in setting down tales and witticisms regarding her adventures. A notable example is the frank letters from Vienna in which she describes the local custom of married women's being "served" by men other than their husbands. She concludes the description by observing to her friend, "Thus you see, my dear, gallantry and good breeding are as different, in different climates, as morality and religion. Who have the rightest notions of both, we shall never know till the day of judgment" (Halsband, "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu as Letter-Writer," 162).

Upon her return to London in 1719, Montagu began writing up her travel experiences in the form of letters to various addressees. She had no intention of actually publishing the letters; she was still too much in agreement with the public sentiment that it was "immodest and déclassé for a woman 'to print'" (Perry 435). At this time, though, Montagu became close friends with Mary Astell. This accomplished, published woman writer asked to read the manuscript of Montagu's letters, and upon finishing the collection she was eager to see it printed. Astell later wrote, "I once had the Vanity to hope I might acquaint the Public that it ow'd this invaluable Treasure to my Importunities" (Perry 435). Montagu, however, maintained her longtime discomfiture with the idea of becoming known as a published author.

In the end, Montagu did make a concession to her friend: she arranged for the posthumous publishing of what would become her *Embassy Letters*. More than thirty years later, Astell's salutation would appear in the preface to the immensely popular published collection: "If these Letters appear hereafter, when I am in my Grave, let this attend them in testimony to Posterity, that among her Contemporaries one Woman, at least, was just to her Merit" (Perry 435).

During these initial years back in London Montagu was slowly becoming known as an author despite her own reluctance. Soon after her return to England the Duke of Buckingham wrote jokingly of the potential of 'the Fam'd Lady Mary' to become the next Poet Laureate (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, "October 1718-1720s: Settling Down," 197). In 1719 a friend one of her letters from Turkey arrived in print, deferentially titled *The genuine copy of a letter written from Constantinople by an English Lady, who was lately in Turkey, and who is no less distinguish'd by her wit than by her quality; to a Venetian nobleman, one of the prime virtuosi of the age* (Grundy, *Comet of the*

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*



*Enlightenment*, 197). Another work that would soon be published was a poem that Montagu later said her uncle had shown about “indiscreetly”; it appeared in *A New Miscellany of Original Poems* in May 1720.<sup>16</sup> In later years Montagu would express frustration about this inadvertent appearance in Hammond’s collection; she probably saw such impositions upon her efforts to shield herself from the spotlight as disrespectful and unwelcome.

Montagu herself only supported her known works’ circulation in manuscript form (Poovey 36). Most of her poems from this time are now unknown precisely because they lacked the titles and labels that would have shifted them towards the category of published texts (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 196). When Lady Mary did engage in deliberate publishing during her lifetime, she did so strictly anonymously. She had submitted an essay to Addison’s famous *Spectator* periodical back in 1714. Later, after returning from Constantinople and engaging with Pope in their ongoing satiric struggle, Montagu made a brief sojourn into the world of professional writing by founding her own journal: the *Nonsense of Common-Sense*. This periodical was first printed in December 1737, and belied Montagu’s later claim “that Politics and Controversie were as unbecoming to our Sex as the dress of a Prize Fighter” (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 371). While the paper only remained active for a brief period, such a foray into journalism highlights Montagu’s complex attitude towards writing and publishing. Even while she denied that women should take part in political journalism, she took this opportunity to wittily interrogate various social issues of the time. She also took an active part in the politics of the court. Her inclination towards both writing and social criticism thus overwhelmed her alleged distaste for politics.

While Montagu’s aristocratic leanings limited her outlook and her sympathies to the upper class, placing certain limits on modern efforts to interpret her essays as revealing feminist sentiments;<sup>17</sup> as Grundy describes, Montagu “never lost either the

---

<sup>16</sup> Edmund Curll, who printed the collection, may have been responsible for its publication. The poem alternately may have reached print through the efforts of the collection’s editor, Anthony Hammond (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 197).

<sup>17</sup> While Montagu was notable in her writings on the importance of women’s sexual pleasure (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 241) and her critiques of marriage law and public attitudes towards non-marital sex (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, xxi), issues that destabilize claims of Montagu’s

earnest desire to do right herself, or the habit of bringing other people's actions to the bar of ethical judgment. But in old age she based that judgment on endorsement of rigid social hierarchy, while in youth she felt she 'was to treat no body as an Inferior, and that poverty was a degree of Merit'" (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 87).<sup>18</sup> Her eventual faith in the value of social hierarchies probably further limited any inclination towards overt authorship; while towards the end of her life the number of women writers in England had skyrocketed, Montagu probably felt that her class set her well apart from the growing authorial class of "bluestocking" writers (Grundy, "The Politics of Female Authorship," 19-20).

For over a decade at the end of her life Montagu lived in the Italian provinces, communicating with her family and friends through whatever letters survived transit to and from the Continent. Near the end of this decade Montagu found, to her great displeasure, that a selection of her poems had been appearing in print for ten years in Dodsley's popular *Collection* (Landry 314). These poems had established Montagu's reputation as an author in England during the same years when she had been vehemently denying the accuracy of such categorization among her social circle in Italy (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 518). A letter to a friend in 1753 illustrates her frustration with the ongoing battle to determine her authorial status:

Sure no body ever had such various provocations to print as my selfe. I have seen things I have wrote so mangle'd and falsify'd I have scarce known them. I have seen Poems I never read publish'd with my Name at length, and others that were truly and singly wrote by me, printed under the names of others. I have made my selfe easy under all these mortifications by the reflection I did not deserve them, having never aim'd at the Vanity of popular Applause. (10 October 1753; Lowenthal 168)

In "The Politics of Female Authorship" Grundy explores Montagu's anxiety of authorship through the lens of the marginal notes in her copy of Dodsley's *Collection*.

---

feminism include her consistent prizing of the image of women's domesticity, her defining her servants based on their utility in her own life (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 464), and her tendency "to deal with male criticism of women by claiming that *she* was an exception" (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 343).

<sup>18</sup> As an old woman living in the Italian provinces, Montagu wrote, "Was it possible for me to elevate anybody from the station in which they are born, I now would not do it. Perhaps it is a rebellion against that Providence that has placed them, and all we ought to do is to endeavor to make them easy in the rank assigned them." She then named Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift as two individuals whose birth and heredity clearly entitled them to be footmen (Halsband, "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Eighteenth-Century Fiction," 332)

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

Pronouncements of “mine” and “By the Same. I confess it” demonstrate her determination to claim certain pieces as her own, even if only in her own private copies of the printed works. Another note points to the frequent cases of mistaken attributions in the chaos of London’s presses: “I renounce and never saw till this year 1758” (Grundy, “The Politics of Female Authorship,” 23). These notes, in combination with her professed scorn at striving for “the Vanity of popular Applause,” showcase Montagu’s conflicted attitude towards authorship. As little as she felt that the title of “author” was appropriate to her social position, she could not restrain herself from feeling proprietary regarding her writing any more than she could comfortably accept false attributions. Perhaps control over her name and writings seemed like the best available compensation for her inability to release her writing to the public; finally, when denied even this control, her sole recourse was private indignation.

### **Beyond Authorship: Montagu’s Wider Reputation**

The care Montagu lavished upon her authorial reputation may well have been connected to her lack of control over her wider social standing on London’s public stage. Montagu’s time in Constantinople proved influential for an unexpectedly large portion of the English population because of her work with inoculation. After barely surviving her run-in with smallpox in December 1714, Lady Mary had been fascinated by this Turkish practice of combating the disease. Immunization through inoculation (a precursor to vaccination) left treated patients mildly ill for a few days and then immune to the disease for the rest of their lives. As the French Ambassador in Constantinople told Lady Mary, “they take the small-pox here by way of diversion, as they take the waters in other countries” (Modern History Sourcebook). Montagu arranged for her young son’s inoculation while in Constantinople, and upon her return to England she became the pivotal actor in introducing the practice to London’s society. Given that Montagu rewrote her letters upon her return, the reflections in her correspondence regarding inoculation’s potential reception back home might be interpreted as reflexive rather than prophetic:

I am patriot enough to take the pains to bring this useful invention into fashion in England, and I should not fail to write to some of our doctors very particularly about it, if I knew any one of them that I thought had virtue enough to destroy

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

such a considerable branch of their revenue, for the good of mankind. (Modern History Sourcebook)

Lady Mary became somewhat notorious for her part in the fight to bring inoculation to England. Rational fears on the part of the public warred with more spectacular suspicions “of Turkish or female influence, financial exploitation...a secret weapon in unscrupulous hands, wicked step-parents or guardians doing away with infant heirs” (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 218).<sup>19</sup> She did earn some commendations, but chances are that she felt as ill-served by the praise as by criticism. Her letters imply that she was exhausted from being “pull’d about and solicited” throughout the height of the inoculation craze, and she likely craved a quiet respite from the public eye (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 220). Unfortunately, such a respite would be a long time in coming.

Montagu’s family connections also drew her name into the spotlight. Her son Edward became a public concern as a youth when he ran away from school and Lady Mary and her husband were reduced to advertising for him in the papers. By the end of his life he was a known criminal notorious for dodging gambling debts. According to Grundy, Edward was “a sore subject, not for years but for decades. At the end of her life Lady Mary said Edward had broken her heart” (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 290). In the meantime, while Montagu’s sister Lady Mar had been a beloved friend and confidant early in their lives, severe mental illness drove a wedge between the sisters and forced the Montagu name into the spotlight through much of the late 1720s. Lady Mar was “literally driven mad by her role as an object of exchange between the conflicting forces of England and Scotland, Whigs and Jacobites” (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, xxi). The legal battles surrounding Mar’s guardianship and ensuing complications in family finances became popular gossip in the London papers, and Lady Mary’s close relationship with her sister drew to a close. These family circumstances

---

<sup>19</sup> Fenno’s observations about modern scholarship that discusses Montagu’s role in inoculation demonstrate the importance of acknowledging scholarly subjectivity in modern work within the field of the history of science: “Since women and Turks are excluded from authorizing the production and dissemination of professional knowledge, there is a sense in which *any* claim that looks like science and is authorized by a Turk or a woman—or perhaps worse, a Turkish woman—will not be treated as epistemically valid. If medical training is celebrated and upheld as the only means of acquiring particular kinds of knowledge, then knowledge that comes through other circuits can look unreliable just in virtue of its not being professional knowledge” (102).

were troubling in themselves; their publicity seems to have compounded Montagu's frustration as each situation made its rounds through London's gossip mills. By the end of the 1730s Montagu's family troubles would return to the presses by Pope's agency; and by virtue of both their publicity and their personal nature, they would make for a powerful weapon in the poet's ongoing pamphlet war.

Montagu was a spectacular individual in the most literal sense of the word, drawing the eyes of friends, enemies and the public throughout her life regardless of whether she deliberately sought out the spotlight. This positioning persisted until the last months of her life, when upon her return to England "she found herself a sight, a lion, in a society avid for nine days' wonders" (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 614). The grudges garnered from her decade of poetic battles with enemy satirists proved equally enduring. A visitor to Montagu's home in 1758 reported that her "Commode" (chamber pot) was painted with images of the works of Pope and Swift. "They were the greatest Rascals," she told him, "but she had the satisfaction of shitting on them every day" (Rumbold 145).

The year after her death in 1762, Montagu's letters from Constantinople reached print as the *Letters of the Right Honourable Lady M—y W—y M—e, written during her travels in Europe, Asia, and Africa, to persons of distinction, men of letters, &c., in different parts of Europe. Which contain, among other curious relations, accounts of the policy and manners of the Turks, drawn from sources that have been inaccessible to other travelers*. The letters were an event, a curiosity, and quickly generated written and verbal reactions from historical figures ranging from Walpole to Voltaire. Absurdly enough, given the volume of works mistakenly attributed to her throughout her life, while some reviewers doubted the veracity of the letters' contents, others questioned whether Lady Mary had actually written them (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 626). Regardless of such speculations, these letters would prove Montagu's most well known literary production for centuries, and she was the primary agent in bringing them to publication.

The combination of her epistolary extravagance, daring travels, pioneering work with inoculation, and intellectual brilliance build a historical picture of Montagu as someone whose personality was much larger than life. One can be certain that she had

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

a mixed relationship with the idea of authorship; the vast majority of her works remained unpublished during her lifetime, and most of those that did reach print were probably published without her knowledge or consent. Such piracy was probably her point of reference when in 1758, near the end of her life, she told her friends the Steuarts, "All my works are consecrated to the fire for fear of being put to more ignoble uses, as their betters have been before them" (*Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* Vol. 3, 270). Montagu's anonymous publication of the *Spectator* essays and *The Nonsense of Common-Sense* became an opportunity for her to claim some measure of authorial agency in the public sphere. However, such anonymity further evidences of her active evasion of the category of "author" during her lifetime. Montagu's birth and country defined her intellectual endeavors. At the same time that they prohibited her open publishing, they also acted as a principal means of countering criticism regarding her "excessive" reading and writing (Grundy, "The Politics of Female Authorship," 25).

Today the works for which Montagu is most known are the ones that reached publication by some means; her manuscript works were deliberately impermanent. However, Montagu's roots in her own present day meant that even towards the end of her life she considered it a potent insult to portray a high-class woman as an author (Grundy, "The Politics of Female Authorship," 37). Her subjection to the ideology of her time draws one back to feminist interactions with New Historicism; even as her literary production was shaped by ideological and discursive constraints specific to her time, Montagu's private impulse towards authorship led her to push the boundaries of those constraints in her authorial ventures.

### III. Pope, Politics and Disability

*“Good God! what an Incongruous Animal is Man! how unsettled in his best part, his soul; and how changing and variable in his frame of body?”<sup>20</sup>*

When Lady Mary and Pope first met around 1715, the two writers’ upbringings offered little common ground. Pope was born in London as the only child of middle-class parents. His Catholic background excluded him from full civil rights in an era when Catholics were frequently suspected of treasonous sentiments (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 90); in the meantime, his disabilities made for a constant obstacle to his daily life and social participation (Papper 359). However, at this stage in her life Montagu valued intellectual merit more than class concerns (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 91), and Pope was to prove an intellectual equal and a literary success. Although his writings throughout his career suggest ambivalence regarding the increasing commodification of literary production, by the end of his life Pope would reach the top of London’s literary market (Gallagher xxi).<sup>21</sup>

Writers including Foucault, Woodmansee and Rose describe modern conceptions of authorship—what Foucault describes as “the privileged moment of *individualization* in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy, and the sciences”—as becoming popularized in the late eighteenth century (‘What Is an Author?’, 281).<sup>22</sup> Changes during the first half of the century presaged this shift. Successful writers transcended their predecessors’ identification as mere craftsmen to become widely recognized as cultural producers and—in some cases—celebrities. The popularization of printing played a role in these changing ideas of authorship. Publishers like Edmund Curll also did their part by producing biographies of writers and keeping marketable names in the public eye through newspaper stories and advertisements. As Rogers

---

<sup>20</sup> In *The Works of Alexander Pope*. Pope to Addison Dec. 14, 1713: 405.

<sup>21</sup> His immensely popular translations of Homer’s *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* would earn him about £5000 each—the modern equivalent of about £100,000 (Landry 307).

<sup>22</sup> Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?”, in David Lodge (ed.), *Modern Criticism and Theory* (London: Longman, 1988), 196-210; Martha Woodmansee, “The Genius and the Copyright: Economic and Legal Conditions of the Emergence of the ‘Author’”, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 17 (1984): 425-48; Mark Rose, *Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

describes, through tactics like these, Curll “made authorship into news, and literature into a locus of scandal, a temple of infamy, a whispering gallery of rumor” (“Nameless Names,” 240). Authors themselves also took part in the game of shaping public opinion; as in Pope’s case, writers’ livelihoods often depended on public recognition of their names and works. This sociohistorical birth of the author changed the nature of literary consumption; readers began to approach literary texts “as theologians had long approached the book of nature, seeking to find the marks of the divine author’s personality in his works” (Rose). It also changed the nature of authorship, with many writers facing the choice of either learning to manipulate their authorial reputations or fading into literary obscurity and financial hardship.

The sheer breadth of the attacks made upon Pope during his career stand as evidence of his success in achieving popular celebrity (or notoriety). In his “descriptive bibliography” of pamphlet attacks against Pope, Joseph Guerinot locates over one hundred and fifty attacks written between 1711 and 1744 (2). Pope also became an extremely popular subject of portraiture: William Wimsatt describes him as “probably the most frequently portrayed English person of his generation, perhaps of the whole eighteenth century” (quoted in Deutsch, *Resemblance and Disgrace*, 226). As Landry describes, Pope’s success existed simultaneously with his exclusion from social power (311). Attacks made against him generally noted his physical, religious and political vulnerabilities. In the end, though, others’ attempts to harness such vulnerabilities seem only to have made Pope more determined to exercise the agency available to him in terms of maintaining literature excellence and manipulating public opinion. In 1713 Pope wrote to Addison, “Good God! what an incongruous animal is man! how unsettled in his best part, his soul; and how changing and variable in his frame of body! --the constancy of the one shook by every notion, the temperament of the other affected by every blast of wind. What is man altogether but one mighty inconsistency?” (Pope to Addison Dec. 14, 1713: *The Works of Alexander Pope* 405). As in such passages, the complexity of Pope’s life and world would become a compelling basis for his writings. His marginalizing physical, religious and political positioning may have initially presented as simple obstacles, but they provided a powerful impetus for Pope to empower himself by constructing a unique authorial identity.

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*



## **Pope and Deformity**

In 1712 Pope wrote to his friend Caryll, “I believe no mortal ever lived in such indolence and inactivity of body, though my mind be perpetually rambling” (Pope to Caryll Dec. 5, 1712: *The Works of Alexander Pope* 173). The following years would only compound the contradictions of his active mind and painfully restricting physique. Pope’s physical impairments began with Pott’s disease, a tuberculosis of the spine which he probably contracted as an infant from a wet nurse (Mack 153). This illness probably combined with rickets to cause severe spinal curvature, which produced pain and the appearance of a hunchback. The spinal curvature also compressed his lungs so that he sometimes had trouble breathing. Some combination of these ailments stunted his growth: as an adult Pope was only four and a half feet tall. Throughout his life Pope suffered from myopia that compromised his eyesight and produced frequent migraines. The recommended treatment for migraines involved consuming large quantities of coffee; this treatment was probably the cause of Pope’s decades of severe insomnia (Papper 359). Such a list of ailments need not provoke pity; it should, however, show the centrality of health and its obstacles to Alexander Pope’s life. Illness was not an occasional occurrence for Pope; instead, for many years, it was a fact of his daily life (Papper 359). As such, poor health affected both Pope’s interpersonal relationships and his literary production. Studies of Pope’s construction of the self in his writings and interpersonal interactions must accordingly be placed in the context of a powerful cycle of disconnect from and probably painful engagement with his body. Early in his life, Pope would tell his friend Steele:

“When a smart fit of sickness tells me this scurvy tenement of my body will fall in little time, I am e’en as unconcern’d as was that honest Hibernian, who being in bed in the great storm some years ago, and told the house would tumble over his head, made answer, What care I for the house? I am only a lodger. (Letter to Mr. Steele, July 15 1712: *Letters of Mr. Alexander Pope: and several of his friends* 102)

Pope’s illness seems to have produced some sense of such resigned disengagement (as this quote implies). However, it’s likely that his health also acted as a powerful motivation for Pope to excel.

Pope’s writings indicate that he was highly aware of others’ diminutive perceptions of his physicality (Papper 359). As Mack describes, by the time Pope became well known as a writer he “was already established in his own mind and in the

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

minds of others as a dwarf and cripple” (153). The poet’s self-expression in his works indicates that his physical limitations during his adult years produced a constant struggle to engage with the era’s dominant definitions of masculinity (Straub 76). His relationship with his body was largely painful, and social attitudes towards disability at this time only reinforced his and others’ beliefs in his physical monstrosity. His works frame his life as a constant performance before a “potentially threatening audience...His body is his burden, a blight upon and distortion of the real life within, possessing him and putting him on permanent show” (Deutsch, *Resemblance and Disgrace*, 11). As a writer and personality, however, Pope seemed reluctant to allow others a primary influence in how he defined himself. While his attitudes towards his physical and social limitations were heavily influenced by the era’s social norms, his meticulous attention to his authorial identity manifests less as an acceptance of others’ expectations than as a “lifelong effort to rewrite marginality as authority” (Deutsch, “Pope, Self and World,” 18). His literary production, or his “Muse,” would provide ongoing relief and resources for self-definition within the context of what Pope described as “this long Disease, my Life” (Papper 359).

### **Misfits and the Ideology of Form**

In her article “Misfits,” Rosemarie Garland-Thomson describes physical impairments as producing socially constituted disability. She introduces a methodology of “misfitting” within which the terms impairment and disability “distinguish between bodily states or conditions taken to be impaired, and the social process of disablement that gives meaning and consequences to those impairments in the world” (Garland-Thomson 591). People who are disabled by society’s approach to their social and spatial needs may be described as “misfits”: their physical bodies do not allow them to fit smoothly into the societal and architectural structures of their reality.

Garland-Thomson’s exploration of misfitting as a “social process of disablement” takes on new implications when considered in the context of eighteenth-century attitudes on ill health and deformity (591). During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many people in England saw the smoothly functioning human body as the physiological counterpart to a well-ordered universe. They also commonly conceived of

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

both the body and the universe as results of intelligent design.<sup>23</sup> Roger Lund takes such conceptions as a stepping-off point to define what he calls the eighteenth century's "ideology of form"—the popular set of beliefs which maintained that "beauty is born of symmetry and order" and "all deviation from such symmetry is by definition 'unnatural' and repulsive" (Lund 97). Since the body was seen as the work of an "intelligent artist" and deformity as necessarily "'unnatural' and repulsive," disabled individuals' seeming imperfections logically relegated them to the category of artistic errors (Lund 94). Pope's "Essay on Man" suggests that he was thoroughly interpellated within this ideology despite its construction of his own form as a divine mistake. The "Essay" portrays the world as an orderly, deliberate production and ignores how in such a setting Pope's deformity would have to be "interpreted as an unavoidable but accidental glitch in the mechanical processes of nature...or rejected as a visible transgression of the principles of order upon which such a world is based" (Lund 111).

Davis observes that in the eighteenth century many viewed physical deformity as "a disruption in the sensory field of the observer" (56). In 1728, Chamber's *Cyclopedia* argued that "Ideas of Beauty, like other sensible Ideas, are necessarily pleasant to us, as well as immediately" (Lund 96). Ugliness and deformity were thus widely perceived as fixed conceptions to which viewers had no choice but to respond (Lund 96). The 1742 anti-Pope verse "The Blatant Beast" took this approach as the basis for its slander: "If Beauty be the Subject of our Praise, / A rude, misshapen Lump Contempt must raise" ("The Blatant-Beast: A Poem" [1742]; quoted in Lund 97).

In a culture that idealized order, ridicule became a popular method of cultural purification against the disruptive, "anomalous" deformed (Lund 104). In Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*, the main character describes with great humor "the unaccountable sport of Nature in forming such numbers of dwarfs" (Sterne 187; quoted in Lund 92). To describe dwarfism as nature's joke seems alien from a modern viewpoint. However, at the time many people viewed any human form that fell outside a strictly defined standard as highly comedic. As Simon Dickie describes, "any disability or incapacity; any stutter, lameness, or blindness simply made

---

<sup>23</sup> Bentley neatly encompasses these beliefs in this 1692 assertion on human physiology: "So uniform and orderly a system, with innumerable motions and functions, all so placed and constituted as never to interfere and clash one with another...must needs be ascribed to an intelligent artist" (quoted in Lund 98).

one a standing joke—a reminder, perhaps, of the hilarious intransigence of nature, of the physicality that lay behind all attempts at human dignity” (17).

Eighteenth-century thinkers often saw visual deformities as logically and inevitably attracting attention and, more ominously, obstructing sympathy. In the *Paradox of Acting* (1773; originally *Paradoxe sur le comédien*), Denis Diderot insisted that true sympathy between actor and audience could not be achieved unless the actor was attractive: an unattractive physicality necessarily fixated the viewer’s attention upon the body rather than the story being told, thus posing as insurmountable a distraction from sympathy as a comedic accent (Dickie 17). That disability would produce a break in sympathy was seen as inevitable; such a reaction was a natural reflex to those who physically could not be “ordinary.” However, the distancing and lack of sympathy provoked by an atypical physique might also befit one for the stage: individuals with visible deformities were often seen as naturally destined to perform as professional clowns and buffoons. In the eyes of their contemporaries, deformity was considered to have dehumanized such performers (Dickie 17). Accordingly, the entertainment industry of the time featured many profitable events showcasing the deformities and often suffering of dwarves, cripples, blind men and amputees. One popular event at London’s fairs involved staged combat between a dwarf and a larger adversary; by the end the dwarf would have suffered a severe beating (Dickie 15). Garland-Thomson describes “misfitting” as preventing affected individuals from achieving material anonymity. This “predominantly unmarked and unrecognized way of being in the world” allows one “not to stand out, make a scene, or disrupt through countering expectations” (596). Misfitting would have stripped any opportunity for material anonymity from the eighteenth-century disabled.

Humanitarian sensibility that reproved laughter at disabled people’s expense was beginning to emerge by the mid-eighteenth century, but such attitudes were still far from dominant (Dickie 18). James Beattie (1776) believed it was natural that “pity should prevail over the ludicrous emotion,” and Fielding wrote that only a “diabolical” person would laugh at “Ugliness, Infirmary, or Poverty” (Dickie 3). However, while “pious dissenters” and “the politest of middle-class women” probably would not have appreciated jokes at the expense of the disabled, such sentimental attitudes were slow to gain popularity (Dickie 10). In the meantime, even supposedly “polite” culture seems

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

to have been highly compatible with slurs against the disabled, perhaps because—as Adam Potkay suggests—such culture is largely defined by its attenuation of “violence and argumentative strife” (Dickie 5). Some jestbooks accommodated to the changing times by insisting that their jokes targeted not physical disabilities, but the affected persons’ attempts to disguise or overlook their physical misfortunes (Dickie 11). Many accordingly saw Pope, whose accomplishments violated “the expectation that the deformed will make themselves as invisible as possible,” as meriting scorn and criticism because of his successes (Lund 108). In “A Letter to Mr. Pope, Occasioned by Sober Advice from Horace. . .” (1735) Thomas Bentley thus scoffs, “’Tis very amazing, to see a little Creature, scarce four Foot high, whose very Sight makes one laugh, strutting and swelling like the Frog in Horace, and demanding the Adoration of all Man-kind, because it can make fine Verses” (17–18).

While laughter was a frequent response to physical deformity, perhaps equally frequent was revulsion and the labeling of the affected individual as monstrous. Such reactions joined ridicule in forcing the physically deformed into the realm of misfitting. Lund’s conception of the ideology of form explains why many viewed deformity itself as transgression, with Weinrich (1596) stating, “All that is imperfect is ugly, and monsters are full of imperfections” (*De ortu monstrorum commentarius*, quoted in Lund 94). Other thinkers whose words had shaped popular culture were no less callous. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Locke attempted to explain the murders of “monstrous Births” by suggesting that the human “shape, as the leading Quality...seems more to determine that Species, than a Faculty of Reasoning” (518–9). While Castiglione questioned the correlation between physical shape and moral goodness, he still believed that physical “defects” might be easily interpreted as punishments. “No one likes to think he has them,” he says, “since then it seems that Nature herself has caused them deliberately as a seal and token of wickedness” (Castiglione, quoted in Davis 58).

Many attacks upon Pope found their basis in the idea that his physical appearance reflected or served as a punishment for some inner wickedness. John Dennis (1716) described Pope’s deformity as “the mark of God and Nature upon him, to give us warning that we should hold no Society with him, as a Creature not of our Original, nor of our Species” (Lund 104). Decades later the allusions to Pope’s inner

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

monstrosity continued, with Lord Hervey in 1742 describing Pope's body as "A Symbol and a Warning to Mankind: / As at some Door we find hung out a Sign, / Type of the Monster to be found within" (Guerinot, *Pamphlet Attacks*, 300). The author of *Durgen. A Satyr* (1729) asserted that it was not simply Pope's deformity that merited ridicule, but the resemblance between his warped body and his soul:

Mistake me not to ridicule thy Frame,  
Which adds not to thy Glory, nor thy Shame,  
Only 'tis something wond'rous to behold,  
That Soul and Body both are of one Mould. (Guerinot, *Pamphlet Attacks Against Alexander Pope*, 184)

In "Verses Address'd to the Imitator of Horace," Montagu and Hervey would add another satire to the mix. After first insulting Pope's writing, they build to a satiric peak by calling Pope a burlesque caricature of the human species whose "Sign-Post Likeness of the noble Race...is at once Resemblance and Disgrace" (Montagu, "Verses Address'd to the Imitator of Horace," 15).

In considering Pope's likely reactions to such attacks, one must explore to what extent he himself subscribed to eighteenth-century popular beliefs regarding disability and deformity. Pope seemed to accept the argument from design that motivated much exclusion and ridicule of the deformed. In 1706 he acted as editor for a cruel set of lines that celebrated how a young woman's hunchback guaranteed her perpetual chastity; this act destabilizes any modern assumptions of his empathy with contemporaries who were physically afflicted.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, the *Dunciad* presents a selection of variously grotesque characters whose appearances give rise to the narrator's stinging ridicule. Such mockery is surprising coming from Pope; by engaging in these kinds of insults he anchors his attacks upon the "dunces" within the same ideology that authorized their attacks upon him (Lund 103). Pope did offer some parody of society's attitude towards disability in the "Double Mistress" episode of *The Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*. This

---

<sup>24</sup> An excerpt from "To a Little, Crooked Woman, with a Good Face and Eyes, tho' with a Bunch Before, and Behind" (1706) by William Wycherley:

Because your Crooked Back does lie so high,  
That to your Belly there's no coming nigh,  
Which, as your Back's more low, more high does lie;  
You then all Breast, all Shoulders, and all Head,  
To be Love's Term or Limit may be said,  
By which our Love-Proceedings are forbidden;  
You, because Saddled, never will be Ridden.

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

piece meticulously satirizes the idealization of particular elements of the human form. In “Double Mistress,” Scriblerus falls in love with one half of a pair of conjoined twins. He exclaims of their beauty by saying “If there are charms in one face, one mouth, one body; if there are charms in two eyes, two breasts, two arms; are they not all redoubled in the Object of my Passion?” (*Memoirs of the Extraordinary Life*, 147).

Pope’s attitude towards physical deformity thus seems divided; while he himself subscribed to the argument from design and saw visible deformities as presenting opportunities for satire, he also seemed to recognize his own vulnerability to attacks rooted in the ideology of form. As Lund describes, Pope was “held captive by the very categories he endorsed” (Lund 111). Pope’s literary successes guaranteed him a greater level of “fitting” than most people with disabilities during his era, but they could not entirely protect him from an ideology so deep-rooted that even his own works contributed to its reach.

Pope’s illness led him to have an uneasy attitude towards his physique; it also produced literary motivations and psychological introspections that set him apart from others of his era. As he wrote around 1714 after seeing a hermaphrodite on display, “Few proficient have a greater genius for Monsters than myself” (Deutsch, *Resemblance and Disgrace*, 11). His unhappy resignation regarding his own vulnerability may be garnered from occasional lines in his letters to Lady Mary, or even earlier, as in a letter to Caryll in 1711: “It is certain the greatest magnifying glasses in the world are a man’s own eyes, when they look upon his own person; yet even in those I appear not the great Alexander Mr. Caryll is so civil to, but that little Alexander the women laugh at” (Pope to Caryll Jan. 25 1710-11: *The Works of Alexander Pope* 139).

### **Politics and Papists: Catholicism in Early Hanoverian England**

The accident of Alexander Pope’s Catholic origins joined his physical disability in forcing him into marginalized spheres of eighteenth-century English society. Haydon’s summary of one article in the popular *Weekly Observer* offers a hint of the era’s anti-Catholic propaganda: “Popery is politically unacceptable: the Pope is ‘a proud sort of a Spark, who hectors Emperors, bullies Kings, and values a Prince no more than a Cobler’. Its adherents’ religious tenets are blasphemous and irrational...The Papists are cruel,

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

and dangerous to society too” (22). Given the popularity of such sentiments, associations with Catholics and Catholicism were predictably unsavory. At best, many believed that Catholic men lacked sufficient control over their families (Straub 77). At worst, Catholicism became identified with sexual deviance, with Catholic clerics suspected of indulging in “rampant sexuality and nameless vices behind a facade of chastity” (Miller 70; quoted in Straub 77), and the papacy framed as “‘second Sodom,’ ‘new Sodom,’ ‘Sodom Fair,’” and “nothing but ‘a cistern full of sodomy’” (Bray 19; quoted in Straub 77). Pope, already struggling with the limitations that his disabilities imposed on his performance of mainstream masculinity, could only have been further frustrated by such attitudes.

Conflict between Catholics and the national government maintained an unsettling prominence in England during Pope’s lifetime. Legislation blocked Catholics from “Posts of Profit or of Trust” and thus from the majority of public actions, effectively relegating Pope and other Catholics to the outskirts of “dominant, nonsexual, male gender roles” (Erskine-Hill 126; Straub 76). Pope told his friend Harcourt that this was “an age when...to be a papist was to be a reputed rebel” (Pope to Harcourt, May 1723: *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope* 171-172). The recent history of Catholics in Britain offers some explanation for the Hanoverian government’s distrust: by the time Pope rose to prominence in England’s intellectual scene, many Catholics throughout the country had taken part in treasonous political plots.

Decades earlier, during the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the Roman Catholic King James II of the Stuart line had been forced from the throne to be replaced by the Protestant King William III. James II spent the remainder of his life in exile, but he maintained links with his remaining supporters in Great Britain. Those who remained in favor of this Stuart king and his descendants became known as Jacobites. After William III’s successor Anne died in 1714, the first of the Hanoverian monarchs rose to power. Aware that many Tories had begun to favor a return to a native royal line, the Hanoverian King George I promptly barred the nation’s Tories from most political participation. Control over the nation’s politics shifted to their political opponents, the Whigs. This effective disenfranchising of the entire Tory party left many Tories believing that, regardless of what bloodline should rightfully hold the throne, a return of the Stuart monarchy would be the necessary first step for them to regain the political

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*



power that they had lost. As Erskine-Hill describes the setting, “It may be more useful to think of a nation divided between two parties each with its own candidate for the throne, the Whig king and party holding a tight monopoly of power, the Tory king and party driven into exile, conspiracy, or silence, than of a nation ruled by the Whigs but with a loyal Tory opposition” (126).

The association of Catholicism with Jacobitism and Jacobitism with both treasonous disloyalty and the disenfranchised Tory party meant most Catholics were considered politically suspect from the beginning of George I’s reign. The Jacobite rebellion of 1715, often called “the Fifteen,” only cemented such doubts. During this uprising supporters of the exiled “Pretender” James Edward Stuart attempted to reclaim the throne for him and the Stuart line. As Chapin describes, while some English Catholics “acknowledge[d] the early Hanoverians as kings de facto...they remained loyal to the Stuarts as kings de iure” (Chapin 418). Papist gentry thus formed the backbone of the rebellion, with scores of “ordinary Catholics” joining them to fight for Pretender’s right to the throne (Haydon 82 and 84). Pope’s close friend Bolingbroke served as Secretary of State to the Pretender throughout these events (Erskine-Hill 127).

When the rebellion failed, the government swiftly enacted punitive measures. As Daniel Szechi describes, during the Fifteen, “Great magnates, superiors, clan chieftains, heritors, landlords and masters mobilized their people to fight for the Stuart cause...And the basis of this Jacobite elite’s social power was its property ownership” (230). The Whig-controlled Parliament, well aware of the centrality of landed gentry to the rebellion, established the Commission for Forfeited Estates 1716. This commission worked to confiscate wealthy Catholic families’ property in England and Scotland. While in Scotland local opposition largely confounded the commission, the new measures devastated Catholic communities throughout northern England (Szechi 231). Pope’s ties to the Catholic community are clear in his letters from this period, as when he told his friend Caryll:

Methinks, in our present condition, the more heroic thing we are left capable of doing, is to endeavor to lighten each other’s load, and (oppressed as we are) to succor such as are yet more oppressed...The misfortune of private families, the misunderstandings of people whom distresses make suspicious, the coldness of relations whom change of religion may disunite, or the necessities of half-ruined estates render unkind to each other,--these at least may be softened some degree, by a general well-managed humanity among ourselves, if all those who

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

have your principles, had also your sense and conduct. (Letter to Caryll, 20 March 1715/16; quoted in Chapin 418-419)

The punitive property taxes would continue through the 1720s.<sup>25</sup> Catholics also found themselves pressured to take oaths of allegiance to King George I; Pope and his family probably refused this oath on religious grounds, though Jacobite leanings may have also served as a motivation.

Over the next thirty years Jacobite activity waxed and waned, but Catholics—especially those with Jacobite connections—would be seen as increasingly politically suspect (Haydon 117). As Haydon describes, in 1715 English society was “divided as to who represented the 'public enemy': was it the Papists, Tories, Jacobites, Whigs, or Dissenters? Yet in 1745 the Catholics were overwhelmingly the targets for popular hostility” (118). King George I had been raised in a cosmopolitan court and did not encourage official persecution based on religion, but the 1715 rebellion and other attempted Jacobite plots within the next decade gave the Hanoverian government plentiful reason to distrust English Catholics on political grounds (Haydon 124-25).

While Pope’s family does not seem to have suffered severe consequences for their religious association, the political and legal situation for Catholics at that time was so harsh that many renounced their religion. Others fled the country to avoid discrimination (Chapin 418). In 1716 Pope recounted to Caryll how “‘We here bid our papist-neighbors adieu, much as those who go to be hanged to their fellow-prisoners,’ (Pope to Caryll, 20 March 1716; quoted in Erskine-Hill 132). No clear proof remains that Pope refused to take the oath of allegiance to George I, but his complaints of being double-taxed and his ridicule of papists who took the oath “just to keep their horses” implies that popular assumptions of his refusal were probably correct (Erskine-Hill 132). Pope must also have faced government suspicion because of his copious connections to high-profile Jacobites throughout the country. Even a small portion of Erskine-Hill’s overview of Pope’s Jacobite connections goes some way to indicate the poet’s precarious political situation:

---

<sup>25</sup> Marie Rowland’s study of papers relating to the collection of a 1723 property levy led her to conclude that at this time English Catholics “felt themselves to be under considerable pressure” (M.B. Rowlands, ‘Staffordshire Papists and the levy of 1723, *Staffordshire Catholic History*, II, 1962, p. 37; quoted in Haydon 124).

Francis Atterbury, bishop of Rochester, on whose behalf Pope testified at the political trial at the House of Lords, was leader of the English Jacobites before their plot broke in 1722, and secretary of State to the Pretender after being sent into exile...Lord Lansdowne, the Tory statesman and poet to whom Pope dedicated *Windsor Forest*, was a Jacobite until 1725. Lord Bathurst was Jacobite until after the Atterbury Plot. The Duke of Buckingham, whose *Works* Pope edited, was Jacobite. The second earl of Oxford and the fifth earl of Orrery, close correspondents of Pope, were Jacobite...Pope's much-admired friend, the Earl of Peterborough, was considered by the poet to be 'well inclined' and fit to have headed the proposed Jacobite rising in 1714. (127-128)

The early 1720s were a particularly tumultuous political time for English Catholics, and Pope's many connections within England's Jacobite networks must have made him politically vulnerable. Pope spoke at court to defend Atterbury's innocence after the Jacobite leader was pinpointed as the leader of a treasonous plot in 1723. This incident seems to have affected Pope deeply—after Atterbury described him as a “friend” at the trial, Pope told him, “I am far prouder of that word you publicly spoke of me, than of anything I have yet heard of myself in my whole life” (*The Correspondence of Alexander Pope* 169). Pope's participation in this trial led many papers of the time to accuse him of perjury (Erskine-Hill 133). Around the same time, the *Works* that he edited for the Jacobite Duke of Buckingham nearly led to Pope's arrest (Erskine-Hill 133).

The political situation eased to a relative calm in the later 1720s, and indeed for some years Pope seemed to have been on friendly terms with the high-ranking Whig politician Robert Walpole. However, he remained politically engaged in his writings. Erskine-Hill speculates that Walpole may have forcefully silenced Pope's political voice during the years of their apparent friendship (Erskine-Hill 135-36). The theory is plausible, especially since Pope's method of introducing his 1728 *Dunciad* to the court would have made for a satisfying form of revenge: “Bearing traces of the anti-Hanoverian satire apparently present in the early drafts, it [the *Dunciad*] was actually presented by Walpole to the king and queen on 12 March 1729.” Within a short while “the comic time-bomb went off” as readers began to notice “the anti-Hanoverian subtleties of the poem” (Erskine-Hill 135-36). Pope did at least profess concern regarding his appearance in those political circles, however. In 1733 Montagu and Hervey's *Verses Address'd to an Imitator of Horace*, a cruel attack on Pope, was circulated at court and then published. In the defensive “Letter to a Noble Lord” that Pope addressed to Hervey later that year, Pope's accusations centered around the early

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

manuscript circulation of the *Verses* and the damage it might have caused to Pope's reputation at court, and especially with the Queen:

Your Lordship so well knows (and the whole Court and town throe' your means so well know) how far the resentment was carried...not only in the *Nature* of the *Libel* you propagated against me, but in the extraordinary *manner, place, and presence* in which it was propagated; that I shall only say, it seem'd to me to exceed the bounds of justice, common sense, and decency. (*The Works of Alexander Pope Esq. Volume VIII* 192)<sup>26</sup>

Pope's concern regarding the circles in which such attacks were circulated may have been sensible. While Hervey is certainly not an unbiased witness, his *Memoirs* claim that by 1734, Pope "was recognized by the court as a public critic of the king and royal family" (Hervey's *Memoirs*, ed. Sedgwick, 73; quoted in Erskine-Hill 136).

Pope may have been vulnerable, but his attitude towards his religious and political positioning seems to have mirrored his approach to his physical disabilities: he would not let marginality curtail his self-expression or his literary successes. Although his Catholicism made him an immediate target for criticism at a time when anti-Catholic propaganda regularly sprang from the presses, Pope would continue to value and express his religious beliefs.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, while the prospect of facing down a government and legal system that had exiled or imprisoned many of his friends could not have been appealing, modern analyses join the assumptions of his contemporaries in extrapolating Jacobite messages from many of his works.<sup>28</sup> His participation in marginalized religious and political groups could have led to his arrest or exile, but he manipulated those dangers to shape an authorial identity that held an element of rebellion at its core.<sup>29</sup> Helen Deutsch writes of Pope's "life-long effort to rewrite

---

<sup>26</sup> McLaverty describes Pope's attack on Hervey in *To Arbuthnot* as a response to that early circulation of the *Verses* and his showing the poem to the Queen (*Eve*): "Or at the Ear of *Eve*, familiar Toad, | Half Froth, half Venom, spits himself abroad" (319-320; McLaverty, "Of Which Being Publick the Publick Judge," 196).

<sup>27</sup> "Pope did not wish merely to appear a Catholic, he sincerely believed he was one, and that his opinions were in general accord with those 'of that great man and great saint, Erasmus.'" (Chapin 430)

<sup>28</sup> Two articles by Howard Erskine-Hill offer readings of Pope's poetry according to a Jacobite code. As Landry describes, "Once the case for such a code has been made, images of conquest, rape, or violent seizure, whether by scissors or swords, and mentions of William I, 'the Conqueror,' in Pope's poetry, offer themselves as charged with a furtive allusiveness to the Revolution of 1688-89 and William III." (Landry 312)

<sup>29</sup> Erskine-Hill describes how during the unsettled early 1720s, "Pope wrote as if he expected to follow Atterbury into exile" (134).

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

marginality as authority” (Deutsch, “Pope, Self and World,” 18). While obstacles of religion, politics and disability played central roles in Pope’s self-fashioning, his ongoing popularity stands as evidence that his efforts to overcome marginality would culminate in literary success. Such success would make him an influential voice in social satire—and a powerful threat to Montagu’s reputation.

## IV. The Early Letters: Montagu's Journey to Constantinople

*"More than kisses, letters mingle souls. For thus absent friends speak."*<sup>30</sup>

Their contemporaries might have been surprised had they known the intensity of the correspondence between Pope and Montagu. After all, Lady Mary's denigrating attitude towards the court dwarves said little of her respect for Pope's disabilities (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 125), and Pope professed few expectations of aristocrats like Montagu who wrote "at leisure hours, and more to keep out of idleness, then to establish a reputation" (*Letters of Mr. Alexander Pope: and several of his friends* 69). However, after the two met around 1715, their friendship struck intellectual sparks. They made mutual friends and collaborated on literary ventures, probably including the *Court Poems*.<sup>31</sup>

Upon Montagu's departure with her husband to Constantinople in 1716, she and Pope quickly established an active and complex correspondence. By means of these letters, each seized the chance to profess the highest esteem for the other, even while carefully constructing specific roles for the other to fill according to their own interests and desires. While Montagu made her journey an opportunity to further her identity as an intellectual while also establishing herself as an adventurer, Pope's letters paint her as being perhaps more praiseworthy for her beautiful body than for her focus on travel and learning. In the meantime, while Pope sought Montagu's acknowledgment in his assumed role as a hyper-masculine sentimental gallant, she focused her efforts on gaining his respect as an intellectual equal. In the end, while each went to considerable effort to construct the other within these respective roles, both were to be disappointed.

### **Historicizing the Poets' Epistolary Collections**

The epistolary productions of this era constitute a unique and highly gendered literary form. While men had long been encouraged to write and express their thoughts

---

<sup>30</sup> In Gardner, "Gossip, Flattery, and Flirtation: The Art of Eighteenth-Century Letter Writing" (2007).

<sup>31</sup> Grundy offers an evocative description of their shared social group during this time in Montagu's life: "The impression is of a group of clever young people fooling around, their class differences dissolved in shared fun" (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 92).

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

in various forums as a seemingly natural facet of masculinity, for many years women were discouraged from writing. The scene shifted, however, in the eighteenth century. Now women suddenly became the target audience for a huge number of familiar letter-writing manuals as well as penmanship manuals, grammar books and other related literature. Some writers even insisted that women, by virtue of their sex, generally surpassed men in letter writing: “Your sex much excels our own,” one male writer declared to his female audience, “in the ease and graces of epistolary correspondence” (Dierks 33). Letter-writing manuals increasingly encouraged the use of a spontaneous, conversational style—something in which women were widely believed to excel.<sup>32</sup>

Letters were increasingly viewed as a way to negate distance and thus continue conversations despite one speaker’s absence. As S. Dalton describes in the book *Engendering the Republic of Letters : Reconnecting Public and Private Spheres in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, correspondents utilizing this form “ask and answer questions, quote from preceding letters, and use a language of immediacy, including using the present tense and a vocabulary of vision and speech” (5). Despite such similarities to face-to-face conversation, however, the communication preserved in such correspondence remained distinct from immediate conversation. Letters required a certain amount of effort, allowed participants to ignore topics that they did not wish to address, and conversely could encourage them to voice thoughts that they otherwise would not discuss.

The letters exchanged between Montagu and Pope during these years are intriguing and occasionally shocking; they are also extant largely in forms edited and approved by the poets after their enmity was firmly established. As Eve Tavor Bannet explores in the review essay “Studies in British and American Epistolary Culture,” authors often deliberately fashioned personae for themselves by way of both the content and the form of their letters. They deliberately selected which letters they preserved, and sometimes they doctored their selections. Occasionally, as in the case of Montagu, writers’ families and other parties also took part in editing and censoring correspondences for the sake of protecting individual or familial reputation (Grundy,

---

<sup>32</sup> For more information, see: Dalton, S. (Author). *Engendering the Republic of Letters : Reconnecting Public and Private Spheres in Eighteenth-Century Europe*. Montreal, QC, CAN: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004.

*Comet of the Enlightenment*, xix). The styles of the letters exchanged between Montagu and Pope makes it clear that each writer played with personae commonly adopted in eighteenth century letter-writing, with Pope's frequently behaving as the sentimental gallant and Montagu's acting as a historian preserving the tale of her journey for posterity.

Pope produced his authorized copy of his letters in May 1737, when the antagonism between he and Montagu was at its height. Given this timing, it would be reasonable to assume that his letters to Lady Mary were calculated to act as additional weapons in the poets' ongoing battle. Two years prior, Pope had tricked notoriously corrupt London publisher Curll into producing a collection of Pope's letters without the poet's permission; Pope used the result to bring serious questions about copyright to parliament (Mack 653). The earlier edition also meant that Pope was able to issue his authorized edition in 1737 without appearing vain or egotistical (Rogers, "Nameless Names," 239). The differences between the two editions shed light on the poet's active role in censoring and highlighting elements of his own work: while the unauthorized edition includes Pope's comment on what a fine sight the "Lady Abroad" would be if she were naked, the later publication lays bare the poet's fantasy of Lady Mary's shedding both Western clothing and inhibitions as she moves westward.<sup>33</sup>

Montagu's letters were published posthumously in May 1763 as the *Letters of the Right Honourable Lady M—y W—y M—e, written during her travels in Europe, Asia, and Africa, to persons of distinction, men of letters, &c., in different parts of Europe. Which contain, among other curious relations, accounts of the policy and manners of the Turks, drawn from sources that have been inaccessible to other travelers*. These letters were released to the public well after the furor of the poets' private pamphlet war had died down; however, this timing also indicates that Montagu had had many years to reflect upon the former friendship symbolized by these letters and to censor accordingly. While the chilliness of Montagu's responses to Pope has been explained away through reference to her likely expectation that the letters would eventually be published as

---

<sup>33</sup> While Pope's highly sexualized admiration for Montagu may have figured prominently in the early letters, the exposure of these fantasies to the public eye must have been "anxious reading" for Montagu, and was certainly more likely to cause damage to her reputation than to his (Grundy, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 368).



travel writing, even as published works the letters addressed to Montagu's female friends "are positively extravagant in comparison" (Rumbold 140). The later antagonism between Montagu and Pope—when combined with Montagu's later opportunities to edit the letters—may account for this disparity.

### **Valiant Adventurer and Sentimental Swain: Exploring the Poets' Epistolary Personae**

While Lady Mary wrote her letters in the mode of a travel writer and adventurer, Pope may have modeled his style after the work of French sentimental letter-writer Vincent Voiture, whose heavily styled familiar courtly letters were widely read and admired in France and England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>34</sup> While direct emulation of the French epistolary icon is uncertain, the sentimental gallant was a popular persona assumed by many male letter-writers at the time. The role would have been particularly attractive to Pope, whose disabilities prevented his participation in much conventionally masculine gender performance. When Montagu departed from England for a journey from which few expected a prompt return (her husband's diplomatic appointment in Constantinople was initially expected to last for decades, or even until the end of his life) she supplied Pope with a convenient focus for his adulation.

The openness of Pope's letters may have been partially based on the customs and style of the time, but the written nature of the medium and his distance from Lady Mary's bodily presence probably allowed him to speak more freely about his painful physical limitations. His letters profess to be "the most *impartial* representations of a *free* heart, and the truest copies you ever saw, though of a very mean original. Not a feature will be softened, or any advantageous light employed to make the ugly thing a little less hideous; but you shall find it, in all respects, most horribly like" (*The Works of Alexander Pope; with Notes and Illustrations by Joseph Warton* 14). These "impartial

---

<sup>34</sup> Pope later mourned the icon's demise in "Epistle to Mrs. Blount, with the works of Voiture":  
"Ev'n rival Wits did Voiture's death deplore,  
And the gay mourn'd who never mourn'd before;  
The truest hearts for Voiture heaved with sighs,  
Voiture was wept by all the brightest Eyes" (*The Works of Alexander Pope; with Notes and Illustrations by Joseph Warton* 299-300)

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

representations” proved extremely affectionate and perhaps (for Montagu) uncomfortably forward. In the first letter, Pope tells Lady Mary that she has ruined him “for all the conversation of one sex, and almost all the friendship of the other” since she’s shown him “that the company of men wants a certain softness to recommend it, and that of women wants everything else” (*The Works of Alexander Pope; with Notes and Illustrations by Joseph Warton* 16). This early and heavily complimentary letter still hints at Pope’s uneasiness with Montagu’s intellectual abilities, though. After describing her as “more powerful than philosophy” and “wiser than all the sages,” he writes: “A plague of female wisdom! it makes a man ten times more uneasy than his own” (*The Works of Alexander Pope; with Notes and Illustrations by Joseph Warton* 11). Such sentiments make for ominous foreshadowing of the fear of “female wit” that would figure so prominently in his later attacks.

Pope frequently bemoaned the distance that separated him from Lady Mary. However, he also deemed that distance sufficient reason to disregard “a great many of those punctilious restrictions and decorums that oftentimes in nearer conversation prejudice truth to save good breeding” (*The Works of Alexander Pope; with Notes and Illustrations by Joseph Warton* 12). Lady Mary may have been intimidating in person with her “ingrained great-lady manners, her vigorous health, and her larger size (smaller than most women, but still larger than he was),” but when he had reframed her through his letters Pope could feel at ease (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 125). The distance between them ensured that her immediate perceptions would be of his strength of written expression. Thus the medium gave him the freedom to redefine himself as a highly masculine sentimental swain. Pope’s letters offer a window into the “imaginative worlds outside his native decorum” where he can “find a context for the aspirations other people take for granted” (Rumbold 140). When Rumbold considers Pope’s retelling to Montagu of a story of a queen who fell in love with a dwarf, she describes how “he is also reminding himself that only in a grotesque world could his body be other than repulsive...He offers in the same breath to follow her 'to those parts of India, where they tell us the Women best like the Ugliest fellows...and look upon Deformities as the Signatures of divine Favour’” (140).

A few times in the course of these letters, Pope professes respect for Lady Mary’s husband Edward Wortley, theoretically negating his seeming flirtation with Montagu

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

through these open acknowledgments of her marital status. Even these mentions, though, generally shift into waxing lyrical about Wortley's good fortune in having Montagu as his wife. Pope tells Montagu, "May you continue to think him worthy of whatever you have done; may you ever look upon him with the eyes of a first lover, nay, if possible, with all the unreasonable happy fondness of an unexperienced one, surrounded with all the enchantments and ideas of romance and poetry" (*The Works of Alexander Pope, Esq. with Notes and Illustrations* 13). Pope's discussion of the "happy fondness" of the inexperienced would seem to apply more to his own situation than to Montagu's, given her lukewarm marriage and Pope's epistolary devotion—but at the same time Pope's words suggest a more distant and perhaps condescending appreciation. He looked in upon her marriage with great enthusiasm, but he could offer no such spectacle for her viewing.

Pope also insisted that Montagu's husband must be overwhelmed by her "Self-neglect and Resolution" in accompanying him—as Grundy points out, the idea that she was gratifying her own interests does not seem to have occurred to him (*Comet of the Enlightenment*, 126). Such blatant misconstruction of her character—often combined with professions of affection—feature prominently throughout his letters. At several moments he pushes the boundaries of propriety, such as in his repeated request that Lady Mary bring him back a "fair Circassian" slave whose primary quality would be physical resemblance to Lady Mary herself.<sup>35</sup> Few scholars have placed much emphasis on this overture, which may be dismissed as traversing the very edges of acceptable gallantry at a time when rampant flattery was an expected epistolary style for men addressing noblewomen. These requests seem to go beyond simple flattery, though. Their blatant sexual overtones offered Pope the opportunity to assert his masculinity and eroticize his affection for Lady Mary; he insists that the slave would serve as his "mistress," and justifies his request with the pronouncement "I am past a boy" (*The Works of Alexander Pope, Esq. with Notes and Illustrations* 107). In the meantime he

---

<sup>35</sup> Though the idea that a stranger's enslavement might be an acceptable basis for a romantic overture is disturbing from a present-day perspective, Pope and Montagu (like most other British intellectuals and aristocrats of their time) probably would not have considered slavery to be problematic or remarkable. Montagu may have even participated in the slave trade; Grundy says in regard to Montagu's involvement in the stock market that "No investor seems to have given a moment's thought to the presence of negro slaves among the commodities ostensibly being traded" (*Comet of the Enlightenment* 206).

exhibits a telling discomfort with Lady Mary's assertiveness as exemplified by her body when he asks that the slave's resemblance to her be tempered by "colours a little less vivid" and "eyes a little less bright." The slave's presence must be less powerful than that of Lady Mary herself. Otherwise, he says, "instead of being her master, I must be only her slave" (*The Works of Alexander Pope, Esq. with Notes and Illustrations* 116).

Orientalist eroticization of Lady Mary and the "East" was a frequent theme throughout Pope's part in the friends' correspondence. An early letter in 1716 waxes poetic in a fantasy of Lady Mary's accession to "the Customs of the True Believers" (Pope's term for the Muslim people of the Ottoman empire): "At this Town they will say, she practiced to sit on the Sofa; at this village she learnt to fold the Turban; here she was bathed and anointed...Lastly I shall hear how the very first Night you lay in Pera, you had a Vision of Mohomet's Paradise, and happily awaked without a soul." To this fantasy he adds the daring announcement that, due to her lack of a soul, her "beautiful Body" would be "left at full liberty to perform all the agreeable functions it was made for" (Garcia 60). In a similarly stereotyping and sexualizing letter two years later, Pope assures Montagu that more than her "Sonnets" and "Oriental Learning" he longs for her "Oriental self." He proceeds eroticize both her spirit and her form by telling her, "I expect to see your soul as much thinner dressed as your body...Without offense to your modesty be it spoken, I have a burning desire to see your soul stark naked" (*The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* 338). Pope's phrasing in these sentences leaves the reader in little doubt as to his attraction to Montagu's body regardless of any interest in her soul. He alleges that her relocation to Constantinople must have left her soulless, a quality he attributes to Muslims. The next few lines communicate both the urgency of his desire and his determination to define creation as a masculine prerogative: "if I must be content with seeing your body only," he writes, "God send it to come quickly... in the very twinkle of one eye there is more wit, and in the very dimple of one cheek of it there is more meaning, than all the souls that ever were casually put into women since men had the making of them" (*The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* 338). Pope's description of Montagu's body as a mere holder for her "stark naked" soul, or—more scandalously—for the lack of a soul he attributes to followers of "Mahomet," makes this imagined soul seem indecent because of his sexualized fascination with its supposed beauty. Such attitudes are typical of Pope's

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

approach to Montagu in these letters, though: while he repeatedly insists on his admiration for Montagu's intelligence, he consistently ties this admiration to erotic appreciation for her body. As Rumbold describes regarding Pope's erotic fantasy of Montagu's travels, "Lady Mary reduced to 'the beautiful Body' would not have been the fascinating woman she was, but having been fascinated Pope revels in speculating on a relationship as unfettered by decorum as by her intellectual assertiveness" (Rumbold 138). The version of Montagu created in Pope's letters is "the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning" (Mulvey 58).

In a social context, Montagu's demotion to the role of spectacle served a specific function in Pope's writing. By demoting the Lady Mary of his letters to a fascinating and exotic object, Pope could construct an appealing persona for himself as its complement: the virile masculine character that his physical disabilities had long barred him from assuming in embodied interactions with his peers. The role Lady Mary herself strove to assume was far too assertive and too adventurous to accommodate Pope's more conventional expectations of women—as Rumbold observes, Pope's esteem for his close female friends "was in effect conditional on their conformity in manners and conversation with more conventional feminine ideals" (109). The role he constructed for Lady Mary thus became something of a composite—a mix that included some of her own traits and some belonging to "radically different women" (Rumbold 109).

Lady Mary herself had already balked the expectations of her time by choosing to accompany her husband to Constantinople; her writings during her journey cement her status as a courageous and enthusiastic adventurer. She approaches her travels with a wry attitude and a careful eye for cultural details, making droll comments at even the most dangerous moments of the journey. Preparing to travel through war-torn sections of Europe under the threat of life-threatening weather conditions, Lady Mary sent the following note to Pope:

I think, I ought to bid adieu to my friends with the same solemnity as if I was going to mount a breach... the weather is at present such, as very few ever set out in. I am threatened, at the same time, with being frozen to death, buried in the snow, and taken by the Tartars, who ravage that part of Hungary I am to pass. 'Tis true, we shall have a considerable *escort*, so that possibly I may be diverted by a new scene, by finding myself in the midst of a battle.

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

How my adventures will conclude, I leave entirely to Providence; if comically, you shall hear of them. (*The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* 235)

She finishes the note with a request that Pope tell their friend Congreve that she had received his letter, explaining, “if I live, I will answer it” (*The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* 235). Montagu was aware that her party would face very real dangers departing from Vienna that winter; her levity in the face of such peril might be read as frivolous. However, the level-headedness she exhibits in her other extant travel correspondence indicates that there was probably a more self-conscious element to her comedy. Montagu’s courage was of a piece with her pride. She had taken on the role of the intellectual adventurer when she made the decision to journey to Constantinople. Now, no matter how dangerous the circumstances, she would play that role to the hilt.

Lady Mary’s attitude towards Pope in her letters seems almost unsettlingly businesslike given the effusive pronouncements of affection that he directs towards her. Her extant letters, though, were produced (and likely censored after the fact) with the expectation that they would later be released to the public as travelogues. Montagu was writing her letters as a friend but also as a historian; no matter how often Pope beseeched her to share her innermost feelings, her observations of Viennese gallantries and “Oriental learning” were far more suited to publication in the travel genre. Furthermore, it is likely that in these letters—and in person—she hoped to be seen as Pope’s intellectual peer rather than an object of desire. While she directed talk of her social successes to her sister Frances and politics to her friend Lady Bristol, she reserved the literary aspects of her travels for Pope (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 144). She sent him translations of “Oriental” poetry, and alluded to his Homer translations in her ensuing discussion of the vagaries of prose translation (*The Works of Alexander Pope; with Notes and Illustrations by Joseph Warton* 76). She also peppered her letters to him with references to Greek philosophers and plays by Plautus, Molière, and Dryden. Grundy theorizes that Montagu may have hoped “to join the circle of learned friends who helped with his Homer translations,” especially given her attention to matters of eastern manners and poetics that may have related to his work translating Homer (*Comet of the Enlightenment*, 145). Montagu saw herself as an intellectual, and had likely met Pope through a shared social circle of intellectual young

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

people back in London. She may have hoped that these letters would offer opportunities to exercise her wit in correspondence with an intellectual peer. If Pope noticed any such intellectual aspirations, though, he ignored them—focusing instead on the feminine softness that (in his view) must dominate her personality for her to live up to the role that he had constructed for her.

### **Early Conflict: A Collision of Sentiments**

Their conflicting portrayals of one another came to a head in a now infamous exchange of letter and verse. Pope precipitated the incident with a sentimental account of two young lovers who were struck by lightning in Oxfordshire—which Rumbold believes he saw “as just the topic to bring out the latent softness” he still believed existed in Montagu (Rumbold 140). He recounted his version of the moments after the lovers’ deaths—how the “faithful pair” were “already stiff and cold” with John’s hand hovering protectively over his Sarah’s face “as if to screen her from the lightning” (*The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* 339). Thoroughly caught up in the picturesque sentimentality of the tragedy, Pope requested that the local lord erect a monument for the couple. In his letter to Lady Mary, he included copies of two epitaphs he wrote for this monument—though he was sure that she would have written verses more deserving on “so moving an occasion” (*The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* 339).

His pastoral portrait of the couple idealizes both marriage and the laboring classes—neither of which would have constituted endearing sentiments for a pragmatic aristocrat like Montagu. Even more offensive, though, would have been his repeated insistence that she offer a sentimental reaction to the event. “I know you have tenderness,” he told her, “you must have it...the finest minds, like the finest metals, dissolve the easiest” (*The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* 340). As Rumbold describes, Pope seemed concerned that Montagu had yet to display any of the softness that he believed was integral to feminine charm. His discussion of the deceased couple thus solicited this softness with minimal subtlety. He hoped she would share in his sentimental mourning: “The greatest honor people of this low degree could have was to be remembered on a little monument,” he told her, “unless you will give them

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

another,—that of being honored with a tear from the finest eyes in the world” (*The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* 340).

The persona that Pope had constructed for Montagu might have responded in kind, just as a woman who fit a more conventional feminine persona may have joined with him in his sentimental effusions. His solicitations of her pity “for himself and his extremity of fondness” may also have met with a more sympathetic response from such a correspondent (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 177). After all, Pope’s efforts to elicit pity were well suited to the role of the sentimental gallant that he was accustomed to playing in his letters. As Rumbold notes, “Pity, as the Chaucerian echo reminds us, is the key to the courtly lover’s hopes” (Rumbold 141). The actual woman with whom Pope corresponded, though, did not remotely resemble the persona that he had so lovingly constructed in the course of their correspondence. The true Montagu was probably already offended by Pope’s erotic depictions of her soul and body in this and previous letters. Now she found in Pope’s demands for sentimentality an impetus less for sentiment than for satire.

Lady Mary’s reply diverged sharply from Pope’s assumptions regarding her supposedly unquestionable tenderness. She promptly drew the pastoral romance back within the strictures of her aristocratic reality by pointing out that Pope’s “pastoral lovers” are “vulgarly called haymakers,” then offered satirical applause for Pope’s naïveté (politely termed “good-nature”) in assuming that the lovers “would have lived in everlasting joy and harmony” had they not been killed by the lightning (*The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley-Montagu* 340-341). She then proceeds to briskly puncture each pastoral element of Pope’s passionate retelling of the lovers’ tale. There is no reason to assume that the lovers were particularly virtuous or unusual, she says—had they survived, they likely would have led unremarkable lives similar to those of all their neighbors. Their sudden death could not really be interpreted as a reward for their virtue; “Time and chance happen to all men” (*The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley-Montagu* 341). Pope’s touching recounting of John’s protectiveness meets with an especially chilling retort: that the arm across the lover’s face was such a natural response that John certainly would have done the same “for his horse, if he had been in the same situation” (*The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley-Montagu* 341).

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*



Montagu then takes Pope up on the suggestion that she compose an epitaph to the lovers. The resulting verse is remarkable in both its wit and its irreverence. She addresses and dismisses any idea of special providence, saying of the lovers, “But the bold thunder found them out | (Commission'd for that end no doubt)” (*The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley-Montagu* 341). She mocks Pope’s romanticized notion of marriage with zeal, saying of the lovers’ death,

Who knows if 'twas not kindly done?  
For had they seen the next year's sun,  
A beaten wife and cuckold swain  
Had jointly curs'd the marriage chain. (*The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley-Montagu* 341)

She concludes the letter with a self-deprecating riposte to his portrayal of death as a reward for the virtuous: “You see how much I esteem the honor you have done them; though I am not very impatient to have the same, and had rather continue to be your stupid *living* humble servant than be *celebrated* by all the pens in Europe” (*The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley-Montagu* 341). While Montagu may have concluded the letter on a fond note, her mockery must have been difficult for her sentimental swain to stomach after his heartfelt epitaphs. Montagu’s rejection of his expectations of her tenderness, especially when combined with the targeted mockery of her verses, probably shook the foundations of their early affections.

If the correspondence between Montagu and Pope is any indication, significant portions of their friendship were built on illusions based on each writer’s hopes for and expectations of the other. Though Pope probably did not expect Montagu to reciprocate his erotic interest, he likely would have been pleased to see her fulfill a more conventional feminine role. In his eyes she was a desirable wanderer, a spectacle made all the more dramatic by her journey to the exotic east, but her attractiveness was still contingent on her subscribing to certain elements of conventional femininity (like “softness”). In the meantime, Montagu sought recognition within history as a travel writer and within their correspondence as Pope’s intellectual equal. Her detached rationality was central to each of these goals. One cannot be much surprised by her impatience at Pope’s expectation that she would shed tears over the pastoral tragedy of two strangers when she would not betray emotional unease in her letter that openly discussed the possibility of her own demise.

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

## **Returning Home**

In the summer of 1717, Edward Wortley received word that he was to return to England; his diplomatic efforts in Constantinople had been cut short for reasons outside of his control. Montagu's letters communicate a clear disappointment about the sudden change in plans. Many diplomatic appointments extended for decades; after just over a year in Constantinople, though, her travels were now drawing to a close. The prospect of returning home may have raised concerns for Montagu regarding the future of her friendship with Pope. Their recent relationship had been firmly based on the fact of her distance; the miles between them meant his theoretical devotion ran no real risk of being tested, a fact that likely came as a relief for both correspondents (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 165). Furthermore, that distance and the epistolary medium offered Montagu the option of ignoring less agreeable elements of Pope's attitudes towards her. Montagu's return to London would change the game for both correspondents.

In a final letter, Pope asked Lady Mary to send him a message immediately after her return to England. Whether she acted on his request is hard to tell, but after her arrival in London in October 1718 Pope took his time in making the journey into the city. The relationship between the two faced an unanticipated shift from the imagined and idealized roles each had constructed for each other to the reality of two stubbornly dominant personalities. Montagu's first adventure abroad, and the writers' profligate correspondence, was drawing to a close.

## V. Turning Point

*“Once, and but once, his heedless youth was bit,  
And lik’d that dang’rous thing, a female wit.”<sup>36</sup>*

### **Growing Apart**

In a 1720 letter to her sister Frances, Lady Mary insisted that she saw Pope very little. Regardless, records of the two indicate that they maintained consistent contact during this period. During the summer of 1719 Dr. Arbuthnot poked fun at Pope’s tendency, when in Lady Mary’s company, of making bad puns “for which you are so often reprimanded, & never reformed” (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 181). At about the same time Pope reviewed some of Montagu’s earlier writings, and he showed Lord Bathurst his ornate manuscript of her court eclogues (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 199).

At the beginning of 1720 Pope commissioned his friend Sir Godfrey Kneller to paint a portrait of Montagu on his behalf. From the letter in which Pope describes the intentions of the portrait it would seem that the two were still close. The opening dwells on Pope’s affection for Lady Mary: “Indeed, dear Madam, 'tis not possible to tell you, whether you give me every day I see you, more pleasure or more respect” (*The Works of Alexander Pope, Esq.*, 241). One might speculate from Pope’s words that Lady Mary had expressed some trepidation about sitting for a portrait, perhaps because her encounter with smallpox had left her beautiful face visibly pockmarked. Pope seems to respond to such doubts when he writes, “I have made a perfect passion of preferring your present face to your past” (*The Works of Alexander Pope, Esq.*, 242). His awareness of the public nature of their friendship then comes to the foreground: “Only give me cause to say you are good to me” (Pope, *The Works of Alexander Pope, Esq.*, 242). Pope then moves into a discussion of how the sittings will be arranged. This was not a private arrangement: once completed, the painting would hang in Pope’s home in full view of callers. The openness of the transaction, however, is belied by Pope’s allusion to his

---

<sup>36</sup> This couplet appears in an early draft of Pope’s *An Epistle to Arbuthnot* (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 348). Pope would discard these lines before the poem’s publication in 1735.

earlier hopes to possess her image in the form of a look-alike Circassian slave; now he asks her with this portrait, “allow me as much of your Person as Sir Godfrey can help me to” (*The Works of Alexander Pope, Esq.*, 242). This portrait of Lady Mary would remain prominently displayed in Pope’s “Best Room Fronting the Thames” until the end of his life, when the two had long been known to the world as bitter enemies (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 201).

Gay joined in Pope’s effusions in a verse celebration of Pope’s completion of the Iliad in the spring of 1720. In this poem Gay paid tribute to Montagu when a translator “singles out from a troop of admiring ladies one whose ‘eyes’ declare she is ‘Wortley’.” Gay exclaims, “How art thou honour’d, number’d with her friends? | For she distinguishes the good and wise” (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 199). Later that year Pope made a similar reference to Montagu’s eyes, writing that although he has perfected his garden he cannot enjoy it in her absence since “Joy...only dwells where W— casts her eyes” (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 199).

That summer Pope also gave Montagu some unfortunate financial advice: he recommended in a letter that she purchase South Sea Stock, probably not realizing that she was buying on behalf of a third party. The intended beneficiary was a French man named Rémond who had been pursuing Montagu “with a platonic and probably calculated passion” for years (Rumbold, *Women’s Place in Pope’s World*, 142). The stock fell continuously from the date of Pope’s letter, and Rémond blamed Montagu for the change in fortune. In a series of increasingly heated letters, he told her that if she could not pay him a substantial sum of money he would have their correspondence exposed to Edward Wortley—a turn of events that would, Lady Mary told her sister, have caused “inevitable misfortunes” (Rumbold 142). Lady Mary “begged him to return the letters; she begged her sister Frances (now in Paris) to reason with him; she sent back a present he had given her; she complained that the suspense was undermining her health” (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 207). Eventually Lady Mary must have confided in her husband, and the most threatening letters were probably given over to lawyers. Rémond faded into the background and stayed there until Pope’s later attacks “conjured him up as a skeleton in her closet” (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment* 209).<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the Rémond affair see Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 204-209.

Lady Mary and her husband moved to a rented home near Pope's in Twickenham that year—a move that Grundy attributes partly to Pope's "eager manœuvring" (*Comet of the Enlightenment*, 270). Grundy notes that Pope's efforts to influence Montagu's choice of neighborhood and his earlier arrangement to procure her portrait may indicate that he felt that he did not have enough control over her. She references an "undatable, confessedly agitated note" in which he assures her "Indeed I truly Esteem you, and Trust in you" (*Comet of the Enlightenment* 270).

The writers' friendship only survived a few Twickenham years. Pope's last extant letter to Lady Mary was written in September 1721 to apologize for having to withdraw his offer to lend her a harpsichord. As Rumbold describes, this letter has "no air of final breach about it: [Pope] offers his own house for her consort, is pleased that she liked his gardens, passes on an invitation from Lord Bathurst and closes with an impenetrable private joke" (142). In April of 1722 Montagu told her sister that she saw him "very seldom" but in the same letter she enclosed Pope's latest verses written in her honor. A few months later a town gossip reported that "she and Pope keep so close yonder that they are a talk to the whole town," but from a letter to her sister it seems that Montagu had not even seen the improvements Pope was making to his grotto (Rumbold 142-143). That same year, Pope announced publishing proposals for his translation of the *Odyssey*. Between 1722 and 1724 Wortley put his name down for five copies—a generous contribution to Pope's work. Such details, especially when considered in combination with their letters, hint less at some overt ill will than at a slow process of growing apart.

Montagu's last two notes to Pope are tantalizingly uninformative. In 1723 she wrote a short note asking Pope for a book, and offering to call if he was not well enough to come to her. Her final letter, a few lines written that same year, does not suggest any particular tensions. She tells him, "If you are not well enough to come hither, I will be with you tomorrow morning, having something particular to say to You" (Rumbold 142-143). In a letter written in September 1724, Pope apologized to their mutual friend Bathurst for neglecting Lady Mary. He promised to "endeavor (for your sake) to know more of her, than perhaps I might otherwise do" but his tone implies a profound lack of enthusiasm. His later aspersions to Lady Mary's honesty have a precursor in this letter's questions of "what further fiction, than that whc [sic] is necessary to Poetry, may

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

be in her.” Finally he admits to Bathurst that he finds Lady Mary indecipherable, and says, “I can assure yu [*sic*] that in me there is no Degree of Fiction sufficient to qualify me for a Decypherer [*sic*]. God forbid there ever should!” (*The Correspondence of Alexander Pope* 258; Hughes 462). These lines hardly make for a promising basis for any reconciliation. Pope’s distrust of Lady Mary’s integrity had already come into play, and his pride forbade him from even expressing interest in becoming someone—“a Decypherer,” he said—who would be able to understand her actions.

In 1724 newspapers solicited subscribers for Pope’s upcoming edition of Shakespeare. In contrast to their earlier subscriptions for the *Odyssey*, the Wortleys made no known contribution to Pope’s latest venture. In the next couple years Montagu and Pope’s lives diverged, but they continued to move in the same circles. Lady Mary was painted by Pope’s close friend Jonathan Richardson in a 1726 portrait, and in a reprint of the “Epistle to Jervas” Pope made no alterations to the his earlier compliment to “Wortley’s Eyes” (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 272). Few other peaceable interactions between the two appear, though. By the end of the 1720s only couple old friends—Bathurst and Congreve—remained close with both.

### **The Falling-Out: Rumors and Speculation**

The details of any inciting moment that tore apart this faltering friendship have eluded literary scholars and historians for centuries. In the years that followed, both writers agreed that Pope had dropped the friendship before any overt conflict arose. In a letter to Lord Hervey in 1733, however, Pope wrote that he had not had “the least misunderstanding with that lady, till after I was the *author* of my own misfortune in discontinuing her acquaintance” (*The Works of Alexander Pope, Esq. with Notes and Illustrations by Himself and Others* 464). As with his accusations in “The Capon’s Tale” of Lady Mary’s foisting off lampoons on other (unnamed) parties, Pope’s discussion of the falling-out in this later places the blame upon Lady Mary, insisting that she attacked him for his silence rather than any active words or lampoons. Also in this letter he offered a terse explanation for his disengagement from prior friendships with both Montagu and Hervey: “I assure you my reason for doing so was merely that you had both *too much wit* for me, and that I could not do with mine, many things, which you could with yours”

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

(*The Works of Alexander Pope, Esq. with Notes and Illustrations by Himself and Others* 464). Around that same year, Pope drafted the following couplet for his *First Satire of the Second Book of Horace*:

Once, and but once, his heedless youth was bit,  
And lik'd that dang'rous thing, a female wit. (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 348)

Pope's early eagerness to "declare himself intensely and outrageously attracted by witty woman" had by now wholly given way to a fear and hatred for female intelligence (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 90-91). Soon the beauty and intellect that had first attracted him to Lady Mary would become ample fodder for his literary lampoons.

Lady Mary made several attempts through their mutual friend Arbuthnot to find out "why he had left off visiting me." On the second occasion, Pope told Arbuthnot that Montagu and Hervey "had pressed him once together...to write a satire on some certain persons" and conflict arose when he refused. Lady Mary rejected this explanation, saying that the three writers had never spent time together "in our lives" (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 273). Rumbold suggests that Pope was jealous of Montagu's relationship with Hervey, particularly in the early 1720s when Hervey became Montagu's primary collaborator in her written work (144). The explanation that Pope offered to Arbuthnot may indicate that Pope envied Lady Mary's relationship with Hervey. Lady Mary also suggested to a friend, Lady Pomfret, that Pope was jealous of her friendship with Wharton (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 273). Her claim may be supported by Pope's later aspersions upon Wharton as someone "ruined by his need for the praise of 'women and fools'" (Rumbold 144).

Other theories and stories of their falling-out surfaced continuously during following centuries. One such tale, repeated by the popular voice of Lord Byron and such near affiliations as Lady Mary's own granddaughter (Landry 309), says that Pope declared his love for Lady Mary and was brusquely rejected:

At some ill-chosen time, when she least expected what romances call a *declaration*, he made such passionate love to her, as, in spite of her utmost endeavors to be angry and look grave, provoked an immoderate fit of laughter; from which moment he became her implacable enemy. (Rumbold 143)

This story, which Rumbold terms the "rejected passion theory," has in recent years been discussed and dismissed by researchers on both sides of the historical aisle. Various

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

factors undermine its plausibility. Pope's defensiveness with women is apparent in biographical research, if not in his lovelorn poems. Grundy, whose biographical work centers on Montagu, writes that Pope "was far too self-protective to risk such a declaration; besides, he seems to have nourished romantic feelings in her absence rather than in her presence, which he found unsettlingly independent and assertive" (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 274). Maynard Mack, a Pope biographer, makes note of Pope's "painfully acquired wariness about exposing his crippled self to humiliations," referring back to an earlier incident of Pope's immediate fear "of being cuckolded by some handsome Lord Foppington when in 1717 his friend Harcourt suggested that he marry a Harcourt relation" (Mack 553). Mack also points out that Lady Mary made no mention of any such declarations in any of the poems, published or unpublished, that made up her side of their nearly decade-long poetic battle. If such an overture had taken place and Lady Mary had refused Pope's advances, the story would have made for a tempting piece to include in her poetic catalogues of Pope's sins (Mack 553). Grundy suggests an alternate possibility: that this story is the hazier version of a true incident of Montagu "turning savagely on what she felt as sexual harassment by innuendo" (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 274). While such a turn of events seems possible given the personalities at play in this drama, Rumbold's observation that a declaration of love from Pope would have been "inconsistent with the gradual cooling the letters suggest" would also seem to apply to any confrontation based around Montagu's perception of direct harassment (Rumbold 143).

Various theories regarding their falling-out circulated during the 1720s and '30s, many sounding more than not like spurious rumor. One popular tale said that when Pope showed Lady Mary his epigram on a beautiful woman with an ugly mind, Lady Mary had responded with her own verse:

Had Pope a person equall to his Mind  
 How fatal wou'd he be to Womankind  
 But Nature which doth all things well ordain  
 Defac'd the Image and inrich'd the Brain.

Another story said that when Lady Mary heard of Pope's setting up a memorial at Twickenham to his old nurse, she quipped: "No wonder that he's so stout and so strong | Since he lugg'd and he tugg'd at the bubby so long" Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 273). Neither of these stories can be backed by solid evidence, though;

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*



and while their cruelty does not preclude their truth, Lady Mary's reluctance to engage in public conflict during the early years of their lampoons make such accounts sound less like historical fact than like the gleeful gossip of the writers' contemporaries.

Modern theorists offer similarly varying explanations. While most simply repeat the theory that Montagu rejected Pope's amorous advances, Lois Kathleen Mahaffey suggests that Lady Mary and Maria Skerrett were secret lovers and Pope's horror upon discovering their relationship prompted him to make immediate attacks against Montagu and, in 1738, offer vehement denunciations of Maria. However, these charges are difficult to support. As Grundy notes, while Lady Mary may have been covertly accused of being a lesbian, Pope's own lines make no such allegations. Furthermore, the timeline of Pope's attacks destabilizes this theory, as he first lampooned Lady Mary in 1728 but then waited a full decade before making Skerrett the target of his satire (Grundy 269).

Gender issues may have arisen as a source of conflict within another sphere: politics. While in past years Lady Mary had participated in politics under the guise of forwarding her husband's diplomatic and political interests, during the 1720s Lady Mary began to distance herself from her husband's faltering career while associating with some of the most powerful members of the Whig party. In taking such steps she exhibited an interest in politics that could not be "masked by the pretense of marital duty" (Rumbold 144). Even in the early days of their relationship Pope had revealed an acute discomfort at the idea that women might balk his passive ideals of femininity; his disapproval of Lady Mary's "unfeminine" ambition thus may have played a central role in the rift (Rumbold 144).

Other political possibilities also spring up to muddy the waters. The decade when this conflict arose was a time of political schism in England, and Lady Mary and Pope had strong personal alliances on opposite sides of the widening divide. Pope's Jacobite friend Bolingbroke (whose name would later be joined with Pope's in Montagu's satirical poem *Pope to Bolingbroke*) returned to England from political banishment in 1723 and became known for writing pseudonymous political pieces aimed at undermining the powerful Whig politician Horace Walpole. Lady Mary had long hated Bolingbroke, and maintained a strong personal and political allegiance to Walpole. Since Bolingbroke was a member of high society, she probably felt

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

comfortable openly discussing her dislike. By contrast, Pope was extremely loyal to Bolingbroke as a friend and a political ally who opposed the Hanoverian regime. He saw Walpole as “an emblem of bad government and personal evil” (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 271). As Grundy notes, while such causes seem trivial in the face of the works produced and infamy earned by each writer during the years of their conflict, such personal alliances must have had some effect on the relationship between the two (*Comet of the Enlightenment*, 329).

The most likely cause of overt conflict between the two writers is authorship concerns, as Pope’s 1728 poem “The Capon’s Tale” implies. This poem poses Lady Mary as both an overzealous yeoman’s (farmer’s) wife and an oversexed hen “whose tuneful clucks | Drew after her a train of cocks” (“The Capon’s Tale” 5-6). Once fertilized by these cocks, the hen “hatch’d more chicks than she could rear” (16), so the farmer’s wife arranged for a “dry-nurse” for the eggs (18): she made a capon (castrated rooster) drunk off sops, stung his rump with nettles, and placed him atop the extra eggs. When the capon awakened it joyously concluded the eggs were its own. The poem ends with a pointed couplet: “Such, Lady Mary, are your tricks; | But since you hatch pray own your chicks” (27-28).

This poem opens itself to copious interpretations. Pope’s characterizing Lady Mary as an indiscriminately promiscuous hen presages his later accusations of her sexual debauchery. It may also imply, as Grundy describes, that Lady Mary is “a society coquette” (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 274). The connection between production and promiscuity may also constitute a claim “that females need fertilization by males for literary production as for reproduction” (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 274). Given Pope’s dislike of Hervey and frequent aspersions to his masculinity, the “capon” figured in the tale could be a reference to him. Alternately (or additionally) Pope may have intended such a gullible and emasculated character to act less as a direct reference than as a foil. Pope’s later poems often featured a secondary character or speaker whose hesitance or foolishness underscored the urgency and integrity of Pope’s claims. In this poem, the capon’s foolishness acts to highlight the shrewdness of the poem’s all-knowing narrator; unlike the befuddled fowl, the narrator is not vulnerable to deception. Furthermore, the capon is blatantly emasculated, both in its past castration and its easy assumption of a mothering role. Particularly given the

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

association of that emasculation with a susceptibility to trickery, the capon's character underscores the importance of traditional masculinity in maintaining social and literary authority.

"The Capon's Tale" came to press while Lady Mary struggled to come to terms with both her sister's rapidly declining health and the public's perceptions of her family's politics, which at this point were thoroughly entrenched in Lady Mar's health problems (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 276). It is probable that Lady Mary saw the poem before most of her contemporaries, since she preserved undated draft of the poem that was written in Pope's handwriting. This draft credits the verse to "two cocks," and while Pope's hand in the work is undeniable the other author is uncertain.<sup>38</sup> As Grundy observes, in manuscript form the poem might have seemed like a friendly jibe from a fellow satirist. As a printed publication, however, "The Capon's Tale" was a brutal strike against a public rival (*Comet of the Enlightenment* 275).

Several theorists have addressed Pope's potential impetus for "The Capon's Tale." Given Montagu's penchant for satire and the literary environment at the time, it is possible that she had written verses against Pope before March 1728. As early as 1724 Pope told Bathurst that Lady Mary had in her more "fiction" than was "necessary to Poetry" (*The Correspondence of Alexander Pope* 258), and in his 1733 letter to Hervey Pope still insisted that Lady Mary had thrown the first stone in their battle of lampoons (*The Works of Alexander Pope, Esq. with Notes and Illustrations by Himself and Others* 464). Had Montagu crafted earlier lampoons they probably would have been quietly circulated at court, since much of the gossip of the time was "reported in clever verse" among those social circles (Mack 555). According to Mack, Pope thought "that either by her encouragement or by her pen she was covertly responsible for certain of the attacks made on him" and, even further, he "convinced himself that she was palming off some of her productions in this vein as his" (555). This would make sense given the content of "The Capon's Tale" as well as the sociohistorical context, though more specific evidence would make it easier to pose this theory as concrete fact. Pope's writings and comments regarding his disability (as well as the usual treatment of disabled people at that time) indicate that the poet's years of painful health problems had left him hyperaware of his

---

<sup>38</sup> Grundy theorizes that the second poet was Gay (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 275).

susceptibility to ridicule. This defensiveness could only have been reinforced when the vicious satire “A Pop Upon Pope” came to print a few months later, as discussed below. Even a suspicion of Lady Mary’s involvement in satires against him might have prompted Pope to move forward with this first published attack.

Pope had directed his (perhaps amorous) literary attentions at other women during the time period when he knew Montagu. The “pride, dress, assertiveness and most of all...[the] ‘sprightly eyes’” of one woman, Teresa Blount, had all become targets back in 1723 when Pope began to resent that his dedication to her did not provoke any tenderness or intimacy on her side of the friendship (Rumbold 130). Therefore the story begun with his growing distance from Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was, on his side of the affair, not entirely new. In October 1722 Pope’s close friend Peterborough published a poem in which he contrasted Lady Mary’s “spirit and fire” with the “artless gentility and modesty” of Lady Howard (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 270). The copy of Peterborough’s ballad that survives in Lady Mary’s archives lacks the published version’s compliment to Mrs. Howard, but it is clearly labeled as Peterborough’s work. However, Montagu also kept a “maddeningly rough, partly illegible draft” of a longer, similar ballad in Pope’s handwriting (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 271). This poem seems to compliment Lady Mary herself. It rejects other women in favor of one in whom “Not a Grace, not a Muse, not a Virtue is wanting and (though not entirely legible) the conclusion may have read “[Lady Mary] I’m sure, won’t imagine tis She” (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 271). In a verse written that same year—one with a form similar to that of this draft and Peterborough’s poem—Pope alluded to Montagu as a “glaring, ‘sprightly Sappho’, who *forces* love and praise” (emphasis in original) contrasting her unfavorably with Lady Howard, whom he praised as a “sober moon” whose soft glow will last longer than Sappho’s gaudy glare (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 270).<sup>39</sup> The rough copy that remains of Pope’s verse *might* have been the source of Peterborough’s poem. It also may have formed the basis for this later poem that Pope used to praise Lady Howard.

The transfer of what was originally a compliment to Lady Mary (and each poet’s reframing of Lady Mary as a foil to highlight the perfection of less assertive women)

---

<sup>39</sup> Pope likely knew about Montagu’s dedication to the Scudéry’s “Sappho” (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 270).

probably provoked considerable anger from Montagu. She wrote a biting quatrain in response to Peterborough's poem in which she painted him as a literary procuress, asking: "who but a Bawd will design on Threescore?" (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 271). Horace Walpole said that when Lady Mary saw the Pope's new version of the poem, she confronted Pope by sending him "the original copy in his own handwriting" (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 271). While Lady Mary's anger at this transfer of a compliment may have provoked reciprocal anger in Pope, on its own this incident seems symptomatic of a deteriorating friendship, not like the cause of a sudden upset. Pope probably would not have begun slandering Lady Mary without some belief that she had initiated the aggression, and if he believed that she was writing against him then their friendship must have already stood on shaky ground. It is possible, though, that this poetic series of events encouraged the collapse of their already waning friendship.

### **Behind the Scenes: Roots of the Conflict**

The widely varying theories regarding the writers' falling-out sport a few common threads. Pope's discomfort with Lady Mary's intelligence and sense of the ridiculous rank high among these; as Rumbold notes in regard to the "rejected passion theory," the only part of that story that does "ring true...is the laughter" (Rumbold 143). His attempts to reshape her to fit a softer model of femininity proved repeatedly unsuccessful. She would not respond as he wished to sentimental overtures or his earlier sexualizing letters; rather, she seemed to resolutely ignore such attempts on his part. Furthermore, her intellectual associations may have prompted a covert jealousy from the poet—a sentiment that would have been aggravated the insecurities produced by his physical disability and sociopolitical marginalization.

Pope seems to have been determined to view Montagu as a sentimental object of outside affections, even as Montagu was busy "constructing herself as doing and seeing and writing" (Grundy xviii). His initial attraction to her was based in her intelligence; her "female wit" seemed like a "glorious paradox" (Rumbold 145). Later, though, when she proved inflexible in the face of his best efforts to reinvent her in the form of his version of ideal femininity, he reframed her as an emblem of dangerous, unfeminine

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

womanhood. Even at this point his attacks may have been partially driven by “his sneaking attraction towards those qualities of brilliance and assertiveness which he officially condemned (and probably feared) in females” (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 329). The most likely explanation for their immediate falling out probably lies in “The Capon’s Tale,” with its harsh approach to gender roles and authorship. However, Pope’s suspicions—even if they were well founded—cannot be painted as the sole causes of their falling out. Between Montagu’s efforts to gain Pope’s consideration as an intellectual equal, Pope’s hope to gain her sentimental devotion, and his “impossible desire to be treated as a potential lover,” the two writers had long treaded on shaky ground in their friendship (Rumbold 143). The conflict between them was certainly connected to problems of embodiment. Pope proved unable to value a woman’s ambition and intellect more than her beautiful form, and Montagu’s regard for Pope’s intellect did not expand to a respect for a physique burdened by longtime disability. Each of their expectations, and their ultimate disillusion, were partially rooted in physicality. Other frictions had also been building for years, though, as their writings can attest. Pope’s appreciation of Montagu’s intellect had slowly become polluted with a sense of discomfort regarding her “female wit,” especially when coupled with Montagu’s pride and satiric edge. In the meantime, Montagu’s hopes to assign Pope the role of an intellectual friend and equal had been continually disappointed. Now, as the 1720s drew to a close, each poet finally gave up on achieving acceptance from a personally fictionalized and carefully idealized version of the other.

## VI. Poetic Justice

*“Behold it is my desire, that mine Adversary had written a Book.  
Surely I would take it on my Shoulder, and bind it as a crown unto me.”<sup>40</sup>*

Montagu and Pope’s early friendship had shifted to blatant antagonism by the end of 1728. During the years and battles that followed, each made careful use of both societal norms and personal knowledge garnered from their former friendship in vicious attacks designed to hurt the other. Montagu had read early letters from Pope that made no secret of his loathing for his physique—letters in which he implied that his form could only be seen as attractive in a “grotesque world” or in some fantastical depiction of the Orient (Rumbold 140). Now, staying true to the prejudices of the time and this deeply personal knowledge, she would make his disability a primary target of her lampoons. In the meantime, Pope would target Lady Mary’s family, her status as a woman and her work on inoculation. While his initial suspicions of Lady Mary’s lampooning him may or may not have been correct and London society proffered huge numbers of satiric targets, Pope’s anger towards Lady Mary somehow stood apart from his other enmities. His writings showcase an aggressive and “almost obsessive” hatred carefully couched into the semblance of “judicial condemnation” (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 273).

### **Reputation, Power and Vulnerability**

Reputation was a central concern for both writers. Montagu was forced to exist within a complex set of expectations based upon her class, gender, and prominence in the upper echelons of London’s society (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 346); in the meantime, Pope faced considerable political scrutiny as a Catholic and suspected Jacobite. Both writers, however, coupled these vulnerabilities with forms of empowerment that specifically enabled each to appear highly threatening to the other. Montagu’s political connections countered the vulnerabilities produced by her gender and class, offering significant power to endanger a rival already suspected of treasonous

---

<sup>40</sup> Guerinot, *Pamphlet Attacks*, li.

sentiments. In the meantime, Pope's skill at reading and shaping public opinion meant that he was well-positioned to threaten what society and Montagu probably both saw as her most valuable possession: her reputation.

Despite her uniqueness as a writer and traveler, Montagu shared many limitations with other upper-class women of her era. As discussed in Chapter II, her status as an aristocrat ensured an uncomfortably tight link between her good name and her public standing. For many women this link meant a spotless reputation was less a goal than a necessity; being the target of defamation became a frightening prospect (London iii). Conduct books of the time told women that "how you are perceived matters as much as what you are" (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 346). While some level of infamy might work in Pope's favor in terms of boosting sales of his writing, Montagu had little to gain when her private life became public gossip.

The gendered nature of exhibition becomes a central concern in considering the poets' choices of content and publishing for their acerbic verses. Montagu had to be aware of the "specifically feminine danger" of becoming a spectacle: "The danger was of an exposure. Men... 'exposed themselves,' but that operation was quite deliberate and circumscribed. For a woman, making a spectacle out of herself had more to do with a kind of inadvertency and loss of boundaries" (Russo 53). Contemporary Pope biographer Maynard Mack disparages Montagu as having "struck from ambush" by remaining anonymous when "Verses Address'd to the Imitator of Horace" was published (560); however, he overlooks that for an aristocratic woman to publish such an attack openly was extremely risky. Probably because of a reluctance to make herself a "spectacle," Montagu refrained from openly publishing any of her writings against Pope. However, she could not control the use of her name in London's presses. At the height of the poets' conflict she thus "lived in two modes: that of her own activity in her various roles, and that of public printed discourse in which Pope's unrelenting enmity was building an almost free-standing mythical version of her" (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 288).

Pope's adept manipulation of public sentiment and his attention to his authorial reputation would put him in an ideal situation to exploit the vulnerabilities that Montagu faced as a woman and aristocrat, and perhaps to even profit from her attacks. He engaged with the literary market well beyond simply writing poetry and prose,

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*



running his own small printing and publishing business, marketing much of his writing, and even acting as his own copyright lawyer at various points throughout his career (McLaverty, *Pope, Print, and Meaning*, 11; Probyn 423). The timing of each of his works' publication was often deliberate. As David Foxon notes, Pope "settled down each autumn after his summer jaunts to see his work into type, but withheld the product until the new year, when Parliament reassembled and with it Society" (Foxon 143). As early as 1723, Pope proved so successful in manipulating the process of subscription publishing that subscribers to the *Iliad* paid him six times as much for each copy as the copies would have cost the original publisher (Probyn 425). Many of Pope's contemporaries also believed that he had founded or was a driving force behind *The Grub Street Journal*, since he and the newspaper shared so many common enemies (Goldgar). Unusually for a writer of the time, Pope also seems to have carefully managed which of his works would be published under what name. Some works he chose to release anonymously; others he revealed as his own work only through literary and textual quirks in later editions. As Rogers describes, this was "canon formation carried out on the run, by the author himself" ("Nameless Names" 236).

The episode in which the poet tricked notorious bookseller Edmund Curll into issuing Pope's collected letters in print might be seen as particularly indicative of the poet's determination to control the progression of his literary career. Curll had threatened to make Pope the subject of a life of the author. Pope's response bordered on comedic: "by a series of intrigues and intermediaries, including at one point a London actor dressed to look like a clergyman...[Pope] duped Curll into buying the unbound sheets and thus becoming their apparent publisher and unmistakably their first distributor" (Mack 653). As Rogers notes, through this elaborate ploy Pope managed to effectively "pirate his own work" ("Nameless Names" 239).

Curll and Pope had already established their enmity decades before this incident. One illustrative example of Pope's comfort engaging with the gritty publishing industry is his brutal response to Curll's unsolicited 1716 publication of the *Court Poems* on which, Pope, Lady Mary, and possibly Gay had collaborated. Probably at Pope's behest, a mutual business associate invited Curll for a drink soon after the work's publication. Pope stopped in, offered Curll a mild reproof, and seemed to accept the publisher's excuse and apology. Then Pope invited Curll "to drink to their reconciliation." The toast

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

seemed friendly; its outcome, however, was far from peaceable. Pope had dosed his unfortunate adversary's drink with an emetic. His anonymous *Full and True Account of a Horrid and Barbarous Revenge by Poison, On the Body of Mr. Edmund Curll* would detail the revenge that followed:

The Avenger sees, with a delighted eye,  
His long jaws open and his colour fly;  
Then while his guts the keen emetic urge,  
Smiles on the vomit and enjoys the purge. (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 111)

A second poem, titled *A Further Account of the most deplorable Condition of Mr. Edmund Curll*, describes how the publisher lost his mind in the days following Pope's revenge. This pamphlet, headed with the title-page line, "To be published Weekly," carries the implicit (though not followed-up) threat of a prolonged revenge.<sup>41</sup>

Pope believed that art was an important cultural value and artists should rank "among a nation's most distinguished persons" (Reichard 421). That being said, he knew that even high art had to be protected, marketed, and sold. As McLaverty notes, Pope maintained full control of his reputation and canon formation: "he writes his own notes; paints his own portraits; drafts his own biography; writes his own criticism; publishes his own libels. He attempts to shape every Pope...the public might encounter" (*Pope, Print, and Meaning*, 56). Through careful manipulation of every means of literary production available to him, Pope became a success in his time and an icon of authorial self-fashioning in contemporary literary and historical studies. Lady Mary had to second-guess her desire to make her writings public; Pope, on the other hand, made an art of the public exposure of his works. By the end of the 1730s he would become a dominant figure in literary publishing—and such positioning would leave him ideally situated to tear down Montagu's highly prized and carefully protected reputation.

As a woman and aristocrat Lady Mary was more vulnerable than Pope to slander in the public sphere. However, her gender and noble roots would offer powerful

---

<sup>41</sup> Years later, as a footnote in his first publication of the *Dunciad*, Pope claimed to have threatened and then "punish'd" Curll for attempting to publish the *Court Poems* under Lady Mary's name. Given the *Dunciad's* emergence soon after Pope's initial pamphlet attack on Lady Mary ("The Capon's Tale") and the lack of any extant attribution of the *Court Poems* to Lady Mary, it would seem that Pope attempted to alter history in this footnote so as to reinforce the appearance of himself as the wronged party in his newly adversarial relationship with Montagu (Halsband, "Pope, Lady Mary and the Court Poems," 249-50). For further exploration of Pope and Montagu's interactions with regards to the *Court Poems*, see Robert Halsband's article "Pope, Lady Mary and the Court Poems."

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

recompense: influential connections in the complex realm of early Hanoverian politics. Upon her introduction to the royal court in 1715, Lady Mary's beauty, intellect and aristocratic manners helped her to achieve almost immediate social success. She ingratiated herself with a wide range of female and male courtiers, studying German to gain access to circles that were closed to most English aristocrats. She was reported to be the only Englishwoman invited to the cultured evening parties hosted by the king's illegitimate half-sister Madame von Kielmansegg. She was also "particularly favoured" by the Princess of Wales. During her travels she would correspond with the Princess, with Madame von Kielmansegg, and the king's mistress, Baroness von der Schulenberg (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 83). These court connections would become less central to Lady Mary's life after her return from Constantinople, but she remained on good terms with the Princess, who was one of her primary supporters in her efforts to introduce inoculation in England (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment* 211, 214-15).

When the court began to separate into different factions, Lady Mary would become a favorite in the rival Courts of the King and the Prince of Wales (Symonds 201-202). Prime Minister Walpole also numbered among her connections. She was close friends with his mistress and later wife, Maria Skerrett. Furthermore, her longtime friend and collaborator Lord Hervey acted as Walpole's instrument in the House of Lords and his "watchdog" at court (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, xx). Hervey's suggestion in his diary that Pope was viewed as a critic of the royal family by 1734 is probably no coincidence; as a friend of Lady Mary and a supporter of a politician Pope reviled, Hervey probably relished the idea that Pope's writings might propel the poet into the dangerous territory of treason. Montagu herself was probably no less pleased. Pope had targeted her gender and her family in publications designed to wreak maximum damage to her reputation. Now her political and court connections put her in a position to deliver her attacks against Pope to the audience to whom he was the most vulnerable: monarchs and politicians.

As discussed in Chapter III, Pope's Catholicism and Jacobite connections posed two large-scale liabilities at a time when uprisings against the current royal family were still common enough to keep the monarchy on its guard. The years immediately following the 1715 Jacobite uprising and the volatile 1740s were especially dangerous times for Catholics, Jacobites, and Tories in England, but historical documents indicate

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

that even during apparently tranquil historical moments the relationship between the government and these groups remained tense. An anti-Jacobite intelligence system between 1715 and 1745 produced papers remained “studded with report of Papist plots” even during the low-key 1720s (Haydon 127). The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge also kept up its circulation of anti-Catholic material and encouraged mob activity against Catholic communities during this decade and the 1740s (Haydon 127).

Pope was not simply a Papist; he was also closely connected with many proven Jacobites, some of which had been arrested or exiled for their treasonous efforts to incite uprisings. From the well known Bolingbroke and Atterbury to the friend-of-a-friend Charles Caesar, who played a central role in the Jacobite plot of 1716-17, many of Pope’s connections had demonstrated a distinct lack of loyalty to the crown. Pope himself tested the limits of treason in verse in some of his writings, most notably the 1737 epistle *To Augustus*, which almost led to his arrest. The offending lines in this epistle celebrated Jonathan Swift’s successful campaign against Walpole’s introduction of debased currency to the Irish economy:

Let Ireland tell, how Wit upheld her cause,  
Her Trade supported, and supply’d her laws;  
And leave on Swift this grateful verse engraved,  
The Rights a Court attack’d, a Poet sav’d. (221-24)

After this poem became known in court, members of the King’s Council proposed Pope’s arrest. In the end, he was only saved by a slim margin of historical ambiguity: because the lines referred to the previous reign, government officials decided to “avoid a confrontation” and held back from making the arrest (Erskine-Hill 137). This incident demonstrates how close Pope came to suffering serious consequences for his politics. His arrest probably would not have shocked many of his contemporaries, least of all Lady Mary. She had little freedom to respond publicly to Pope’s slurs, but the closed circles of court and politics offered opportunities for self-expression among the precise individuals who Pope could little afford to further alienate.

### **Pamphlets and Poetry as Vehicles for Satire**

The two writers addressed each other extensively in poetry. During the Restoration and the eighteenth century, satirical poetry (which could feature satire,

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

lampoon, libel or slander) was popular and widely read.<sup>42</sup> Satirists put a deeply personal twist on a selection of subjects, including greed, lust, and folly. Many writers gave vent to misogynistic sentiments in their texts, and over time other writers responded to these texts with works defending women. Though most women lacked the resources to write, and those who wrote were discouraged from writing satire, those that delved into the genre often made misogyny and chauvinism the target of their wit.<sup>43</sup> Critics meticulously distinguished between quality satire and poorly written works; in the 1679 “An Essay Upon Satire” by John Dryden and Earl of Mulgrave, the two described how “loose-writ” libels were never as effective as “shining satire” (Dryden and Mulgrave). Given the nature of satire as a rhetorical mechanism, such distinctions may have been inevitable. As Michael Seidel describes, “Satire always exists on a line of bias, and the more variegated, ingenious, and complex the nature of its presentation, the broader the invitation to readers to absorb satire's argument to their own biases and prejudices” (36).

The poetic works of both authors were frequently published within pamphlets, though Montagu's works seem to have arrived in printed pamphlets without her knowledge. Pamphlets emerged as an extremely powerful publishing medium during the early eighteenth century. According to Joad Raymond, “Authors of literary and political writings were aware of the opportunities for communication that the pamphlet offered, and while they expressed reservations about the commonness of the medium, they either chose to exploit the form, traffic with it, or found themselves influenced by its negative pressures” (26). The print medium was popularized during this era in a large part because of public pamphlets, which enjoyed a wide circulation. This was the venue through which Pope made his name as man and author. Without the publicity of printing, the two authors' shared slander might have remained an intimate affair. However, with pamphlets as a central part of “the everyday practice of politics,” Pope was presented with an ideal forum for his literary attacks (Raymond 26).

---

<sup>42</sup> In this research the term “satirical poetry” may refer to satire, lampoon, libel, or slander. As Seidel describes in the article “Satire, lampoon, libel, slander,” “in the Restoration and early eighteenth century, satire, libel, lampoon, and slander were inextricably mixed, whether the specific forms they took were poetic, dramatic, narrative, or expository” (33).

<sup>43</sup> See Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry: Inventing Agency, Inventing Genre* 18.

## Poetic Altercations

Pope had already opened fire in the poets' burgeoning pamphlet war with "The Capon's Tale" (1728). His narrow focus on gender and authorship would be redirected to airing the skeletons in Montagu's closet with the *Dunciad* later that year, presaging a barrage of wide-ranging attacks exchanged between the two authors during the next decade. Montagu's contributions tended towards circulation among narrow circles of friends and acquaintances while Pope's were generally released in the public sphere. What both poets' works would share, however, was an increasingly palpable fear and hatred. Their attacks maintain a power to shock partly because they so eagerly target the most sensitive topics available, from Pope's physical disabilities to Montagu's sister's descent into madness. Once the two authors had entered into this conflict, neither would willingly give ground. Instead, each would make full use of whatever skills, social positioning, and personal knowledge would inflict the most damage upon the other's life and reputation. This research will focus on the ten primary attacks in their ongoing conflict, leaving the additional attacks that Pope made against Montagu as potential avenues for future research.<sup>44</sup>

## The *Dunciad*

Pope's 1728 *Dunciad* targeted a wide range of individuals, making Lady Mary only one of the many injured by the work's publication. This rambling epic poem would constitute Pope's first engagement with what many scholars call his battle with the "dunces"—a nearly decade-long volley of harsh lampoons exchanged between Pope and, primarily, the lesser-known Grub Street writers who the poet targets in this piece. In a 2007 edition of the *Dunciad*, Valerie Rumbold offers insights into the dance of publicity and marketing that preceded the work's publication ("Editor's Headnote," 3).<sup>45</sup> A few

---

<sup>44</sup> See Rumbold's chapter "Female Wit" in *Women's Place in Pope's World* for reference to these additional attacks.

<sup>45</sup> The circumstances preceding the work's publication stand as evidence of Pope's ease of engagement with the chaotic literary marketplace; the actual method of publication further reinforces this impression. When the *Dunciad* first appeared in May 1728, it was deliberately filled with "bluffs and misinformation." For example, a couple lines on the title page described the work as a London reprint of an earlier Dublin edition; as Rogers notes, this claim "was quite fictitious, and gave the deliberate impression that the work had been published in a clandestine way, rather than being issued in exactly the way its creator had designed" ("Nameless Names," 237).

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

months earlier, Pope had published *Peri Bathous: or, The Art of Sinking in Poetry*. This satiric piece, published openly and with many traceable targets, was likely intended to provoke attacks against Pope. These attacks would later allow Pope to preempt any accusations that his lampoons in the *Dunciad* were based in ill-nature: in fact, the fictional publisher who opens the *Dunciad* describes the work as a response to how “for these two Months past, the town has been persecuted with Pamphlets, Advertisements, Letters, and weekly Essays, not only against the Wit and Writings, but against the Character and Person, of Mr. Pope” (Pope, *The Dunciad*, iiv-iv). This publisher also insists that the work’s anonymous author has “attacked no man living, who had not before printed and published against this particular Gentleman” (Pope, *The Dunciad*, iv). Thus the introduction of the *Dunciad* sets the stage for a heroic effort to defend the beleaguered poet from the “formidable, irritable, and implacable race of mortals” that has, with no apparent provocation, made Alexander Pope the target of their ire (Pope, *The Dunciad*, vi).

Pope’s efforts to maintain his anonymity in this early work were sufficient to puzzle even a knowledgeable reader. “When the poem came out,” Roger notes, “even a well-connected observer could write to the second Earl of Oxford, an insider within the Pope group, ‘Who is the Author of the Dunciad?’ though he did then hazard the guess, ‘Is it not Pope?’” (“Nameless Names” 237). In “The Publisher to the Reader,” Pope dances in ornate circles around the author’s identity: “Who he is, I cannot say, and (which is great pity) there is certainly nothing in his style, and manner of writing, which can distinguish, or discover him. For if it bears any resemblance to that of Mr. P. ‘tis not improbable but it might be done on purpose, with a view to have it pass for his” (Pope, *The Dunciad*, v). Perhaps partly because of the mystery of its authorship, the poem quickly became wildly popular. Samuel Johnson offers a romantic depiction of the work’s first day on the market:

On the day the book was first vended, a crowd of authors besieged the shop; entreaties, advices, threats of law and battery, nay, critics of treason, were all employed to hinder the coming out of the ‘Dunciad:’ on the other side the booksellers and hawkers made as great efforts to procure it. (238)

While the *Dunciad*’s satiric targets pointed to Pope as the most likely author, the identities of the lampooned individuals were not entirely clear. The 1728 version of the *Dunciad* accordingly gave rise to widespread speculation and the sale of many keys

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

“that offered, plausibly or implausibly, to unlock its mysteries” (Rumbold, “Introduction,” ix). However, any remaining uncertainty regarding authorship would fade with the 1729 edition *Dunciad Variorum*. This edition supplied more names in the text than the original and added a prose commentary by the fictional, fussy scholar-critic Martinus Scriblerus that was “frequently more insulting than the satire of the poem itself” (Sutherland 348).<sup>46</sup> This was the version of the *Dunciad* that would cause a stir at court after Robert Walpole presented the work to George II.<sup>47</sup>

Pope’s war against the “dunces” derives partially from the sheer number of individuals he places in that category. It is not for nothing that he describes the “sons of Dulness” as “an endless band” that “Pours forth, and leaves unpeopled half the land” (1-2). Perhaps because of some special vitriol arising from his years of maneuvering for her affection, Pope did not simply categorize Lady Mary among the crowds of dunces; instead, he would place her among society’s whores.

The characters in the verse including Pope’s reference to Montagu find common ground in the theme of deception. The Goddess Dulness here appears as a brothel-owner deviously marketing each decrepit prostitute, or “batter’d jade,” under the name of a notable beauty praised throughout high society (113-114). She concludes the verse by advising the shape-changing Proleus, a symbol for Edmund Curll, to follow her example of deception in the context of the bookseller’s trade: he should publish the works of lesser-known writers under the names of famous ones (117-120). Before Proleus/Curll comes to Dulness’s attention, however, Pope drops in a suggestive couplet:

“Whence hapless Monsieur much complains at Paris  
Of wrongs from Duchesses and Lady Marys” (115-116).<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Even at this stage Pope continued to deny any part in the poem’s creation. He assigned the poem to three noble lords: Lord Bathurst, the Earl of Burlington and the Earl of Oxford (Sutherland 348).

<sup>47</sup> The *Dunciad*’s collection of attributions and editions would grow even more complex during the course of publishing litigation in the years that followed. See James R. Sutherland’s “The *Dunciad* of 1729” for an overview of the work’s complex bibliography.

<sup>48</sup> While this research takes the standard approach of viewing these lines as a reference to Montagu, Aubrey Williams presents several interesting arguments against that interpretation in the article “Pope’s ‘Duchesses and Lady Mary’s’” (1953). Additionally, Williams’ article “The ‘Angel, Goddess, Montague’ of Pope’s ‘Sober Advice from Horace’” (1973) argues convincingly against describing the lines “Angel! Goddess! Montague!” in another of Pope’s poems, “Sober Advice from Horace,” as a reference to Montagu.



On the surface, the lines suggest that if a “hapless Monsieur”—perhaps an unfortunately infected customer of Dulness’s brothel—should complain, the deception means he will ascribe any wrongdoing by the prostitutes to higher-class “Duchesses and Lady Marys.”<sup>49</sup> Within this limited interpretation, the couplet already constitutes an insult to Lady Mary’s pride and reputation. By placing her name among references to prostitutes, this allusive offensiveness follows the trend that Pope had upheld in “The Capon’s Tale,” of associating Montagu with promiscuity. Such an unoriginal slur, though, was not characteristic of the poet’s battles, and Pope likely had far more deliberate intentions when he penned those lines. He was well aware of Lady Mary’s nearly disastrous exchange with the “French wit” Rémond during the South Sea bubble of the 1720s. She and Rémond had exchanged letters that posed some danger to her reputation; she had given him (on Pope’s recommendation) what turned out to be poor investment advice; he had then attempted to use the letters to blackmail her for the money that he had lost. Lady Mary ultimately showed the letters to her husband and the matter was handled quietly. The situation was well behind her until these lines dragged that past danger into the present.

Two 1735 editions of the *Dunciad* made the insult even more blatant, tagging the offending couplet with the pointed annotation, “This passage was thought to allude to a famous Lady who cheated a French wit of 5000 pounds in the South-Sea year. But the Author meant it in general of all bragging Travellers, and of all Whores and Cheats under the name of Ladies” (Williams 360). Did Pope mean to target Lady Mary as a “bragging Traveller”? His early letters had alluded wistfully to the impossibility of his following her abroad; her zeal at experiencing sights and cultures that were far beyond Pope’s reach might well have been construed as bragging, particularly with the benefit of bitter hindsight. His categorizing her among “Whores and Cheats under the name of Ladies” may reflect his disillusionment after their friendship. Pope believed that Montagu had tried to batter his reputation through her writing; the loss of the trust that had accompanied their friendship, especially in combination with the shattered expectations of their early letters, would have produced a strong sense of betrayal.

---

<sup>49</sup> Rumbold takes this interpretation even further, suggesting that in these lines “Pope fantasises that Rémond had been her lover and had caught venereal disease from her” (footnote, *The Dunciad (1728)*, 54).

Pope's placement of this couplet in a verse built around the concept of deceit is likely no coincidence. Lady Mary, he had decided by now, simply could not be trusted.

### "A Pop upon Pope" and *One Epistle to Mr. A. Pope*

Reports of Lady Mary's response to the *Dunciad* were inconsistent. Evidence today shows that Montagu, in collaboration with Henry Fielding, produced a rewriting of the *Dunciad* that reproduced the mythology of the original while turning the tale against Pope and his circle. The two friends never published the poem, and Montagu probably only kept it on hand as a potential weapon primed against Pope (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 331). Several alternate offensives of varied authorship, however, did reach the presses.

Only a month after the appearance of the *Dunciad*, the cruelly mocking poem "A Pop upon Pope" (June 1728) made a stir in London. This piece purports to describe the "horrid and barbarous Whipping" committed against Pope "out of spite and revenge for a harmless lampoon which the said poet had writ upon them" (*Book of Days* 703). Pope supposedly took the squib seriously enough to later publish a notice in *The Daily Post* denying that this attack had taken place—though such a notice may have been published by his enemies to further compound the original joke. In its cultural context, this and later works founded on the premise of violence against Pope's crippled form would not have seemed out of place. As Dickie notes, during this period the deformed and disabled frequently "suffered not only verbal taunts, but also violent practical jokes. Apprentices and laborers, according to mid-century moralists, delighted in...poking sticks at cripples" (Dickie 14). The violent ill will directed against Pope was real enough that his sister wrote "My brother does not seem to know what fear is" when she found that, despite the threats against him, he would still venture outside with only his dog for protection (Spence 38).

The authorship of "A Pop upon Pope" is still unknown today. Popular gossip reported Lady Mary as the author of the piece, and Pope believed this was her revenge for his attack in the *Dunciad* (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 277). Grundy admits that "it is not impossible" that Montagu wrote the piece, since the work mirrors her later attacks in its violence and careful framing of Pope's disability as dehumanizing (Grundy,

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

*Comet of the Enlightenment*, 277). Given Montagu's reluctance to take on an active role in the public pamphlet wars, however, it is unlikely that she would have aimed for the poem's publication.

Pope also believed that Lady Mary was behind *One Epistle to Mr. A. Pope* (April 1730). This work had been circulated privately before publication, probably in 1729. Two other writers claimed authorship for the piece in the *Spectator* in February 1729, pronouncing it "the due Chastisement of Mr. Pope for his Dunciad" (Guerinot, *Two Poems Against Pope*, 3). However, Pope must have asserted his suspicions of Lady Mary regardless, since she wrote to Arbuthnot twice in 1729 to deny authorship. She told Arbuthnot that Pope must know she had not written the poem, and must be affecting suspicion as "a contrivance...to blast the Reputation of one who never injur'd him." She also said that if Pope was forging her handwriting, she hoped that he would be hanged for it (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 332). Grundy poses the poem as one more instance of the "standard pattern" in which attacks upon Pope would criticize his treatment of Lady Mary, and he would take those criticisms as evidence that she had taken part in the attacks' production (*Comet of the Enlightenment*, 332). The *Grub Street Journal*, a paper with which Pope was closely associated, announced that Montagu had "some hand" in *One Epistle*. It also said that she "confidently reported He once was whipt," a phrase which effectively credited her as the author of *A Pop upon Pope* as well (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 332). With these additional offensives the tension between the two poets rapidly increased. Pope's reprisal, whether merited or not, would not be long in coming.

### *Epistle to Bathurst*

The January 1733 *Epistle to Bathurst* attacks Montagu through a new avenue: by lampooning her husband. This *Epistle* serves as an ode to the faults of an evolving marketplace (Pope, *Epistle III*, 98). It describes how that once-stable arena has become dominated by the "feminine" and the "grotesque" (Jones 488). Montagu's husband Wortley serves as an eminent example of disorder, "crying coals from street to street |

Whom with a wig so wild, and mien<sup>50</sup> so mazed<sup>51</sup> | Pity mistakes for some poor tradesman crased” (Pope, *Epistle III*, 100). This version of Wortley, transparently renamed “Worldly,” appeared at a time when the real Wortley was widely known to have precipitated a price war in the coal industry. Pope’s attached note further emphasized the poem’s real world reference: “Some Misers of great wealth, proprietors of the coal-mines, had entered at this time into an association to keep up coals to an extravagant price, whereby the poor were reduced almost to starve” (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 334). Wortley was popularly known for his reluctance to spend money as well as for his part in the coal crisis. The wealth of each “Miser,” heavily emphasized in Pope’s note, would certainly have further fed the ire of a struggling public. The disorder communicated in these lines underscores the problems of the evolving market: in an ideological system that idealized ordered systems, the “crased” appearance of the corrupt coal magnate parallels his grotesque social role. Worldly becomes the personification of a faulty socioeconomic system. Grundy offers details of earlier drafts of the work: other insults that Pope had considered included the announcement “that Worldly’s wife wanted him dead” and that Montagu and her friend Maria Skerrett “were heaping ‘monstrous’ wealth against future inflation in the price of a man” (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 334). While these additions remained unpublished, the possibilities of the drafts demonstrate that even just a couple lines against Lady Mary served as deliberate expressions of deep-seated anger. Far from an afterthought, they were the products of drafts and careful revisions. The different versions of the verse also showcase how the poets’ past friendship offered artfully incisive routes for expressing their later anger. Montagu’s identity was rooted in both her family and her class, and her societal position made her dread becoming the target of public gossip. Pope was well aware that directing popular anger against her class and family would make for an effective line of attack.

### *The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace*

---

<sup>50</sup> mien: air or bearing especially as expressive of attitude or personality (from the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary).

<sup>51</sup> maze: Bewilder; perplex (from the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary).

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

Pope's next strike against Lady Mary is perhaps the most infamous. In his dialogue poem *The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace, Imitated* (February 1733) he places Montagu among women whose methods of hurting others suggest animals' tendencies to attack based on their naturally assigned physiques. He thus demotes her, and the other women he accuses of libel, to the category of any donkey that angrily kicks its adversary. A pair of lines alludes to one woman's "slander and poison" (81) and another's "hard words or hanging" (82). Then Pope flings a couplet at Lady Mary:

From furious Sappho scarce a milder fate,  
P-xed by her love, or libeled by her hate. (83-84)

As in earlier attacks, Pope refers to Montagu as "Sappho," her preferred pseudonym. His characterizing her as "furious" may be a reference to Montagu's rising anger in terms of their conflict; she had, after all, already commented to a mutual friend that if Pope was plagiarizing her handwriting then she wanted to see him hanged. Alternately (or additionally), the phrasing might follow in a tradition of describing women as overzealous in their anger: William Congreve's famous line of *The Mourning Bride*, "Nor Hell a fury, like a woman scorn'd" had only appeared about thirty years earlier.<sup>52</sup> The phrase "libeled by her hate" takes a similar approach, making Montagu's irrational, "psychotic" hatred the basis for the kinds of written defamation that Pope was convinced she had carried out against him (Mack 555). Once again, his belief that she had libeled him formed a central element of his accusations.

The phrase "P-xed by her love" may form Pope's most brutal attack in the poets' entire exchange. While "P-xed" could theoretically have been interpreted as a reference to the spread of smallpox, readers accustomed to the ribaldries of the time would have quickly made the connection between pox and syphilis (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 334-35). Furthermore, as Halsband notes, Montagu's bout with smallpox (which was known to have left her visibly scarred) would have left her unable to transmit the illness ("Pope's 'Libel and Satire,'" 473). A vulgar interpretation is further supported by the phrase "by her love," a clear reference to sexual contact, and by the simple fact of the word's inclusion in an attack against this particular figure. Lady Mary's travel and intellectuality placed her in a category of women who refused to conform to popular expectations of women's passivity. She accordingly faced frequent

---

<sup>52</sup> This line is often misquoted as "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned" (Adams).

accusations of promiscuity from people who sought to use that slander as a means to force her to adapt to other popular standards of femininity or who struggled to disassociate her seeming eccentricity from other much-feared varieties of women's nonconformity. The idea that some innocent male victim might be "p-xed by her love" thus effectively incorporated a number of popular misogynistic attacks that had already attached themselves to Montagu's public name.

Another interpretation (and perhaps the more brutal) hearkens back to another one of Lady Mary's reluctant moments in the spotlight: her fight to bring inoculation to England. In this context, "p-xed" could reference the process of inoculation. However, more likely, given its being posed as a potential negative consequence of Sappho's "love," Pope meant to portray inoculation as dangerous and Montagu as a proponent of potentially lethal medical experiments (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 334-35).

After *The First Satire* was published, Montagu made an unsuccessful effort to enlist Peterborough as an ally in silencing Pope. Peterborough's eventual response was a mean-spirited letter that was probably ghostwritten by Pope. In addition to other slurs, the letter relayed the poet's denial that Lady Mary was the subject of the offensive couplet; indeed, Pope "wonderd how the Town could apply those Lines to any but some noted common woeman" (Halsband, "Pope's 'Libel and Satire,'" 474).<sup>53</sup> Perhaps relevant to this letter's authorship is the fact that Peterborough and Pope were closely aligned politically, while by this time Montagu and her husband had clearly associated themselves with the most influential of the Whigs.

### *Verses Address'd to the Imitator of Horace*

A biting response emerged on the market within three weeks of the *First Satire's* publication. This poem, titled *Verses Addressed to the Imitator of the First Satire of the Second Book of Horace* (popularly and here referred to as *Verses Address'd to the Imitator of Horace*), would become known as "the most outrageous as well as the most poetically forceful of all the attacks on Pope" (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 338-

---

<sup>53</sup> As Grundy notes, these sentiments were particularly unconvincing coming from Peterborough since his 1723 poem "I said to my heart" was the first piece to publicly refer to Montagu as Sappho (*Comet of the Enlightenment*, 335).

39). The authors tore Pope apart in verses so violent as to make even the modern reader cringe. They call him a snake, a monster, and a “poor corpse” before concluding by referring to him as “marked on thy back, like Cain, by God’s own hand” in a transparent allusion to his physical deformity (*Verses Addressed*, 38 and 58). The *Verses* were extremely well written; even Guerinot, whose extended bibliography of and commentary on pamphlet attacks against Pope argues consistently in the poet’s favor, describes this as “the only pamphlet attacking Pope that catches anything of Pope’s own satiric brilliance” (*Pamphlet Attacks*, xxvi). The poem’s circulation at court in manuscript form before its publication undoubtedly aroused Pope’s fears and fed the poets’ feud.

The *Verses’* authorship is still uncertain. When Hervey presented the poem to the King and Queen, he said that it was by “a Lady.” However, Lady Mary consistently denied authorship (McLaverty, “Of Which Being Publick the Publick Judge,” 198).<sup>54</sup> Most modern sources conclude that Lady Mary and Lord Hervey were the primary writers while a third figure, William Wyndham, played a minor role in the work’s composition (McLaverty, “Of Which Being Publick the Publick Judge,” 184). While at present no documentary evidence links Montagu to the *Verses*, most of her contemporaries believed that she had taken some part in the work’s creation (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 338).

Two published versions of the *Verses* appeared on March 8, 1733.<sup>55</sup> In “Of Which Being Publick the Publick Judge: Pope and the Publication of ‘Verses Address’d to the Imitator of Horace,” a bibliographic study of the work’s publication, McLaverty makes a convincing case that Pope himself brought about the publication of at least one of these

---

<sup>54</sup> When prompted by Arbuthnot, Lady Mary maintained that while she had not written the verses, the author was a gentleman of high standing whom Pope “durst not attack.” Such a claim points away from Hervey, since Pope had already satirized him under the name of Sporus in *To Arbuthnot* (McLaverty, “Of Which Being Publick the Publick Judge,” 186). However, Hervey’s private letters assert his role as one of the authors (Grundy, “Verses Address’d to the Imitator of Horace” 99), and given the frequency of Pope and Montagu’s attempts to mislead one another, it seems unwise to place much weight on her claims regarding the author’s identity. Grundy suggests that Montagu’s denial of authorship in a letter to Arbuthnot the day after the publication of Pope’s *Epistle to Arbuthnot* “can be ignored as a desperate defensive stroke in her mortal combat with Pope” (Grundy, “Verses Address’d to the Imitator of Horace” 98).

<sup>55</sup> The dual publishing would give rise to an enduring battle between the respective publishers as each attempted to establish theirs as the authorized version of the poem (McLaverty, “Of Which Being Publick the Publick Judge,” 183).

versions. Through such means, Pope could have taken control of the sphere within which the poem would circulate, initiating a shift from distribution in the semi-private realm of the court to an arena that where he could exert greater influence: the public eye.

The two versions of the *Verses* were printed by pamphlet-distributors James Roberts and Anne Dodd—two “mere fronts, regularly chosen by authors or publishers who had something to hide” (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment* 339). The former would work regularly with Montagu and Lord Hervey over the course of their careers. He was responsible for another of Hervey’s attacks on Pope, *An Epistle from a Nobleman to a Doctor of Divinity*, and for Montagu’s anonymous newspaper *The Nonsense of Commonsense* (McLavery, “Of Which Being Publick the Publick Judge,” 193-194). The authors’ connections to the publisher, in addition to Hervey’s subsequent revisions to this version, suggest that Hervey was responsible for the initial publication of the Roberts edition of the *Verses*.

Anne Dodd, however, was a distributor with whom neither Hervey nor Montagu had any particular connection. In fact, there were far more connections between Alexander Pope and Dodd (McLavery, “Of Which Being Publick the Publick Judge,” 192-193). This version was printed with the byline, “By a LADY,” and emphasized this authorship in its advertisements. Such credits would play a central role in identifying Montagu as the author—particularly when one advertisement insisted that it was not just by a lady but “By a LADY of QUALITY” (McLavery, “Of Which Being Publick the Publick Judge,” 191). Montagu would certainly have been the first “lady” to come to mind based on such advertising, since in a culture that constructed authors as celebrities her quarrel with Pope was predictably notorious. As McLavery notes, it is possible that without this title page Lady Mary might not have even been identified as the author. Under these circumstances, the phrase “By a Lady” cannot be interpreted as “a neutral designation; it exposes the writer to ridicule” (McLavery, “Of Which Being Publick the Publick Judge,” 191). The republication of the *Verses* six weeks after the publication of Pope’s lampoons on Montagu and Hervey in the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* also suggests that Pope was deliberately orchestrating the work’s release as a counterpoint to his attacks (McLavery, “Of Which Being Publick the Publick Judge,”

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*



199). Significant evidence thus points towards Pope's role as an instigator for the *Verses'* publication.

The most convincing of McLaverty's arguments, however, is his discussion of Pope's numerous motives to publish this attack against himself. Pope's political situation made him most vulnerable to the poem's private manuscript circulation, especially its distribution at court. He was extremely anxious about the *Verses'* having been shown to the Queen (Mack 561).<sup>56</sup> Print publication of the work, on the other hand, brought the battle into the arena that he knew best. As McLaverty notes, the controversy that arose after the *Verses'* publication both excused Pope for his past attacks and provided a justification for those he would write in the future (McLaverty, "Of Which Being Publick the Publick Judge," 183). Furthermore, Walpole had recently requested that Pope demonstrate his loyalty by altering his attack against Lady Mary in *The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace*. The very same day that the *Verses* appeared, Pope communicated to Walpole that his request now could not be honored because Lady Mary had taken her own "Satisfaction" in libel (Mack 587-88). The *Verses'* publication thus vindicated his past satires: neither malicious nor gratuitous, they rather had "predicted" Montagu's future libels (Rogers, *The Alexander Pope Encyclopedia*, 126).

Sometime around 1733, Pope had a number of pamphlet attacks against him bound for his own collection. On a front leaf appeared a slightly altered biblical quotation: "Behold it is my desire, that mine Adversary had written a Book. Surely I would take it on my shoulder, and bind it as a crown unto me" (Guerinot, *Pamphlet Attacks*, li).<sup>57</sup> Perhaps this triumphant attitude also encompassed Pope's stance regarding his enemies' publishing. While Grundy draws no conclusions about Pope's involvement in the *Verses'* public appearance, she does note that this event produced a critical shift in Montagu's authorial standing: "In writing (or part-writing) this scorching assault, Lady Mary stepped outside the sheltered enclosure of high rank and gender

---

<sup>56</sup> Pope himself would engage in the same private circulation to which he had reacted so strongly when he produced the "Letter to a Noble Lord." Pope actually mirrored Hervey's behavior by sending this work to the Queen—an especially notable detail considering that Hervey was the "Noble Lord" against whom Pope proposed to defend himself. The letter was only published as part of a collection decades later (McLaverty, "Of Which Being Publick the Publick Judge," 199).

<sup>57</sup> Quote also appears in McLaverty, "Of Which Being Publick the Publick Judge."

chivalry. Its publication slammed the gates of the garden behind her, committing her to a wilderness inhabited by warring tribes of pamphleteers” (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 340). Montagu had likely established Pope the target of criticism at court by circulating the poem there. If Pope did wrench away that power by instigating the poem’s relocation to the public sphere, he met with considerable success. The *Verses* would undergo multiple printings and receive numerous replies in the years that followed (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 340). The combination of the work’s artistic prowess and its viciousness effectively guaranteed it a prominent space in the public literary consciousness.

In “Laughing at Cripples: Ridicule, Deformity, and the Argument from Design,” Roger D. Lund explores what he calls the eighteenth century’s ideology of form: an “adherence to principles of order so deep as to constitute ideology” (Lund 97). This ideology produced the “argument from design,” which supported the unreflective exclusion and even punishment of deformed individuals because their bodies violated the era’s principles of visual order. One thinker of the time insisted that “the proportionate and regular state is the truly prosperous and natural in every subject” and the “features which make deformity create incommodiousness and disease” (Lund 97). The poets behind the *Verses* certainly accepted and reproduced the argument from design. They took pains throughout the poem to associate Pope with the lowly and disordered—initially through disadvantageous comparisons with Horace, the ancient Greek author of several works that Pope had famously translated. Horace proffered “Roman Wit” while Pope could only offer “English Rage” (2); Horace wrote of “Sense” while Pope wrote of “Scandal” (4); Horace’s “Thorns” were those that grew on any “Roses,” while Pope’s faults were disordered and numerous “like rude Thistles, and mean Brambles” (21-22). Pope’s sin is not simply that he libels, but that his attacks are chaotic and indiscriminate:

Satire shou'd, like a polish'd Razor keen,  
Wound with a Touch, that's scarcely felt or seen.  
Thine is an Oyster-Knife, that hacks and hews;  
The Rage, but not the Talent of Abuse;  
And is in Hate, what Love is in the Stews. (25-29)

The authors thus do not accuse Pope simply of satire, but of messy satire. His lampoons are not refined like those of Horace. Rather, his are lower class, gruesome, products of

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

frenzied disorder. His writing resembles “Satire” only insofar as paid sex in a brothel can be said to resemble “Love.” Horace may thus be seen to stand for Apollonian high culture, while Pope’s satires are a Dionysian “gross Lust of Hate” that must necessarily be reviled by anyone taking part a society that venerates order (30). One might theorize that Montagu was the primary writer behind these lines, given her disappointed efforts to gain Pope’s respect solely as an intellectual equal during the poets’ correspondence more than a decade before. Pope had insistently focused on her sexuality rather than her intelligence in those letters; now she would take this opportunity to convince herself that she had lost little when he refused to regard her as his intellectual peer.

The authors smoothly transition from describing Pope’s writings as disordered products of animalistic rage into posing his deformed body as a faulty imitation of humankind. His form is “A Sign-Post Likeness of the noble Race; / That is at once Resemblance and Disgrace” (11-15). The contention that Pope’s physical deformities define him as less than human reappears throughout the *Verses*. As Deutsche describes, “If Pope’s text is a monstrous distortion, then Pope himself is a monster” (Deutsche, “The ‘Truest Copies’ and the ‘Mean Original,’” 4). He accordingly merits no place within what the authors picture as well-ordered humanity; he instead becomes a hopeless outcast reduced to attacking this privileged inner sanctum from the outside. In simultaneously mocking and dehumanizing miniaturizations, they liken him to “fretful Porcupines” and “a little Insect shiv’ring at a Breeze” (71 and 78). By describing Pope as an “angry little Monster” who strikes from outside the bounds of “Mankind,” (74; 80) the authors portray their adversary as standing well outside the boundaries of well-ordered civilization.

Unlike many of their era, the authors do not describe Pope’s outer form as producing inner wickedness. Rather, they describe it as “the Equity of righteous Heav’n, /That such a Soul to such a Form was giv’n” (48-49). He is not a product of his form, but its belonging to him stands as evidence of Fate’s rhyme and reason; it is sensible that “one so odious shou’d be born to hate” (51). Since they have already established that his deformities define him as less than human and are reflected in his deformed soul, they take the opportunity to compare him to the lowest of biblical animal life:

When God created Thee, one would believe,  
He said the same as to the Snake of Eve;

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

To human Race Antipathy declare,  
'Twixt them and Thee be everlasting War.  
But oh! the Sequel of the Sentence dread,  
And whilst you bruise their Heel, beware your Head (52-57)

The final couplet in this stanza makes the comparison of Pope to the biblical serpent into more than a simple insult. It opens a string of increasingly violent threats against the poet, threats that seem uncomfortably brutal even in the eyes of the modern reader. One might guess that Montagu, not Hervey, chose to zero in on Pope's insecurities regarding his masculinity with the lines, "Nor think thy Weakness shall be thy Defense; / The Female Scold's Protection in Offence" (58-59). Even as these lines establish the author of the *Verses* as far from embracing feminist sentiments, they also portray Pope's deformities as demoting him to the level of a stereotypical nagging female. The next two lines, though, far exceed this couplet in their suggestive brutality: "Sure 'tis as fair to beat who cannot fight, / As 'tis to libel those who cannot write" (58-61). The poem's violence builds to stunning climax in the following stanza:

If none with Vengeance yet thy Crimes pursue,  
Or give thy manifold Affronts their due;  
If Limbs unbroken, Skin without a Stain,  
Unwhipt, unblanketed, unkick'd, unslain;  
That wretched little Carcass you retain:  
The Reason is, not that the World wants Eyes;  
But thou'rt so mean, they see, and they despise. (64-70)

Pope's diminutive writings and appearance, the authors suggest, makes him too small a concern for others to even bother engaging with his attacks—an ironic sentiment to express in a poem that does just that. They make such sentiments an opportunity for a further affront his masculinity, though; his weakness, they say, makes him "impotently safe" (75).

The *Verses* conclude with a final effort to isolate the target of their satire, while rooting their attack (in a manner echoing Pope's declarations of innocence in the *Dunciad*) in their having already been libeled:

Then whilst with Coward Hand you stab a Name,  
And try at least t' assassinate our Fame;  
Like the first bold Assassin's be thy Lot,  
Ne'er be thy Guilt forgiven, or forgot;  
But as thou hate'st, be hated by Mankind,

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

And with the Emblem of thy crooked Mind,  
Mark'd on thy Back, like Cain, by God's own Hand;  
Wander like him, accursed through the Land. (103-110)

These final lines are rife with hostile imagery. Pope's libels establish him as an assassin of character, the authors assert. His hatred will lead the world to cast him out; and while his physical deformity will not be the cause of his exile, they cannot have been thinking of anything other than his hunchback in the final lines. Pope will become "an Out-cast, and alone" (100): by way of allegory they have exiled him from their well-ordered society.

### "To Ld. Hervey & Lady Mary Wortley"

Pope's brief retort to the *Verses* was probably written soon after Montagu and Hervey's work arrived in print. Pope circulated "To Ld. Hervey & Lady Mary Wortley" in manuscript form; it was only published with Pope's *Works* in 1750. In the ensuing centuries the 8-line poem has attracted minimal critical attention, perhaps because of its diminutive length and uncharacteristic simplicity. Brief and blunt in its aggression, this poem targets Pope's aristocratic adversaries through the tried and true avenues of sexual deviance, calling Hervey a "pimp" and Montagu a "flagrant Whore" (1-2). What makes this poem notable, however, is the directness with which Pope addresses his detractors and their work:

Thanks, dirty Pair! you teach me what to say,  
When you attack my Morals, Sense, or Truth,  
I answer thus--poor Sapho you grow grey,  
And sweet Adonis--you have lost a Tooth.

The poem presents Montagu and Hervey as irrationally angry; Montagu "crys out" and Hervey "screams" insults (3-4). It then concludes with a surprisingly mild allusion to the aristocrats' supposed impending age and decrepitude. The combination of calm and condescension apparent in the last lines matched Pope's frequent aim in authorial self-fashioning, however; by backing down from the overt hostility of his earlier poems, Pope framed himself as the sole rational voice in an arena of needless aggressors.

### Sober Advice from Horace

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

In 1734 Pope published *Sober advice from Horace: to the young gentlemen about town*. The poem affected to be written by one of Pope's admirers; it even opened with an effusive dedication to the supposedly better-known poet (Stack 78). With a dual focus upon fools and sex, these verses offer a coarse exploration of Pope's attitudes towards sexuality and masculinity.<sup>58</sup> Lady Mary appears at least three times in the poem. She first numbers with Hervey among the corrupt members of hypocritical, low-class society: "THE Tribe of Templars, Play'rs, Apothecaries, / Pimps, Poets, Wits, Lord Fanny's, Lady Mary's" (1-2).<sup>59</sup> A later reference to Montagu under the name of Fufidia, however, is far more damaging:

With all a Woman's Virtues but the P [...],  
*Fufidia* thrives in Money, Land, and Stocks:  
 For Int'rest, ten *per Cent.* her constant Rate is;  
 Her Body? hopeful Heirs may have it *gratis*.  
 She turns her very Sister to a Job,  
 And, in the Happy Minute, picks your Fob:  
 Yet starves herself, so little her own Friend,  
 And thirsts and hungers only at one End:  
 A Self-Tormentor, worse than (in the Play)  
 The Wretch, whose Av'rice drove his *Son* away. (17-26)

The first line mockingly echoes Montagu's frustrated denials after the initial appearance of Pope's infamous "P-xed by her love" line. The insults that follow find their basis largely in false accusations of sexual deviance, but oscillate between truth and fiction to produce a cacophony of insults that edged just close enough to reality to sting.

The Montagu of *Sober Advice* is a monstrous intersection of moneyed high society and improper womanhood. Montagu's dealings in stocks and her family's conflicts over her sister's life and fortune were widely known. Pope's accusations of promiscuity and theft, however, enlivened reality with lies and stereotype—for a woman writer and intellectual, many believed at the time, must inevitably be promiscuous. Pope goes further than to simply accuse Lady Mary of excess sexual appetites ("thirsts and hungers only at one End")—rather, she robs men during sex ("picks your Fob"), is so

---

<sup>58</sup> Seizing the opportunities presented by modern printing formats, Pope used the footnotes to caricature a scholar of a previous generation, Richard Bentley. Perhaps in mockery of the real Bentley's tendency to politely overlook such vulgarities, this '*Reverend Doctor*' noted every mention of female genitalia and male homosexuality throughout the poem, complained that the Imitator had not translated them correctly, and, "in the name of true scholarship...indicated what they meant" (Stack 78).

<sup>59</sup> Hervey and Montagu may also appear as a pair in the line, "Sweet *Moll* and *Jack* are Civet-Cat and Boar" (30).

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

stingy that she turns her family into a moneymaking scheme (“turns her very Sister to a Job”) and starves herself and her immediate family (“Yet starves herself...A Self-Tormentor, worse than [in the Play] / The Wretch, whose Av’rice drove his *Son* away”). The rift between their son and his parents was increasingly part of the public consciousness, as was Lady Mar’s illness and the custody battle that had ensued over Montagu’s sister during the late 1720s. Given that Lady Mary’s reputation and familial standing had long been central to her identity, it must have pained her to witness Pope dragging her family’s politics to the forefront of London’s gossip.<sup>60</sup> The distance proffered by anonymity offered Pope the opportunity to address his enemies with a more casual and decidedly vulgar cruelty. Pope’s accusations of Lady Mary in the poem focus overtly on her supposedly excess attention to money. However, the sexual slurs and insults to her family suggest that it was Montagu’s wider societal positioning and her atypical approach to gender performance that aroused the deepest anger in Montagu’s onetime friend.

### *Epistle to Arbuthnot*

The *Epistle to Arbuthnot* (1735) has been widely described as Pope’s effort to vindicate himself as man and author after the attacks made upon him in *Sober Advice from Horace* (Justice 79; Baines 111; McLaverty, “Of Which Being Publick the Publick Judge,” 204). In the “Advertisement” attached to the first edition of this poem, Pope describes the *Epistle* as a catalogue of complaints “begun many years since, and drawn up by snatches” (Donaldson 184).<sup>61</sup> He claims that he would not have published the piece but for the recent attacks by “Some Persons of Rank and Fortune” upon his “*Person, Morals, and Family*” (Donaldson 184). These attacks, comprised of *Verses to an Imitator* and Hervey’s lesser-known *Epistle to a Doctor of Divinity from a Nobleman at Hampton Court*, had apparently motivated the poet to defend himself under his own name—unlike many of his earlier attacks, this work was published openly. In the

---

<sup>60</sup> Pope would make use of this tactic again in *Epilogue to the Satires* (1738) when he referred to Montagu as she “Who starves a Sister” (“Epilogue” 112).

<sup>61</sup> Pope’s careful manipulation of these sidelines of literary production were as prominent in this work as in earlier ones; as Parrott noted in his 1906 edition of Pope’s works, the *Epistle* was probably actually “the work of one impulse,” rather than having been written over multiple years (122).

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

“Advertisement” Pope also addresses his attackers’ comments on his family background, insisting that while his writings are “publick” and therefore open to criticism, his family should be off-limits in such attacks. Worth noting is the decided irony of this stance given Pope’s propensity for anonymously attacking Montagu by way of her family. Pope also seizes his attackers’ comment on his “birth obscure” in *Verses Address’d to the Imitator of Horace* to expound on how his prominence in the literary world effectively outclassed any aristocratic background (Justice 79).

Within this work Pope twice refers to Montagu under the name of Sappho. In the first instance, the word “Sappho” is promptly followed by the fictionalized Arbuthnot’s seemingly frightened attempts to silence the valiant poet: “Hold! for God-sake—you’ll offend: / ‘No names—be calm—learn Prudence of a friend” (101-102). The brutality of the *Verses* perhaps opened the door to this portrayal of Lady Mary “as a user of physical violence,” and the poet’s persistence in the poem despite Arbuthnot’s frantic interjections frame Pope as heroically defending himself despite the danger of doing so (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 348). The second attack is notable in its hearkening back to the poets’ early friendship. In an early draft, this couplet suggested both past friendship and current regret:

Once, and but once, his heedless youth was bit,  
And lik’d that dang’rous thing, a female wit. (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 348)

The published version was more obvious in its target, but it still depicts Pope as having been grievously misled (“bit”) by the object of his affections:

Yet soft by Nature, more a Dupe than Wit,  
*Sapho* can tell you how this Man was bit. (368-369)

The draft and the published lines share common threads. Pope had felt affection for Montagu; perhaps because of her gender her intelligence proved dangerous; Pope felt that he had been deceived. This may be among the most honest literary expressions in the whole of the poets’ later interactions. The early affection between the poets was plain throughout their early letters, however much each was mistaken regarding the other’s intentions and character. The combination of Montagu’s gender and her “wit” led Pope to view her as stepping out of line; in his view, she was the wrong kind of feminine, and with time he would come to associate her with every other kind of “wrong” femininity. Their literary battle had likely begun with Pope’s belief that

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*



Montagu was covertly slandering him at court. That action would have proven her to be both treacherous and threatening. Now he could only look back regretfully at those years when his youthful self had foolishly fostered affection for “that dang’rous thing, a female wit.”

### *Epistle to a Lady, on the Characters of Women*

Pope’s *Epistle to a Lady* was less targeted than *Sober Advice* in its attacks and defenses, possibly because Pope had composed the bulk of the piece three years before its 1735 publication (Rogers, *The Alexander Pope Encyclopedia*, 109). This tribute to his friend Martha Blount would become one of Pope’s most celebrated poems (*Comet of the Enlightenment* 351). Here Montagu appeared as the personification of filth, in stark contrast to Blount’s portrayal as Pope’s vision of ideal womanhood. This attack would have an enduring influence on Montagu’s reputation. The association of the writer and aristocrat with dirt and filth would prove persistent, with assumptions of Montagu’s poor hygiene cited uncritically for centuries after.<sup>62</sup>

The stereotype of women’s—particularly intellectual women’s—poor hygiene was fairly typical at the time. Pope took the opportunity to enliven the stereotype, however, by highlighting the seeming contradiction between the dirt and the wealth of this “Sappho”:

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

Sappho’s dirtiness is only half her crime; the rest is the incongruity of her “diamonds” with her “dirty smock.” Her participation in high society thus only emphasizes her filth—an angle of attack that likely was also rooted in Pope’s resentment of Montagu and Hervey’s slur against his birth. Worth noting also is Pope’s friend Swift’s similar conclusions regarding women’s falseness and filth in “The Lady’s Dressing Room”—a poem to which Montagu had written a biting response in 1734.<sup>63</sup> Finally, as Rumbold

---

<sup>62</sup> See Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 391.

<sup>63</sup> Montagu’s response to Swift’s poem “The Reasons that Induced Dr S to Write a Poem called ‘The Lady’s Dressing Room’” is among her better-known works today despite its having been published anonymously.

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

notes, the association of Montagu with a glaring sun became increasingly common in Pope's works as he shifted his metaphor of ideal womanhood towards the milder, reflected light of the moon (Rumbold, *Women's Place in Pope's World*, 132). When the *Epistle* was first published Pope referred to Montagu as Flavia—her own name for herself in an early poem after her bout with smallpox. Later, he would change the name to Sappho, which by now was well known to be his alias for Lady Mary (*Comet of the Enlightenment* 351).

### "Pope to Bolingbroke"

By 1735 Lady Mary had produced her final strike against Pope: a verse epistle titled "P[ope] to Bolingbroke." This poem portrays Pope as a charmless sycophant trailing hopelessly after his friend and mentor Bolingbroke, a man whom Montagu had long hated and had perhaps slandered previously at the court. Bolingbroke had already been widely denounced as a "notorious sensualist and serial turncoat" (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 353). His allegiance to the Pretender made him Montagu's political enemy, and Pope's close association with him only made the poet that much more politically suspect. This epistle accordingly lampoons both, drawing careful caricatures of each within the lines of a thorough mockery of Pope's self-conscious poetic style. As Landry describes, "Pope to Bolingbroke" sticks closely to the "mannerisms and pretensions" typical of Pope's poetry, but makes them "absurdly self-revealing" (Landry 321). The Pope of the poem shows himself to be desperately envious of the high life available to those of Montagu's social class; his friendship with Bolingbroke is thus based partially on "bad politics" and partially on hopeless coveting of a world out of reach (Landry 321).

Early drafts of the poem ended on a crude note with Pope and his mentor becoming variously infected while prowling for street prostitutes: "Even there superior, there it often happ'd / My Lord was pox'd, when I was only clapp'd" (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 354). These lines, however, never arrived in manuscript form. The

---

The poem portrayed "Dr S" (i.e. Swift) as a prostitute's client who, upon failing to successfully carry out sexual relations with the prostitute, demanded his money back and (when she refused) threatened to write verses against her. The last lines of the poem showcase the prostitute's response; she tells Dr S, "I'm glad you'll write; / You'll furnish paper when I shite" ("The Reasons that Induced Dr S," 100-101).

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

conclusion to the draft that Montagu copied into an authorized album of her poems was less sexual but no less cruel: it referred nostalgically to the reign of Henry VIII, when Montagu said that “Bolingbroke would have been beheaded for such treason, and Pope merely horse-whipped, as appropriate for one from the meaner, servile classes” (Landry 322). The violence of these lines would likely have shocked those who anticipated cringing delicacy from women. Montagu’s willingness to show this authorized volume of her works to various readers emphasizes her disinclination to behave according to such expectations of femininity.

Overall, each poet’s lampoons presented specific large-scale themes, ranging from sex and class to popular stereotypes of gender and disability. On closer examination, however, their hatred can be seen to manifest in intensely personal slurs that make the most of their mutual understanding of each other’s vulnerabilities. The poets’ past anxieties regarding sex, authorship and reputation, when layered with present-day stubbornness and fears ranging from character assassination to accusations of treason, would prove incendiary. This hatred could not have arisen solely from a misunderstanding; it was certainly rooted partially in each poet’s fear of the other. This fear must have been visible to their contemporaries; Edmund Curll even caricatured Pope’s (perhaps sexualized) fear of Montagu in a cruel satire that worked to both poets’ detriment in 1735 (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 352). Montagu’s efforts to have Pope silenced in previous years stand of clear evidence of her fear; neither poet was immune, just as neither would remain distant from the fray or the sheer nastiness it would produce. Both poets would face their share of attacks outside the realm of this specific feud. However, the hatred behind this particular war of pamphlets and manuscripts shines harshly through the scripted lines. Like much of their writing, these pieces seem timeless; even centuries later readers can find themselves witness to the poets’ bitter and decidedly mutual loathing.

### **Timeless Notoriety**

During their lifetimes Pope and Montagu were not the only ones contributing to their battle of poems and pamphlets. Rather, the conflict between the two became rich

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

fodder for texts ranging from direct attacks to comedic squibs and pornographic pamphlets. One example is the 1732 pamphlet *Mr. Taste, the Poetical Fop*, which features Alexander Taste as a crippled, incompetent poet and translator and Lady Mary as the “whimsical” Lady Airy. This incarnation of Lady Mary is a widow, which may have been “camouflage or a gibe at her marriage.” She also has “a sister, Lady Addle, who had been driven mad by her husband’s ‘barbarous Usage, tho’ she brought him a large fortune” (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 333). In the pamphlet Taste makes an ill-fated declaration of love to Airy—this may have been when this story of their falling-out first surfaced. While the text certainly did not work to the advantage of either author, it likely hit harder for Montagu since her class and gender made her reputation a more crucial concern. By 1733, the two had become so notorious that their names surfaced in multiple texts in the space of a few weeks:

First Bezaleel Morrice dedicated his slashing, anonymous *On the English Translations of Homer* to Lady Mary, as a ‘deliberate affront’ to Pope. Next a more effectively masked ‘Gentleman’ on the other side supported Pope by turning the machete on Lady Mary as Sappho. Then a ‘Gentlewoman’, also calling her Sappho and aiming at a more balanced stance, invited her to admit her unfair treatment of Pope, to reform, and be reconciled with him. A general attack on women cited ‘good lady M—y’ as a vintage example of marital wrong-doing; the *Gentleman’s Magazine* championed her by name as author of the *Verses*. (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 341)

Less direct examples of pamphlets that jumped into the fray arose throughout the years of the conflict, many using Lady Mary’s name “in a manner compromising to her dignity and status” and most with a clear intent of dragging the name of at least one of the poets through the mud (Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, 286). Other writers of the time were only too eager to join the poets themselves in manufacturing a grotesque mythology that reshaped the stories of Montagu and Pope’s lives.

The writers’ altercations have also lived on in history. One notable example of their story being put to use is Virginia Woolf’s fictional biography *Orlando*. The main character in this work is Orlando, an eighteenth-century writer and nobleman who turns into a woman during a journey to Constantinople. After returning to London and spending some time pondering the foolishness of masculine and feminine behaviors, Orlando turns to befriending London’s best-known writers, including “Mr Pope.” Just as Orlando’s journey offers a fictionalized echo of Montagu’s travels, the Mr Pope of

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

Woolf's work is distinctly recognizable as the Alexander Pope of the real life eighteenth-century battle between Pope and Montagu. "Never was any mortal so ready to suspect an insult or so quick to avenge one as Mr Pope," Woolf cautions (294). In the space of a few pages Orlando tires of the writers' company, partly because "there was something in the sneer of Mr Pope...which took away her relish for the society of wits" (294).

## VII. Conclusions and Future Research

*"It has all been most interesting."*<sup>64</sup>

This investigation merged existing research with original analysis to explore a rivalry that has puzzled readers and historians for centuries. While the poetic battles between Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu have long provoked curiosity, scholars have struggled to provide a concrete explanation for the depth of the poets' mutual loathing. This lack has caused many readers and researchers to resort to the popular tale that their friendship ended because Montagu spurned Pope's romantic overtures—even though a number of scholars have offered convincing arguments of this theory's improbability. With a Feminist New Historicist methodological approach as its foundation, this research has offered a new proposal to fill this void in the poets' biographies and in studies of the literature they produced.

Each of these writers occupied a specific sociohistorical subject position that produced notable powers, privileges, and vulnerabilities. Montagu balked conventional femininity by journeying across Europe and pioneering groundbreaking medical advances, but this courage could not override her fear of publishing. Her wealth and class helped her make connections with politicians and royalty in England and across the Continent, but it also left her (like other English women of her class) extremely vulnerable to public opprobrium. Her writing skills and relative bravado could not emancipate her from these limitations of her time. In the meantime, Pope's writing ability and skillful engagement with the publishing industry made him adept at shaping public attitudes. However, his physical deformity relegated him to the outskirts of popular masculine performance and his Catholicism (and likely Jacobite sympathies) put him in a weak political position. Each writer's primary vulnerability—Montagu's reputation as an aristocrat and Pope's political placement—happened to be one that the other was conveniently placed to exploit. Furthermore, the writer's early friendship had left each well aware of the other's emotional weaknesses.

---

<sup>64</sup> These were supposedly Lady Mary's last words before her death in 1762 (Henrickson 108).

The early letters of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu show a friendship complicated by each writer's construction of a personally idealized and exceptionally fictional role for the other. Historical hindsight suggests that their fond correspondence may be viewed less as evidence of tender friendship than as a portent of their later conflict. Lady Mary's letters demonstrate a wish to intrigue and impress an intellectual peer—but such impressions would ideally be based upon her recounting of the cultures and the knowledge she had encountered in her travels. Pope's responses posed him as a gentleman wooing a woman whose unusual choices must not preclude the softness he associated with ideal femininity. He constructed Lady Mary as a sentimental and highly sexualized wanderer, paying special attention to the Orientalist erotic implications of her journey East. Probably partly in reaction to the obstacles he faced in English society because of his physical disabilities, he framed Lady Mary as what he then believed to be the ideal complement to his deep-seated need for masculine validation.

Various theories suggest that some inciting moment in the mid-1720s proceeded to unleash the poets' full-on hatred. Most of these theories share common threads: Montagu proved unsettlingly proud and assertive in view of Pope's conception of ideal femininity; Pope sought an unrealistic level of engagement with (and perhaps control over) her life; the writers' political and social worlds had diverged; Pope believed that Montagu had deceived him (overtly by writing verses against him; perhaps covertly by failing to conform to the role he hoped she would fill in his life). In September 1724 Pope apologized to a mutual friend for neglecting Lady Mary. He suggested in this letter that he found her indecipherable and perhaps dishonest. Four years later Pope's first publication lampooning Montagu, "The Capon's Tale," would center on this belief in her deceptiveness.

Montagu may have written satires against Pope prior to his 1728 attack. If she followed her usual pattern of only circulating the poems among friends, such verses could easily have slipped from view over the following centuries. There would have only been a few copies of any such piece, and these may not have listed the date or the author. Alternately, Pope may have believed that Lady Mary wrote poems that have

since been proven to be the work of other authors. If this was a mistaken accusation, it would not be his last.<sup>65</sup>

The early friendship had transformed into loaded antagonism during by the end of 1728. Each poet was uniquely positioned to threaten and hurt the other. Pope's Catholicism made him vulnerable to political maneuvering, and Montagu was as near to a politician as her gender and class would permit. Her social position and connections offered her direct access to politicians who could seriously threaten Pope's future if they decided his attitudes were dangerous to the government. She also remembered the insecurities Pope had expressed in his early letters regarding his disability. However, Montagu's position as an aristocratic woman made her public reputation a valuable resource, and Pope's expert manipulation of the presses meant he was ideally situated for a public path to vengeance. His knowledge of personal elements of Montagu's life ranging from familial woes to potentially incriminating financial dealings only left him even more prepared to mount his attacks. Their mutual awareness of each other's skills, social positioning and insider knowledge probably gave rise to much of the hatred exhibited in their poetic attacks. Pope and Montagu were both intelligent, self-protective individuals, and they must have realized their mutual vulnerability. Much of their hatred probably found its basis in fear.

In seven poems against Montagu between 1728 and 1735, Pope would accuse Montagu of promiscuity, mistreating her family, mercantilism and violence. He called her dirty and a whore, suggested that she infected men with syphilis, and implied that her pioneering efforts with inoculation were actually murderously dangerous. Some of these poems were published anonymously and others openly. However, nearly all affected to mount a righteous defense against those (including, but not limited to,

---

<sup>65</sup> The historical circumstances behind this first accusation have proven opaque, but during the following decades each poet would insist that the other had been the first to strike. Their descendants and biographers would carry those claims forward through history. Guerinot's *Pamphlet Attacks* portrays Pope as fully justified for waging his "war against the dunces"; in the meantime, the faltering explanations of Montagu's descendent Wharncliffe take a similar approach. In a footnote to the *Verses to an Imitator* he writes, "It appears to be only fair to Lady Mary's memory, to remind the reader that the lines in Pope's poem, which she conceived to apply to her, are most gross and unjustifiable; and when the satirist indulges in such attacks, it may be very unwise, but it is certainly natural, that his victims should retort upon him" (Montagu, *Selected Prose and Poetry*, footnote 82). In any case, while the hatred of the poets' later poetic battles may have been triggered by a particular incident, currently a lack of documentary evidence prevents one from drawing concrete conclusions about such an incident. What is available is considerable evidence that their eventual hatred emerged after years of slowly growing apart.

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*



Montagu) who had slandered Pope without provocation. Lady Mary, however, was not one to refrain from responding to such claims. Her known verses at least equal Pope's in their sheer savagery. She may have been behind the violent poem "A Pop upon Pope," which supposedly recounted a "barbarous Whipping" committed against Pope in reaction to his libels. She collaborated with Hervey in the *Verses Address'd to the Imitator of Horace*, which painted Pope as an eternal outcast and drew on the eighteenth century's ideology of form to mock his disabilities. Her final attack expressed nostalgia for past eras when the behavior of Pope and his mentor Bolingbroke might have earned both corporal punishments. Both writers' attacks were skillfully written and carefully targeted. Their attacks would make them notorious in their time and in the eyes of history.

This essay has made use of feminist New Historicist and close reading frameworks to propose a new explanation for the extraordinary loathing showcased by the poets' attacks. Even today much discussion of the writers hinges on the "rejected passion theory" that Pope declared his love for Montagu and she rejected him (a story which probably originated as titillating, eighteenth-century gossip). This implausible tale has probably remained dominant both because of the sexual charge of the writers' insults and because of the lack of any alternate explanation. This analysis of the poets' lives and works has utilized feminist New Historicism and close reading to uncover a new, more plausible explanation for the terms and content of their poetic battle. The findings of this investigation suggest that the poets' hatred may have been as strongly rooted in their societal power over one another as in the sentiments behind the insults they exchanged. Montagu's ability to injure Pope's reputation at court and his power to destroy her reputation before the public must have made each profoundly wary of the other. Furthermore, their early friendship was built on the shaky ground of the false roles they had constructed for one another. Though history has yet to provide evidence of a concrete motivation for their altercations, the highly gendered misunderstandings of their early friendship and the power dynamics at play in their later sociohistorical circumstances show that even a brief misunderstanding would have been sufficient to push the two poets into the realm of total antipathy.

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

By exploring the poets' works and interactions through a feminist lens, this essay has sought to uncover new perspectives on the poets' attacks. The feminist frame for this investigation's New Historicist and close reading methodologies has not, however, led to gender's constituting the exclusive foundation for this analysis. Instead, gender here becomes a primary element in a wider approach that takes into account other facets of modern feminist methodology including disability studies, class and religion. Montagu's unease with authorship was not simply a response to her gender—women's publishing had actually become fairly typical in England by the end of her life. Rather, they were a response to English society's expectations of women of her class. Similarly, Pope's maleness offered him significant privileges in the arenas of writing and publishing, but his disability and religious marginality combined to thoroughly influence his literary production and his perceptions of society and of his enemies. Application of the profoundly feminist concept of intersectionality, and thus viewing the poets within the context of the overlapping oppressions they navigated in their lives, accordingly allows for a personalized and highly individual exploration of New Historicism's large-scale concepts of ideology and discourse.

Feminist New Historicist conceptions of oppression provides a basis for approaching Montagu and Pope as relative equals in their society—rather than following the example of much literary history and portraying Montagu as the witty sideshow to Pope's overwhelming influence. Given the class and gender concerns in play, these two individuals may well have seen themselves as being on fairly even footing in terms of the power each could exercise against the other. As much as they sought to portray each other as unimpressive opponents, the relatively equivalent power relations involved in their interactions produced far greater levels of mutual hatred and fear than such supposed power disparities would have. Feminist theory also provides an opening for acknowledging Montagu's agency and that of her poetic rival while—with a nod to New Historicism—acknowledging that agency's historically imposed limitations.

Feminist theory also offers new opportunities for moving forward in studies of Pope, Lady Mary, and their interactions. For example, application of Laura Mulvey's theories of spectatorship and other visual theory may deepen understanding of Pope's construction of Montagu, especially given the intensity with which his conception of her

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

in their early letters as a highly sexualized wanderer opposed her own representation of herself as an adventurous traveler and intellectual. Consideration of the gendered nature of epistolary writing could also further illuminate their early relations, particularly if explored in terms of the relative marginality of the literary genre in modern scholarship, women's dominance in the genre, and the potential for subverting societal expectations within letters.

Other profitable approaches for future research may include intensive studies of the poets' social circles and the impact of changing social dynamics within that circle on their feud. Pope addressed Hervey nearly as often as he did Montagu. Hervey's name appears constantly in research on the poets' altercations; his close friendship and collaborations with Montagu made him nearly as intimately involved in these altercations as the poets themselves. Furthermore, Montagu's attacks insulted Pope's friends with a ferocity similar to that she addressed towards the poet himself. Pope's writings were often highly interrelated with those of his contemporaries, as the case of Peterborough's ballad to Mrs. Howard demonstrates.<sup>66</sup> Given the predominance of intentional collaboration and the less direct influence of shared sentiments (as in the parallels between Pope's portrayal of Fufidia's filth in *Epistle to a Lady* and Swift's portrayal of Celia in "The Lady's Dressing Room"), consideration of the works of other writers of the time could shed considerable light on how Montagu and Pope constructed their shared rivalry.

While both of these writers faced significant obstacles and oppressions within the context of their time, they also made their literary and social prowess the means for seizing significant agency within their society. They took advantage of wide-ranging opportunities to assert and maintain influence through business, literature and politics. Both Montagu and Pope consequently become intriguing figures from a feminist literary perspective. While constrained by societal structures and expectations, both of these writers made use of their writing to exercise every scrap of agency available. Their strengths and vulnerabilities pitted them against each other, but their altercation also provoked the production of masterful literary works that would be read with appreciation for centuries after their deaths. Both of these writers navigated complex

---

<sup>66</sup> See page 65 of this essay.

webs of power and marginalization—and both would earn a timeless notoriety through their efforts to tear each other down.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources:

- Althusser, Louis. *“Lenin and Philosophy” and Other Essays*. London: New Left Books, 1977.
- . *Reading “Capital.”* 1968. Trans. Ben Brewster. London: New Left Books, 1970.
- Bentley, Thomas. “A Letter to Mr. Pope, Occasioned by Sober Advice from Horace.” London: T. Cooper, 1735.
- Book of Days: A Miscellany of Popular Antiquities in Connection With the Calendar Part 2*. Kessinger Publishing 2004. E-book.
- Johnson, Samuel. *The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL. D. with an Essay on his Life and Genius*. Vol. I. Ed. Arthur Murphy. New York: George Dearborn, Publisher, 1837.
- Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. 1690. Ed. Peter H. Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979.
- Montagu, Lady Mary Wortley. *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*. Volume 3. Ed. Robert Halsband. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965-1967.
- . *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley-Montagu*. Ed. Lord Wharncliffe. Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Blanchard 1837.
- . *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Edited by her Great Grandson Lord Wharncliffe. In Three Volumes*. Vol. 1. London: Richard Bentley, New Burlington Street 1837.
- . *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Edited by her Great Grandson Lord Wharncliffe. In Three Volumes*. Vol. 3. London: Richard Bentley, New Burlington Street 1837.
- . *Selected Prose and Poetry*. Renaissance Editions. May 1993 and June 1966. Transcribed by Richard Bear. Web. 8 September 2012. <<http://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/iemls/resour/mirrors/rbearold/montagu.html#82>>
- . *Verses Addressed to the Imitator of the First Satire of the Second Book of Horace*. 1733. Ed. Jack Lynch. Rutgers University. Web. September 4, 2012. <<http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Texts/montagu2.html>>
- Pope, Alexander. “The Capon’s Tale: To a Lady, Who Fathered Her Lampoons Upon Her Acquaintance.” 1728. In *The Works of Jonathan Swift: Miscellanies in prose, by Mr.*
- From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

*Pope, Dr. Arbuthnot, Mr. Gay ... Miscellanies in verse by Mr. Pope, Dr. Arbuthnot, Mr. Gay, etc. Prose miscellanies by Swift and Sheridan.* Ed. Sir Walter Scott. Edinburgh: Archibald Constable, Co. Edinburgh, Hurst, Robinson, and Co. London, 1824.

- . *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope.* Ed. George Sherburn. 5 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956.
- . *The Dunciad (1728).* In *The Poems of Alexander Pope.* Ed. Valerie Rumbold. Edinburgh Gate, Harlow: Pearson Education Limited 2007.
- . "Epilogue to the Satires: In Two Dialogues." 1738. In *The Poetical Works of Alexander Pope, Volume 1.* Tredition Classics, 2012.
- . "Epistle III: To Allen Lord Bathurst of the Use of Riches." In *The Poems of Alexander Pope.* In *The British Poets. Including Translations. In One Hundred Volumes. XLI. Pope, Vol. II.* Chiswick: Printed by C. Whittingham, College House, 1822.
- . "Epistle to a Lady. Of the Characters of Women." 1734. In *Alexander Pope: Selected Poetry and Prose.* Ed. Robin Sowerby. London: Routledge, 1988.
- . "Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot." 1735. In *Alexander Pope: Selected Poetry.* Ed. Pat Rogers. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996.
- . "The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace, Imitated." 1733. In *Imitations of Horace.* Ed. Jack Lynch. Web. Feb. 13, 2012.  
<<http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Texts/popehor.html>>
- . *Letters of Mr. Alexander Pope: and several of his friends.* London: J. Wright, 1937.
- . *Memoirs of the Extraordinary Life, Works, and Discoveries of Martinus Scriblerus.* 1741. Ed. Charles Kerby-Miller. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950.
- . *Sober advice from Horace: to the young gentlemen about town. As deliver'd in his second sermon. Imitated in the manner of Mr. Pope. Together with the original text, as restored by the Rev'd. R. Bentley.* London: Printed for T. Boreman; sold by the booksellers of London and Westminster, 1734. Oxford Text Archive. Digitized image of microfilm. Web. <<http://ota.ox.ac.uk/id/3699>>
- . "To Ld. Hervey & Lady Mary Wortley." 1750. In *The Poems of Alexander Pope: A One Volume Edition of the Twickenham Pope.* Ed. John Butt. Oxon: Routledge, 1963.
- . *The Works of Alexander Pope.* London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1871.
- . *The Works of Alexander Pope, Esq. with Notes and Illustrations by Himself and Others. To Which are Added a New Life of the Author, an Estimate of his Poetical Character*

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

*and Writings, and Occasional Remarks, by William Roscoe, Esq.* London: J. Rivington, 1824.

---. *The Works of Alexander Pope Esq. Volume VIII.* London: Printed for J. and P. Knapton in Ludgate-Street, 1751.

---. *The Works of Alexander Pope; with Notes and Illustrations by Joseph Warton, D.D. and Others.* Vol. 2. London: J.F. Dove, St. John's Square, 1822.

Sterne, Laurence. *A sentimental journey through France and Italy: By Mr. Yorick...* London: T. Becket and P. A. De Hondt, 1768.

Woolf, Virginia. *Orlando: A Biography.* London: The Hogarth Press, 1928.

## Secondary Sources:

Adams, Cecil. "What's the correct wording of 'Hell hath no fury...!'" *The Straight Dope*. Web. 19 August 2012.

<<http://www.straightdope.com/columns/read/890/whats-the-correct-wording-of-hell-hath-no-fury>>.

Aravamudan, Srinivas. "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in the *Hammam*: Masquerade, Womanliness, and Levantinization." *ELH* 62, No. 1 (Spring, 1995): 69-104.

Backscheider, Paula R. *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry: Inventing Agency, Inventing Genre.* Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005.

Baines, Paul. *The Complete Critical Guide to Alexander Pope.* London and New York: Routledge, 2000.

Bannet, Eve Tavor. "Studies in British and American Epistolary Culture." *Eighteenth-Century Life* 35, No. 3 (2011): 89-103.

Bickley, Frances. "Alexander Pope and the Lyrical Cry." *The Sewanee Review* 31, No. 2 (Apr., 1923): 140-151.

Bohls, Elizabeth. *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics 1716-1818.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 1995.

Bray, Alan. *Homosexuality in Renaissance England.* London: Gay Men's Press, 1982.

Bressler, Charles E. *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003.

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

- Chapin, Chester. "Alexander Pope: Erasmian Catholic." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 6, No. 4 (Summer 1973): 411-430.
- Dalton, S. *Engendering the Republic of Letters : Reconnecting Public and Private Spheres in Eighteenth-Century Europe*. Montreal, Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004.
- Davis, Lennard J. "Dr. Johnson, Amelia, and the Discourse of Disability in the Eighteenth Century." In *"Defects": Engendering the Modern Body*. Ed. Helen Deutsch and Felicity Nussbaum. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000.
- Deutsch, Helen. "Pope, self, and world." *The Cambridge Companion to Alexander Pope*. Ed. Pat Rogers. *Cambridge Collections Online*. Cambridge University Press, 2007. Web. 14 August 2012. <[http://cco.cambridge.org/extract?id=ccol9780521840132\\_CCOL9780521840132A002](http://cco.cambridge.org/extract?id=ccol9780521840132_CCOL9780521840132A002)>
- . *Resemblance and Disgrace: Alexander Pope and the Deformation of Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996.
- . "The 'Truest Copies' and the 'Mean Original': Pope, Deformity, and the Poetics of Self Exposure." *Eighteenth Century Studies* 27, No. 1 (Autumn, 1993): 1-26.
- Dickie, Simon. "Hilarity and Pitilessness in the Mid-Eighteenth Century: English Jestbook Humor." *Eighteenth Century Studies* 37, no. 1 (2003): 1-22.
- Dierks, Konstantin. "The Familiar Letter and Social Refinement in America, 1750-1800." In *Letter Writing as a Social Practice*. Ed. David Barton and Nigel Hall. Philadelphia: John Benjamins North America, 2000.
- Donaldson, Ian. "Concealing and Revealing: Pope's 'Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot.'" *The Yearbook of English Studies* 18 (1988): 181-199.
- Dryden and the Earl of Mulgrave. "An Essay Upon Satire." 1679. *The Literature Network*, 2000-2012. Web. 2 April 2012. <<http://www.online-literature.com/dryden/poetical-works-vol1/9/>>
- Erskine-Hill, Howard. "Alexander Pope: The Political Poet in His Time." *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Winter, 1981-1982): 123-148.
- Ferraro, Julian. "Pope: Pen and Press." In *Literary Milieux: Essays in Text and Context Presented to Howard Erskine-Hill* by David Womersley, Richard Anthony McCabe. Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses 2008.
- Foxon, David. *Pope and the Early Eighteenth-Century Book Trade*. The Lyell Lectures, Oxford 1975-56. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*



- Gallagher, Catherine. *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace 1670-1820*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1994.
- Garcia, Humberto. *Islam and the English Enlightenment, 1670-1840*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2012.
- Gardner, Andrew. "Gossip, Flattery, and Flirtation: The Art of Eighteenth-Century Letter Writing." *CW Journal* (winter 2007). Web. 25 May 2012.  
<<http://www.history.org/foundation/journal/winter07/letters.cfm>>
- Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. "Misfits: A Feminist Materialist Disability Concept." *Hypatia* 26, no. 3 (Summer, 2011): 591-609.
- Goldgar, Bertrand A. "Pope and the 'Grub-Street Journal.'" *Modern Philology*, Vol. 74, No. 4 (May, 1977): 366-380.
- Gonda, Caroline. "Misses, Murderesses, and Magadels: women in the public eye." In *Women, writing, and the public sphere : 1700-1830*. Ed. Elizabeth Eger. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning from Moore to Shakespeare*. 1980. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- . *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.
- Grundy, Isobel. *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: Essays and Poems and Simplicity, a Comedy*. Ed. Robert Halsband and Isobel Grundy. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977.
- . *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: Comet of the Enlightenment*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- . "Ovid and Eighteenth-Century Divorce: An Unpublished Poem by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu." *The Review of English Studies*, New Series 23, No. 92 (Nov., 1972): 417-428.
- . "Pope, Peterborough, and the Characters of Women." *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, 20, No. 80 (1969): 461-468.
- . "Verses Address'd to the Imitator of Horace: A Skirmish between Pope and Some Persons of Rank and Fortune." *Studies in Bibliography* 30 (1977): 96-119.
- Guerinot, Joseph V. *Pamphlet Attacks on Alexander Pope, 1711-1744*. London: Methuen & Co Ltd: 1969.

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

---. Introduction. *Two Poems Against Pope*. By Leonard Welsted and an anonymous author. *Project Gutenberg*. Ed. Earl R. Miner, Maximillian E. Novak, and Lawrence Clark Powell. Los Angeles: University of California. 1965. Web. 14 August 2012. <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/24199/24199-h/24199-h.htm#intro>>

Halsband, Robert. "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Eighteenth-Century Fiction." In *English Studies Today: Fourth Series*. Ed. Giorgio Melchiori and Ilva Cellini. Rome: Azienda Beneventana Tipografica Editoriale, 1966.

---. "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu as Letter-Writer." *PMLA* 80, No. 3 (Jun., 1965): 155-163.

---. *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956.

---. "New Light on Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's Contribution to Inoculation." *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* VIII (October 1953): 390-405.

---. "Pope, Lady Mary and the Court Poems (1716)." *PMLA*, Vol. 68, No. 1 (Mar., 1953): 237-250.

---. "Pope's 'Libel and Satire.'" *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 8, No. 4 (Summer, 1975): 473-474.

Haydon, Colin. *Anti-Catholicism in eighteenth-century England: A political and social study*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1993.

Heffernan, Teresa. "Feminism against the East/West Divide: Lady Mary's 'Turkish Embassy Letters.'" *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33, No. 2 (Winter, 2000): 201-215.

Hughes, Helen Sard. "Pope to Bathurst: An Unpublished Letter." *Studies in Philology* 24, No. 4 (Oct., 1928): 462-467.

Introduction. "An Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot." In *The Rape of the Lock and Other Poems* by Alexander Pope. The Echo Library, 2007.

Jones, Tom. "Pope's 'Epistle to Bathurst' and the Meaning of Finance." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 44, No. 3, Restoration and Eighteenth Century (Summer, 2004): 487-504.

Justice, George. *The Manufacturers of Literature: Writing and the Literary Marketplace in Eighteenth-Century England*. London, Ontario and Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2002.

Kaes, Anton. "New Historicism: Writing Literary History in the Postmodern Era." University of Wisconsin Press. *Monatshefte* 84, no. 2 (Summer, 1992): 148-158.

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

- Kietzman, Mary Jo. "Montagu's Turkish Embassy Letters and Cultural Dislocation." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 38, No. 3, Restoration and Eighteenth Century (Summer, 1998): 537-551.
- "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762): Smallpox Vaccination in Turkey." *Internet Modern History Sourcebook*. Paul Halsall, July 1998. Web. August 14, 2012. <<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/montagu-smallpox.asp>>
- Landry, Donna. "Alexander Pope, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and the literature of social comment." *The Cambridge Companions to English Literature, 1650-1740*. Ed. Steven N. Zwicker. Cambridge University Press, 1998. *Cambridge Collections Online*. Cambridge University Press. Web. 14 August 2012. <[http://cco.cambridge.org/extract?id=ccol0521563798\\_CCOL0521563798A017](http://cco.cambridge.org/extract?id=ccol0521563798_CCOL0521563798A017)>
- Lawlor, Nancy. "Pope's *Essay on Man*: Oblique Light for a False Mirror." *Modern Language Quarterly* 28, No. 3 (September 1967): 305-316.
- Lentricchia, Frank, and Andrew Dubois, eds. *Close Reading: The Reader*. Durham: Duke UP, 2003.
- Lew, Joseph W. "Lady Mary's Portable Seraglio." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 24, No. 4 (Summer, 1991): 432-450.
- London, April. *Women and Property in the Eighteenth-Century English Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999 and 2004.
- Lonsdale, Roger. *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984.
- Lowe, Lisa. *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991.
- Lowenthal, Cynthia J. *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Eighteenth-Century Familiar Letter*. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2010.
- Lukić, Jasmina and Adelina Sánchez. "Feminist perspectives on close reading." In *Theories and Methodologies in Postgraduate Feminist Research: Researching Differently*. Ed. Rosemarie Buikema, Gabriele Griffin and Nina Lykke. New York and Oxon, UK: Routledge 2011.
- Lund, Roger D. "Laughing at Cripples- Ridicule, Deformity and the Argument from Design." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 39, No. 1 (Fall 2005): 91-114.
- Mack, Maynard. *Alexander Pope: A Life*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1986.

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

- Maner, Martin. "Pope, Byron and the Satiric Persona." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 20, No. 4 (Autumn, 1980): 557-573.
- McElligott, Jason. "The Politics of Sexual Libel: Royalist Propaganda in the 1640s." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 67, No. 1 (March 2004): 75-99.
- McLaverty, James. "'Of Which Being Publick the Publick Judge': Pope and the Publication of *Verses Addressed to the Imitator of Horace*." *Studies in Bibliography* 51 (1998): 183-204.
- . *Pope, Print, and Meaning*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Melville, Lewis. *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: Her Life and Letters (1689-1762)*. Ed. Charles Aldarondo and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team. *Project Gutenberg*. January 4, 2004. Web. 25 May 2012.  
<<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/10590/10590.txt>>
- Miller, John. *Popery and Politics in England, 1660-1688*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1973.
- Montag, Warren. "'The Soul is the Prison of the Body': Althusser and Foucault, 1970-1975." *Yale French Studies*, No. 88, *Depositions: Althusser, Balibar, Macherey, and the Labor of Reading* (1995): 53-77.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." 1975. In *Feminism and Film Theory*. Ed. Constance Penley. New York, NY: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc. 1988.
- Newton, Judith. "History as Usual? Feminism and the 'New Historicism.'" *Cultural Critique*, No. 9 (Spring, 1988): 87-121.
- Papper, E. M. "The influence of chronic illness upon the writings of Alexander Pope." *Journey of the Royal Society of Medicine* 82 (June 1989): 359-361.
- Parrott, Thomas Marc. Introduction. "An Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot." In *The Rape of the Lock, and Other Poems* by Alexander Pope. Forgotten Books. Boston, NY, Chicago, London, Atlanta, Dallas, Columbus, San Francisco: Ginn and Company, 1906.
- Perry, Ruth. "Two Forgotten Wits." *The Antioch Review* 39, No. 4 (Autumn, 1981): 431-438.
- Raymond, Joad. *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Reichard, Hugo M. "Pope's Social Satire: Belles-Lettres and Business." *PMLA* 67, No. 4 (Jun., 1952): 420-434.
- Rogers, Pat. *The Alexander Pope Encyclopedia*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004.
- From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

---. "Nameless Names: Pope, Curll, and the Uses of Anonymity." *New Literary History* 33, No. 2 (Spring, 2002): 233-245.

Rooney, Ellen. "Form and Contentment." *MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly* 61, No. 1 (March 2000): 17-40.

Rose, Mark. "The Author as Proprietor: *Donaldson v. Becket* and the Genealogy of Modern Authorship." *Representations*, No. 23 (Summer 1988): 51-85.

Rumbold, Valerie. "Editor's Headnote." In *The Poems of Alexander Pope*. Volume Three: *The Dunciad (1728) & The Dunciad Variorum (1729)*. By Alexander Pope. Harlowe, UK: Pearson Education Limited, 2007.

---. Introduction to *The Dunciad (1728)*. In *The Poems of Alexander Pope*. Volume Three. By Alexander Pope. Harlowe, UK: Pearson Education Limited, 2007.

---. *Women's Place in Pope's World*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989.

Russo, Mary. *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity*. New York: Routledge 1994.

Santillan, Joe. "The Patriarchal System." University of California at Davis, Fall 1998. Web. 2 April 2012. <<http://www.public.asu.edu/~squiroga/santill.HTM>>

Schneider, Gary. "Libelous Letters in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England." *Modern Philology* 105, No. 3 (February 2008): 475-509.

Seidel, Michael. "Satire, lampoon, libel, slander." In *Cambridge Companions Online*. Cambridge University Press 2006.

Spence, Joseph. *Observations, Anecdotes and Characters of Books and Men*. Ed. Edmund Malone, Esq. London: John Murray, Albemarle-Street, 1820.

Stack, Frank. "Horace, immoral: *The Imitation of Satire I.ii. (Sober Advice)*." In *Pope and Horace: Studies in Imitation*. Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge UP, 1985.

Straub, Kristina. *Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth-Century Players and Sexual Ideology*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

Sutherland, James R. "The Dunciad of 1729." *The Modern Language Review* 31, No. 3 (July, 1936): 347-353.

Symonds, Emily. *Lady Mary Wortley and Her Times*. Kessinger Publishing, 2004.

*From Private Letters to Pamphlet Wars: The Literary Relations of Alexander Pope and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*

- Szechi, Daniel. *1715: The Great Jacobite Rebellion*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006.
- Tavor Bannet, Eve. "Studies in British and American Epistolary Culture." *Eighteenth-Century Life* 35, Issue 3 (2011): 89-103.
- Veeder, Van Vechten. "The History and Theory of the Law of Defamation." *Columbia Law Review* 3, No. 8 (Dec., 1903): 546-573.
- Voltaire. *Letters on England*. 1733. Rockville, Maryland: Arc Manor 2008.
- Weeks, Jeffrey. "Remembering Foucault." University of Texas Press, *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14, no. 1/2 (Jan. – Apr., 2005): 186-201.
- Williams, Aubrey L. "Pope's 'Duchesses and Lady Mary's.'" *The Review of English Studies*, New Series 4, No. 16 (Oct., 1953): 359-361.
- Woods, Thomas F. "*Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* by John Mullan." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 21, No. 1 (Winter, 1991): 81-84.
- Yegenoglu, Meyda. "Supplementing the Orientalist Lack: European Ladies in the Harem." *Inscriptions* 6 (1992): 45-80.