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Recommended Citation

Jordan, N. (2010). Eastern pastoral: "Female fears" and "savage foes" in Montagu's "constantinople". *Modern Philology, 107*(3), 400-420.
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Eastern Pastoral: "Female Fears" and "Savage Foes" in Montagu's "Constantinople"

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Modern scholars of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu have tended to be dazzled, disturbed, or otherwise provoked by her unconventional and protofeminist portrait of Turkey, focusing on how the *Embassy Letters* expose the ways in which gender and class function as categories at once mutually reinforcing and in opposition to one another.[1] As Donna Landry has persuasively suggested, no scholarly consensus is likely to be forthcoming with regard to the ideological implications of Montagu's representation of her eastern sojourn.[2] Rather than delve directly into the fray by further dissecting that "ur-Eastern text,"[3] I would like to explore Montagu's political sensibilities by looking at another, more obscure representation of her experience there, in the poem "Constantinople, To [William Feilding]," written in December 1717. In addition to illuminating the Janus-faced nature of Montagu's treatment of the Ottoman Empire, the poem also demonstrates how an assessment of her

1. Lisa Lowe and Anna Secor echo one another in their formulations of intersecting discourses (gender, class, and orientalism); see Lowe, *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); and Secor, "Orientalism, Gender and Class in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters*: To Persons of Distinction, Men of Letters &c.," *Ecumene* 6 (1999): 375–99. Teresa Heffernan adds religious difference to the list of intersecting vectors of power depicted in the *Embassy Letters*; she assesses how the dynamics among these categories produce hegemonic notions of Western modernity and Eastern backwardness. See "Feminism against the East/West Divide: Lady Mary's *Turkish Embassy Letters*," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33 (2000): 201–13.

2. Donna Landry's essay registers the generic diversity and political subtlety of Montagu's work and offers suggestive, though brief, comments on "Constantinople." See "Alexander Pope, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and the Literature of Social Comment," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1650–1740*, ed. Steven N. Zwicker (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 307–29.

3. Felicity Nussbaum, "British Women Write the East after 1750: Revisiting a 'Feminine' Orient," in *British Women's Writing in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 122.

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politics demands sensitivity to the period's highly charged politics of genre—and of pastoral in particular. Because partisanship dominates the political climate of the first half of the eighteenth century in England, and because the intellectual standard-bearers engage in debate by composing poetry that is specifically neoclassical in form, it seems important to consider Montagu's poetic intervention in politics in both its generic and its partisan manifestations. Doing so represents a less common yet fruitful way to assess the climate in which Montagu's reputation as a daring woman of wit emerged.

The critical tendency to discuss the *Embassy Letters* in isolation from her political lampoons, occasional poetry (whether in ode, epistle, eclogue, or other classical form), and partisan journalism means that Montagu's literary identity loses its political capaciousness. "Constantinople" expresses this very quality. Replete with subtextual references to partisanship and politically volatile topics such as estate design and imperial conquest, the poem offers an opportunity to explore the intersections among Montagu's politics, literary aesthetics, and "Female Fears."[4] The physical setting in which Montagu wrote the poem, which she identified when she transcribed it in an album given to her by Alexander Pope, signals her deliberate construction of a wide survey: "Written in the Chiosk of the British Palace, at Pera, overlooking the city of Constantinople, Dec. 26, 1718 [1717]."[5] With this heading, the speaker appraises not only her own distance from home but also her culture's (as yet) relatively small role in the historical span of empires. A picture emerges of Montagu writing in an exotic gazebo above the landscape at her feet as she overlooks the sweep of imperial history before her. The poem is punctuated by expressions of the speaker's welcome escape from England's freezing weather and "noisy Party rage" (109). In long intervening sections, meanwhile, she responds to monuments in the cityscape before her and envisions other relics of the various empires that have ruled and then fallen in this ancient city.

In this arrangement, Montagu casts what I will henceforth interpret as an imperial gaze. Enclosed and remote though she may seem in her kiosk, she projects an authoritative aura reminiscent of other landscape

4. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, "Constantinople," line 103, in her *Essays and Poems and Simplicity, a Comedy*, ed. Robert Halsband and Isobel Grundy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 206–10. Subsequent citations of the poem are to this edition and will be given by line number in the text.

5. For details regarding this transcription, see the introductory note in Montagu, *Essays and Poems*, 206. The heading I quote appears in the nondefinitive, but for my purposes relevant, online Renascence edition of *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Third Edition, with Additions and Corrections Derived from the Original Manuscripts, with Notes, and a New Memoir by W. Moy Thomas* (London: Bohn, 1861), 225.

gazers who survey their estates (or those of others) in order to impose a certain order and hierarchy upon the vast expanse before them.[6] The way the speaker's bird's-eye view mirrors the visual sovereignty exercised in topographical and country-house poetry, and in landscape poetry such as Pope's *Epistles to Several Persons* (1731–35), indicates that Montagu is well versed in the generic techniques with which writers of the era grapple with political conflict. The twofold investigation that this essay undertakes, examining generic as well as political versatility in Montagu, will enable us to appreciate how the simultaneously formulaic and flexible nature of neoclassical poetry offers Montagu a mode in which to participate in political debate while at the same time developing her own idiosyncratic and often "unfeminine" version of Augustan literature.[7] As with her controversial orientalism, so with her antipartisan Whiggism; with vexing contradiction, she invites readers to imagine a womanhood that wields political authority and yet is neither defined nor diminished by it.

In "Constantinople," Montagu distinguishes herself more in content than in form. She uses versification that is conventional in pastoral poetry but introduces topics—sensual femininity, Ottoman architecture and religion, a highly detailed foreign cityscape—into a form that coalesced, in her time, around the contours of English politics and the English countryside. In heroic couplets (and sporadic triplets) suitable to both the pastoral and imperial themes she will embrace, the first seven lines paint a picture of bucolic serenity:

> Give me, Great God (said I) a Little Farm
> In Summer shady and in Winter warm,
> Where a clear Spring gives birth to a cool brook
> By nature sliding down a Mossy rock,
> Not artfully in Leaden Pipes convey'd
> Nor greatly falling in a forc'd Cascade,
> Pure and unsulli'd winding through the Shade.
>
> (1–7)

6. I draw here upon the work of John Barrell, in particular his essay "The Public Prospect and the Private View: The Politics of Taste in Eighteenth-Century Britain," in *Reading Landscape: Country, City, Capital*, ed. Simon Pugh (Manchester University Press, 1990), 19–40.

7. I am indebted to Isobel Grundy's overview of Montagu's poetry, particularly the notion that it synthesizes immersion in tradition and striking eccentricity. See her introduction to the poems in Montagu, *Essays and Poems*, 172. Susan Staves also explicates Montagu's writing in terms of her expertly executed defiance of convention; see Staves, *A Literary History of Women's Writing in Britain, 1660–1789* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 176–81, 211–17.

The lines are true to the form in their studied simplicity. The unsurprising opening trochee is followed by regular meter and familiar rhyme. No enjambment complicates the linear containment of thought, and the proliferation of single-syllable words in lines 1–4 gives the impression of unadorned candor. In an antithesis between nature and artifice, the speaker opposes natural waters, seasons, and rocks to man-made objects—manufactured pipes and a showy fountain. Compared to the organic images of birth that occur in quick succession ("Where a clear Spring gives birth to a cool brook / By nature sliding down a Mossy rock"), the phallic "forc'd Cascade" and "Leaden Pipes" are paltry expressions of virility. The image of water sliding down a mossy rock, rendered in a metaphor of "giving birth," invites readers to imagine childbirth. In light of the poem's subsequent meditation on female virtue, Montagu's figurative language in the first stanza becomes all the more pregnant, as it were, with the themes of womanhood.

These alignments of woman with nature and man with culture, although perfectly conventional, also set the stage for Montagu to avail herself of pastoral's flexibility. Without (I hope) resorting to essentialist notions of femininity, I find Montagu's use of birth imagery (which recurs in the second stanza), and her subsequent meditations on the cycles of life and of history, resonant enough to sustain a feminist interpretation. The fact that she was in the final stages of pregnancy while she wrote the poem is more than likely no coincidence.[8] And though there is nothing necessarily feminist in depicting landscape as evoking a woman's body, the multiple significations of birth in this poem bring woman's experience into a genre whose origins and most famous examples are by men.

In addition to noting the subtle insinuations of the woman's voice in the poem, it is also important to interpret the political terrain that Montagu summons by making use of antithesis in the structure of her poem. This topos, integral to the pastoral mode, had been adapted for a variety of partisan purposes since the turmoil of the Civil War and therefore evokes a political subtext here. Because the technique (and the pastoral genre itself) acquired new currency in England specifically in the context of factional politics and continued to serve poets in their articulation of partisan issues, it becomes a necessary part of her discourse. It is during the Civil War era, according to James Turner, that "the politics of landscape" comes to the fore in poetic production; during this time, he suggests, English poets begin to use the panoramic perspective as a way to manage an increasingly volatile political situation. *Topographia*,

8. See Isobel Grundy, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: Comet of the Enlightenment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 159.

one version of the poetic rendering of rural scenery, operates according to its own internal logic: "Topographical poems, elaborating on the description of an actual place, and bearing its name . . . derive their structure from a transformation of ideal landscape."[9] In other words, certain principles of nature and form—of items arranged in proper relation to one another—determine how topographical poetry configures the objects in the landscape it is depicting. Turner helps us grasp the literary history embedded in Montagu's *topographia*.

But the England of 1717 differs from the England of the 1640s. "Constantinople" registers this chronological shift in the way that it adapts the typical English rurality of the genre to the depiction of a foreign and urban landscape. Though intimations of political turmoil infuse the poem, the simmering urgency seen in the most influential topographical poems of the seventeenth century is not at work here. Regarding John Denham's 1642 version of *Coopers Hill*, Turner writes, "He offers [like-minded Royalists] the landscape as a way of coping with the collapse of their political world—not a random and clumsy allegory, nor just a glimpse of idyllic country scenes, but a whole aesthetic system, succinct and adaptable, an elaborate display of the art of prospect."[10] Montagu profits from such techniques in the way in which she gathers in the sweep of imperial history. But the motives and implications behind her version of rural retreat necessarily differ from those of Denham, Marvell, and other male poetic landscapers whose tactical decision to reject politics operates within the public sphere while Montagu's decision resonates more in the private realm. When, in conclusion, the speaker declares that she enjoys her sanctuary so much more than the beauty and pomp of a public procession, she speaks not as a politician or even a gentleman but as a woman.[11]

We initially glimpse this interest in femininity in the birth metaphors mentioned previously—a theme that disappears during the middle section of the poem, which focuses on imperial conquest and military pageantry, only to return when the speaker muses over the futility of female virtue at the end. She adds another dimension to this image of feminin-

9. James Turner, *The Politics of Landscape: Rural Scenery and Society in English Poetry, 1630–1660* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 49.

10. Ibid., 61.

11. John Barrell theorizes the proper perception of landscape as a distinctively political faculty, one that is "proper" only to gentlemen. He describes how this mode of perception links the possession of taste to the legitimate exercise of authority. According to the logic of civic humanism that generates this particular way of perceiving, in order to see "correctly," one must be a landed gentleman, free from the necessity of earning a living that would taint one's judgment with private interest. A gentleman is best equipped to rule because of his capacity to perceive the public interest. See Barrell, "Public Prospect," esp. 19–21 and 29–31.

ity near the end of the first stanza, where she pictures her ideal image of water—"Pure and unsulli'd winding through the Shade" (7). One might, upon first impression, read the line as an ungendered image that is part of a rather predictable rehearsal of pastoral values—nature without artifice, and the moral edification derived therefrom. But a reconsideration of the opening lines in light of the overall arc of the poem renders a feminist reading more plausible. Female purity, and its constant exposure to those who would sully it, conclude the poem and thus become an abiding concern in the work as a whole. Montagu is thus adept at implementing familiar pastoral imagery in a way that honors convention while also configuring another, more defiant subtext. By invoking the language of sexual virtue with the phrase "Pure and unsulli'd," she plants the seed of an idea that she will return to after exploring similarly moral themes, though on a historical scale. In her manipulation of antithesis, the feminine/masculine opposition intermingles with nature/artifice and warm/cold as she wends her way from the imaginary farm to barren England, and then on to balmy gardens, monuments, and a military procession in Constantinople. As the first stanza intimates, in both its use of antithesis and its thematic rendering of *vanitas*, the poem evokes a sense of the beauty and the waste of human ambition. There is already a hint of this wistful tone in lines 5–7, where the woman's voice expresses frustration with the grandiose display of certain types of landscape design. Tellingly, she introduces the theme of ambition not just with a representation of architecture, but a decidedly male version of it, in the form of "a forc'd Cascade." She thus establishes a wariness regarding certain types of achievement, a fear that within the pursuit of greatness there lurks the threat of destruction.

The foregoing antitheses establish the modulations in mood—alternating melancholy and delight—that carry the poem to its conclusion. In the couplet at the end of the first stanza, Montagu savors her distance from the brutal English climate: "All-Bounteous Heaven has added to my Prayer / A softer Climat and a Purer air" (8–9). As Isobel Grundy has suggested, Montagu refers here to the pastoral poetry she wrote in her youth; in these lines she thanks Heaven for doubly answering her prayers by giving her not just any rural retreat but one situated in such a balmy locale.[12] This pleasure further propels her into an extended vision of the frozen landscape and dreary weather that she imagines enveloping the home she has left. Following a ten-line meditation on winter, the subsequent section then reverses the antithesis, returning the speaker to the warmth of the present moment. Leaving

12. See Grundy, *Lady Mary*, 159.

behind her thoughts of "barren meadows" (18), she contemplates her immediate situation. She looks out at Constantinople from the kiosk in Pera and revels in all that England is not. Unlike "The wither'd woods grown white with hoary frost" (12), the scene before her summons an image of perpetually hospitable weather generating uninterrupted plenitude: "Here Summer reigns with one Eternal Smile, / And Double Harvests bless the Happy Soil" (20–21). Building on this notion of perpetual plenty, the speaker then crafts an image that calls to mind the natural regeneration that distinguished her "Little Farm" in the first stanza:

> No killing Cold deforms the beauteous year,
> The Springing flowers no comeing Winter fear,
> But as the Parent rose decayes and dyes
> The infant buds with brighter colors rise
> And with fresh Sweets the Mother's-Scent Supplies.
>
> (24–28)

In order to evoke the temperate climate of the region, Montagu concocts a punning and ingenious image of rebirth. Inspired by the contrast between "Our frozen Isle" (10) and "Fair, fertile fields!" (22), she entertains a fantasy of eternal plenitude in which death does not wield its destruction in the same way that it does in northern climates. The double entendre on *spring* conjures complementary images of water bubbling up from the source, and the season when such signs of life abound.

By returning to the theme of birth in the "Parent rose" and its "infant buds," Montagu again feminizes a pastoral scene. This is a sensual as well as a maternal femininity; a heightened awareness of physical experience follows the image of blossoming rebirth. In addition to dazzling color, the passage conjures pleasing smells and sounds. In the wake of the "Mother-Scents," we feel awash in sensation: "the Vi'let glows with odours blest" (29); "streams still murmur" (34); and "The Warbling kind uninterrupted Sing" (36). The emphasis on sensual pleasure distinguishes Montagu's pastoralism from a more philosophical mode of rural retreat, as seen in the works of Abraham Cowley and Edmund Waller.[13] By playing upon the conventional association of femininity and sensuality, Montagu develops a voice that seems driven as much by "proper" perception of an ideal landscape—seeing and thereby controlling it—as by other sensually

13. Douglas Chambers describes Cowley, Waller, and others using the sacred grove of antiquity as a conceit "suitable for philosophical and statesmanly retirement." These conceits are of course motivated by distaste for political life in the city. See Chambers, *The Planters of the English Landscape Garden* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 47.

informed experience. In the play of antitheses, then, she basks in the beauty and reassurance offered by the "infant bud." But as she pursues this thought, hints of corruption break through the canvas of blooming, colorful, fragrant plenty. As depicted in the ten-line meditation on England's dreary winter (10–19), the island emerges as a place fraught with deformity. Line 11 describes the isle as "Deform'd with rains," and line 24 echoes this thought: "No Killing Cold deforms the beauteous year"; thus, the speaker reminds readers of the unnatural, that is, artificial principles at work in freezing England. Everything at home—the garden design, the seasons themselves—evokes a corrupt and even violent ("Killing") atmosphere. The "rough and blasting winds" (11), "the "driving Storms" (13), the "Silenced urns" (16)—all work in concert to evoke an inhospitable environment that beleaguers the speaker with scenes "painful to the Sight" (19). There is, however, something in the decaying rose and its "infant buds" that differs from the earlier antitheses, for this image does not geographically separate its positive and negative poles. Rather, in containing the two within the same space, the speaker sets up the possibility for further images of balanced opposition within the scene immediately before her. By having parent flowers and infant buds participate in an ongoing cycle of fertility, thus keeping death at bay, the speaker manages to suspend opposites—youth and age—in a dynamic process. This technique prefigures the subsequent passage, in which she brings together a dazzling array of opposing elements: Islam and Christianity, war and peace, savagery and civilization.

Thus, after spending forty-odd lines establishing an antithesis between an inhospitable Britain and a temperate Mediterranean, the speaker then proceeds to complicate this schema by introducing a modified antithesis, that between the Christian and Muslim empires that successively ruled this imperial city. In effect, opposites that were once geographically distant now occupy the same scene. Turning away from the gardens and gazing now at the city, the speaker builds upon the aesthetic of coexisting taint and beauty that she created in the decaying rose and infant bud. That image may not initially seem to reinforce the British/Turkish opposition, since the flowers obviously bloom in her Turkish garden; yet the subsequent passage (lines 38–99) introduces a dynamic interplay between past and present occupants of the city that subtly resonates with the generational theme engaged by the rose metaphor. Surveying the monuments in the cityscape below her, she initially speaks in a tone of awe: "New to the sight, my Ravish'd eyes admire / Each gilded Crescent and each antique Spire" (44–45). These lines appear to be a benign expression of admiration for the symbols of the Ottoman Empire, with the "Crescent" referring to the traditional insignia of the Ottomans in Constantinople, and the "Spire" conjuring images of

minarets in the distance. As she begins to remember the history of these structures, however, she becomes wistful, and her "Ravish'd eyes" now consider

> The Marble Mosques beneath whose ample Domes
> Fierce Warlike Sultans sleep in peaceful Tombs.
> Those lofty Structures, once the Christian boast,
> Their Names, their Glorys, and their Beautys lost
>
> (46–49)

Admiration for Ottoman military might gives way here to regret for the culture that fell victim to those "Warlike Sultans." In these lines, the optimism of the "infant buds" is transformed; the exotic presence ("New to the sight"), though momentarily splendid, introduces defeat and loss and thus dispels the promise of youth. If the city's Christian forebears embody the "Parent rose"—having ruled the city (and given it its name) prior to the Ottomans—then the ancient cathedrals contain the "infant," younger mosques. The superimposition of Ottoman and Christian cultures troubles the speaker, leading her to lament the lost glory of a culture she seems to identify with her own. In effect, her conception of natural order does not accommodate the displacement of Christianity by Islam. This section of the poem is therefore quite ambiguous, for the speaker shows signs of both admiration and disdain for the Ottoman Empire. This sense of ambivalence exists in tension with her unequivocal affinity for the fallen Christian empire. The unsettling question thus arises whether (or to what degree) the taint/beauty pair figured in the roses maps onto the Muslim/Christian houses of worship.

The next two lines add to the hint of Western superiority as the speaker contemplates "Those Altars bright with Gold, with Sculptures grac'd / By Barbarous Zeal of Savage Foes defac'd" (50–51). The derogatory language—"Barbarous Zeal," "Savage Foes"—is initially jarring in its intensity. It may build upon the "Fierce" and "Warlike" of line 47, yet those words are imbued with admiration whereas "Barbarous" and "Savage" are soundly negative. This is the moment when the poem's imperial gaze—its orientalist "othering" of the East—is most explicit, for the lines suggest that Islamic conquest amounts to civilization's regression. The way the passage culminates in a declaration of remorse for the fallen empire—"Vain Monuments of Men that once were great!" (66)—suggests that the poem's overarching sense of *vanitas* applies more to the Western tradition it traces than to the Eastern triumphs that also figure in the landscape. In one sense, there is no call for such regret since the Ottoman Empire is thriving before her very eyes; the next section in fact details this "Eastern Pomp and Gay Delight" (79). Yet the

speaker engages the motif of *vanitas* in a way that makes it timeless; the futility she feels for Greek and Roman triumph also carries her through to the final moment in the present, when the poem concludes with her fear that virtue may never prevail. In the emotional economy of the speaker's sorrow, the foreign Other figures primarily in the background; she barely hints at how Ottoman culture might inspire a sense of *vanitas*. When she expresses melancholy at the sight of infant buds, which represent a memento mori that then inspires sadness at the sight of "defac'd" monuments, one has to wonder why subsequent images of Turkish splendor in the present moment do not also cause her to feel sadness for the other culture's entanglement in life's brevity and futility. We have already seen how she depicts the Ottomans as aggressive and zealous; these images incite fear and suspicion rather than sympathy. It is as if the sight of foreign objects does not fully engage Montagu's historical memory and thus does not produce an emotional response comparable to the sadness she feels before "Roman glory" and "the Christian boast."

I would suggest that this particular moment of tension signals a breakdown in Montagu's generic experiment. Her application of pastoral and topographical techniques to a foreign cityscape raises contradictions of the sort that these genres cannot resolve. The incoherence of cathedrals being replaced by mosques that I noted earlier is therefore part of a larger dissonance among these genres' various propensities. The discourse of imperialism is an obvious explanation for this tension, although not in any simple sense of Constantinople's resistance to assimilation by England's effort to dominate the global economy. Yet there is a certain truth in this reading insofar as the aesthetic principles that inform pastoral and topographical poetry seem to run aground when an Islamic (though formerly Christian) city is brought under the gaze of an Englishwoman, and the English ambassador's wife at that. Though peripheral to my analysis, the reasons for Montagu's visit might be said to infiltrate the poem insofar as her effort to bring the city within the purview of a pastoral gaze resembles her husband's mission to negotiate a treaty between Austria and the Ottoman court.[14] In other words, both Montagus seek to "fit" the Ottomans into their particularly English view of the history of empire, or of global politics. These moments when orientalist attitudes seem to overtake her discourse

14. Lowe (*Critical Terrains*, 36–38) and Secor ("Orientalism, Gender," 381–84) explain Edward Wortley Montagu's diplomatic mission to Turkey as part of England's effort to protect its highly prized trading interests in the region. The Levant Company, which Montagu represented, contributed to the long process whereby England managed to negotiate a balance of trade in the region that was favorable to itself but unfavorable to the Ottomans.

present a challenge to readers who recall Lady Mary's contempt for the writings of previous European visitors to the region who showed similar condescension toward a culture they considered inferior. Is it possible that her inheritance of a particularly English pastoralism makes it easier for Montagu to denigrate the Ottoman Empire? It seems likely, given how the generic principles of natural order and freedom from political strife lead her to treat the Ottomans as deviating from these principles.

The fault lines in Montagu's Eastern pastoral can also be seen in the way her antitheses resist the harmony that is the ultimate aim of pastoral's *concordia discors*. One of these fissures appears when the incongruously foreign locale resists assimilation into a genre with distinctively English prerogatives. A glimpse at one of the consummate examples of this "harmony in discord" will put the contradictions of Montagu's generic maneuvering in relief. Alexander Pope's *Windsor Forest* was published in 1713, almost five years prior to the composition of "Constantinople"; this topographical tour de force demonstrated how poetry could put pastoralism into the service of England's imperial aims. While much more vast than "Constantinople" in its historical scope and authorial ambition, *Windsor Forest* also exemplifies how poets in this tradition integrate cityscapes into their panoramic depiction of the English historical—and rural—landscape. The poem's treatment of London is minuscule in scale compared to the number of lines devoted to other varieties of description: the rivers and forests of England, the history of English monarchs since William I, and the exotic regions of the world brought under England's imperium by the Treaty of Utrecht. By reducing London to a relatively small space within the poem, Pope ensures that the pastoral vision of England will endure. Thus, when father Thames utters his patriotic prophecy (under Queen Anne's "Stuart reign"), he uses the language of husbandry to do so: "Safe on my shore each unmolested swain / Shall tend the flocks, or reap the bearded grain."[15] Likewise, as the following lines demonstrate, the poet's experience of viewing the city reinforces the triumphant voice that he has established in the foregoing descriptions of natural beauty and monarchical history:

> Behold! Augusta's glitt'ring spires increase,
> And temples rise, the beauteous works of Peace.
> I see, I see where two fair cities bend
> Their ample bow, a new White-hall ascend!

15. Alexander Pope, *Windsor Forest*, lines 42, 367–68, in *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963), 195–210. Subsequent references to this poem are to this edition and will be given in the text by line number.

> There mighty nations shall enquire their doom,
> The world's great Oracle in times to come;
> There Kings shall sue, and suppliant States be seen
> Once more to bend before a British Queen.
>
> (375–82)

The difference between Pope's London and Montagu's Constantinople is stark. The former city ascends the imperial throne as if to confirm God's decision to grant global sovereignty to England. The latter, meanwhile, displays its architectural wonders to register the erasure of an empire whose links to the West were much closer than those of the Ottomans. According to this schema, Montagu is generically "correct" to mourn the remnants of former glory and to lament the city's present monuments: "Where Holy Saints have dy'd, in Sacred Cells / Where Monarchs pray'd, the Frantic Derviche dwells" (54–55). The contrast between "Holy" and "Sacred," on the one hand, and "Frantic" on the other, insinuates the speaker's ambivalence toward the un-Christian presence in the city's sanctified spaces.

Pope's patriotic achievement in *Windsor Forest* represents a calculated effort to secure his position as the nation's poet/prophet. Montagu's aim in "Constantinople," while more modest, is also not necessarily obliged to aspire to Pope's level of political impact.[16] In this sense, it may seem unfair to use *Windsor Forest* as the measure for other efforts in topographical poetry of a political bent. Indeed, the very need to qualify Montagu's contribution to the genre speaks to hierarchical imperatives that deem masculinized public discourse more significant than feminized private meditation. Nevertheless, the genre does have a distinctly patriotic lineage going back to Denham's *Coopers Hill* (1642) (to which *Windsor Forest* pays homage). This lineage therefore cannot be ignored when reading the last section of Montagu's poem that describes the features of the cityscape. The monumental impact of Denham and Pope has effectively made patriotism a generic feature of English topographical poetry of this era, and Montagu adapts its conventions but modifies them so that their primary purpose is not to extol the subjuga-

16. Pope scholars such as Laura Brown and Pat Rogers have devoted volumes to delineating the political and personal circumstances that informed the various drafts of *Windsor Forest.* John Richardson traces this argument, specifically in relation to allegations that Pope's poem condoned the slave trade. These scholars are merely three among many more who explore the political debate in which Pope's poem deliberately participated (and was received). See Brown, *Alexander Pope* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985); Rogers, *The Symbolic Design of Windsor Forest* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004); and Richardson, "Alexander Pope's *Windsor Forest*: Its Context and Attitudes toward Slavery," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35 (2001): 1–17.

tion of a foreign culture. Unlike Pope's cursory references to the Ganges, Mexico, and Peru in *Windsor Forest*, her detailed treatment of Constantinople suggests that, though it saddens her in some respects, it is also a place that she genuinely admires.

Yet there remains a sense of generic dissonance in the way that Montagu's praise for this Eastern city resists the patriotic aspects of pastoral. The tension has to do with her effort to combine two aims that become mutually contradictory in the terms of the genre she has chosen: to represent Constantinople through a pastoral lens while at the same time maintaining the hegemony of "Western" culture—that is, Christianity, "the Happy Sciences" (161), parliamentary democracy (with Mount Olympus figured as "The Parliamentary seat of heavenly Pow'rs" [43]), and so forth. For all her resistance to grandiose estate design and treacherous party politics, Montagu proves herself beholden to her culture's sense of superiority. She demonstrates in "Constantinople" the will to challenge the denigration of women and the general viciousness of political discourse in England; however, the generic dictates of pastoral keep her operating within a closed circuit of Englishness that results in the subordination of Eastern otherness. "Constantinople" is a poem whose general thrust is to celebrate the speaker's happy reprieve from a world she knows she will soon return to, but the tropes of retreat compel her to distance, and subtly disparage, the foreign city that turns out not to offer the peaceful escape she longs for.

As mentioned previously, Montagu only indirectly includes the Ottoman inhabitants of Constantinople (and their forbears) in her expressions of *vanitas*. In a starker gesture, she uses their dazzling presence on the scene as a way to distract herself from such distress. But before this shift occurs, her mood wanders from regret for "Convents where Emperours profess'd of Old" (65) to lingering sadness as she imagines beautiful Greek women who now, because of their subordinate cultural status, will miss the opportunity to inspire great literature. This interlude reintroduces the poem's interest in femininity, which had been submerged beneath more conventionally heroic subjects such as military valor, artistic greatness, and spiritual dignity. In keeping with pastoral convention, Montagu plays here with the trope of the inspirational female muse, whose evocation of romantic love harmonizes with other pastoral strains of the poem. At the same time, however, she entwines her previous intimations of feminine strength (through regeneration) with present anxiety over thwarted beauty. The following lines thus describe the small Greek quarter of the city,

> Where other Helens show like powerfull Charms
> As once engaged the Warring World in Arms,

> Those Names which Royal Auncestry can boast
> In mean Mechanic arts obscurely lost,
> Those Eyes a second Homer might inspire,
> Fix'd at the loom, destroy their useless Fire.
>
> (70–75)

The passage exemplifies how Montagu's feminine concerns can lead to equivocation with regard to her political stance. The birth imagery in the poem's first section intimated that the speaker's resistance to the bleak English atmosphere—including its political conflicts—was motivated in part by her status as a woman. The allusion to Helen expands upon a sense of female affliction by implying that feminine beauty is slowly destroyed by mechanical and hence artificial labor. Following in the wake of images in which male authority figures proliferate (the city is "So vast, that youthfull Kings might there reside, / So splendid, to content a Patriarch's pride" [62–63]), the toiling Helens seem to suffer under masculine domination. At the same time, however, the speaker's conventional allusion to Helen reveals a colonial stance that shores up rather than subverts a Western view of the East. In sympathizing with the invisible Helens of Constantinople, Montagu suggests that the defeat of the Roman Empire (and its Greek ancestry) has been more of a loss than a gain in the balance of history. Again, her appropriation of a genre deeply encoded with masculine and imperialist tendencies leads her to express ambivalence toward the foreign culture. Intimations of Ottoman glory therefore strike a discordant note in a poetic tradition in which the legacy of Denham, Pope, Cowley, and others treats rural England as naturally superior to other cultures.

When the speaker "indulges" (her word) in a final, detailed gaze over the city, her tone continues to be equivocal, for it instrumentalizes the scenery as mere distraction from weightier thoughts even while honoring the elaborate procession here described. Immediately after imagining the "other Helens" in the Greek quarter of the city, the speaker explains:

> Greiv'd at a view which strikes upon my Mind
> The short-liv'd Vanity of Humankind,
> In Gaudy Objects I indulge my Sight
> And turn where Eastern Pomp gives Gay Delight.
>
> (76–79)

The lines indicate that the source of the speaker's grief is the "useless fire" spent by beautiful women who waste their energy performing manual ("Mechanic" [73]) labor. She hopes to find solace in a more dazzling—though also more masculine—scene. This passage has conflicting implications, for on one hand it treats the procession as a superficial

(though impressive) spectacle. On the other hand, it offers subtle hints that all of this extravagance is in vain—a suggestion that signals that the Ottomans may in fact figure into the theme of *vanitas*. In the next breath, the speaker singles out the processing Vizier for his excessive pride: "The proud Vizier, distinguish'd o're the rest" (82) is followed by "His snowy Steed adorn'd with Lavish Pride" (85). Although she seems awed rather than saddened by this grandeur, it is possible to link the Vizier's pride to the "short-liv'd Vanity of Humankind" that she observed several lines previously. But because this link is speculative, and quite understated compared to a long section expressing remorse for the Romans and Greeks, the balance of her sympathy tips in their favor. She maintains a positive attitude toward the proud Turks, but ultimately her admiration is not as emotionally profound as her melancholic brooding over empires lost. Thus, the overriding tendency in this passage is the speaker's sense of Ottoman difference rather than empathy in the face of a common fate in death.

The procession passage includes further suggestions that Montagu's observations are driven by imperial prerogative. With censorious words like "Gaudy" and "Pomp," she links the East to excess in a way that endorses Western notions of Eastern degeneracy. In the same way that an earlier sequence linked "Fierce Warlike Sultans" to barbarity and savagery, this passage initially praises its object only to undermine that praise with intimations of skepticism toward an East figured as ornate and decadent. What gives the lie to these judgments of inferiority is the fact that this very excess, encoded as Eastern here, appeared in association with the "artfully" constructed fountain at the beginning of the poem. Although she has initially cast her gaze on the city expecting relief from artifice, she still finds it there in modified form. In a similarly inconsistent fashion, she has previously treated excess with nostalgia rather than censure. The sequence depicting Greek and Roman triumph asks, "Where are thy Palaces by Prelates rais'd; / Where priestly Pomp in Purple lustre blaz'd?" (58–59). Though ambivalent toward "Pomp," she expresses melancholy for the culture that embraced such spectacle. In the space between "priestly Pomp" and "Eastern Pomp," Montagu has changed her attitude toward grandeur. Rather than contributing to a sense of her lost culture's "blazing" achievements, now she appreciates the display as a distraction, as entertainment. The pastoral preoccupation with rustic calm resists the intrusion of extravagant urban splendor, and in effect Montagu's disdain for English politics is transformed into a rejection of its Eastern corollary.

With her gesture toward "indulgence," the speaker continues to strive for balance between wonder and dismay in the face of an elaborate Ottoman spectacle. In addition to aesthetic (and emotional) inconsistency,

the scene also effects a disorienting shift in perspective as it narrows the gaze to focus on specific objects. Such close-ups disrupt the pastoral incentives of the poem by limiting the typically wide survey of a panoramic landscape. The fine detail she provides, while complimenting the beauty and impressive gravity of the culture, brings her into proximity with the scene in a way that obstructs her capacity to keep the foreign culture at a safe, that is, diminutive, distance. Consider these lines, whose closely observed particulars suggest that she is closer to the spectacle than seems possible from atop a distant hill:

> See; the vast Train in Various Habits drest,
> By the bright Scimitar and sable vest,
> The Vizier proud, distinguish'd o're the rest.
> Six slaves in gay Attire his Bridle hold,
> His Bridle rich with gems, his stirrups Gold
>
> (80–84)

The lavish exhibition of this exoticized Ottoman army seems to distract Montagu from her desire for pastoral simplicity, and a corresponding lapse in perspective occurs. Assuming that from a remove she would not be able to see the jewels and weapons of the marchers, one wonders whether the speaker is concocting a dreamlike vision out of the memory of similar scenes witnessed at closer range. The uncertainty that this closely observed scene creates is another indication that Montagu confronts the limits of pastoral discourse in this poem; she endeavors to conceive of Constantinople as an escape from home but in the process turns it into a place that reminds her of all that she would like to forget.

In the final stanza, Montagu begins to move toward a conclusion by way of a further twist on her preceding antitheses. Her gratitude for being far from chilly England now becomes relief at being able to enjoy the distance between the military procession below her and the secluded British Palace in Pera. In effect, she retreats to an England-away-from-England:

> Yet not these prospects, all profusely Gay,
> The gilded Navy that adorns the Sea,
> The rising City in Confusion fair,
> Magnificently form'd irregular,
> Where Woods and Palaces at once surprise,
> Gardens, on Gardens, Domes on Domes arise,
> And endless Beauties tire the wandring Eyes
> So sooths my wishes or so charms my Mind
> As this retreat, secure from Humankind.
>
> (92–100)

The return to her original theme of finding a remote refuge effects a corresponding expansion of perspective. With the pastoral gesture of negation, "Yet not . . . ," she pulls away from her close-up view of the procession and re-establishes a certain control over her horizon. In consecutive subordinate clauses she arranges the objects in the landscape ("gilded Navy," "rising City"), flattening them both grammatically and geographically. Because they are framed by negation, these glorified objects are also diminished by the fact that, however beautiful they may be, they do not fulfill the speaker's ultimate desire for relief from artificial ("gilded") show. The same is true of the "Woods," "Gardens," and "Domes"—all are rendered equal, and equally secondary to the speaker's primary desire: to savor a world emptied of such traces of human ambition.

At the same time, this is a measured rejection of the city in that it praises the very objects that it turns from. Montagu seems to recuperate Constantinople from the taint of English artifice by contemplating how it is "Magnificently form'd irregular" (95). Doubled movements such as these, in which the speaker simultaneously embraces and rejects the scene before her, typify her attempts to negotiate a predetermined path without assuming the full burden of the imperial gaze that is affixed to Augustan pastoralism. The words of W. J. T. Mitchell illuminate the contradictory impulses that appear in the landscape that Montagu is inventing in "Constantinople": "Landscape might be seen more profitably as something like the 'dreamwork' of imperialism, unfolding its own movement in time and space from a central point of origin and folding back on itself to disclose both utopian fantasies of the perfected imperial prospect and fractured images of unresolved ambivalence and unsuppressed resistance."[17] Mitchell is attempting to isolate "the central point of origin" for what we might call the ideology of landscape, although he acknowledges that any such origin is fictional. His ideas are germane insofar as they capture the ambivalence that arises when Montagu endeavors to stay true to pastoral convention while also paying respect to Ottoman culture. In this sense, the final stanza, beginning with "Yet not these prospects . . . ," may be read as the kind of utopian fantasy that Mitchell refers to as imperial landscape. By returning to a panoramic perspective, Montagu reattains the balance between the country and the city, with "the rising city" neatly poised beside the woods and the palaces, followed by gardens and domes (96–97). Juxtaposing objects taken as either natural or man-made, lines 96–97 echo the antitheses that proliferated in the poem's earlier sequences describing the ideal farm, the English winter, the cathedrals and mosques, and

17. W. J. T. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," in his *Landscape and Power* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), 10.

so forth. This landscape becomes imperial by relying on binary oppositions that render the Ottomans inferior; indeed, after celebrating their superior climate, much of the poem laments their triumph over the West. The speaker's contradictory aesthetic judgments—such as praising "Pomp" only to disdain it later—intimate how she is trapped in an English echo chamber of sorts; Constantinople is both a haven away from England and an orientalized replication of it. Thus, the pastoral landscape generates a dynamic in which a Western notion of natural order competes with Montagu's alternative vision of a beautiful rural sanctuary amid an exoticized urban cityscape.

In keeping with the pastoral basis in fruitful contradiction, Montagu's encounter with this would-be refuge abroad precipitates an astute intervention in England's political culture. While blind to Ottoman difference, the poem's conclusion also illuminates the nexus of gender and politics in England, and blames it for her society's expatriation (if you will) of virtue. Thus, Montagu reorients the self-preserving impetus of pastoral such that male power, and sexual power in particular, rather than urban vice in general, becomes the object of censure. More precisely, the sinister alliance of sex and politics is what incites Montagu's indignation. She thus parades before her readers a succession of contemptible men whose prominence in society is linked to their sexual-political savvy:

> No Knave's successful craft does Spleen excite,
> No Coxcomb's tawdry Splendour shocks my Sight,
> No Mob Alarm awakes my Female Fears,
> No unrewarded Merit asks my Tears
>
> (101–4)

The echo of words like "Unsulli'd" and "defil'd," which appeared in the beginning of the poem, can be heard in this final stanza. Indeed, the accumulation of threatening or merely tedious male personalities makes this a rather dramatic way for the speaker to revisit earlier references to her experience as a woman. Such glimpses of sexual and political intrigue (the "Knave's successful craft") make for a symmetrical conclusion to the poem, for they resonate with the opening stanza's use of phallic imagery and reiterate the desire voiced there for relief from an artifice that is coded as masculine. In these later lines, artifice reappears in the form of knavery and "tawdry Splendour," and in a reversal of conventional gender stereotypes, the speaker feminizes male artifice and assumes the mantle of honesty and freedom from vanity for herself. The way the stanza is saturated with emotion—spleen, shock, alarm, fear, envy, hurt—suggests that the foregoing modulation between melan-

choly and delight may have been a pleasant reprieve from the emotional turmoil that life at home entails. Her contemplation of the monuments, churches, mosques, and gardens has in some ways counterbalanced this other life, for a wistful reverie on long-gone empires calls forth gentler, more impersonal sentiments compared to the piercing "Spleen" and "Fear." The latter emotions cut to the quick of the speaker's sense of herself and in comparison make ancient history seem more poignant than painful.

By concluding with a meditation on virtue in which no mention of Constantinople appears, the poem retreats from certain contradictions that it has generated. One wonders, for example, whether Montagu considers artifice a universal flaw, or whether her fixation on English trickery has made her lose interest in Ottoman forms of display. Similarly, if we take the poem as a meditation on virtue, we are left with only negative definitions of this ideal. Only so much may be inferred from a list of negative images of home that do not name any specific virtue; does Montagu endorse a femininity that is demure, or tactful, or perhaps pious? In the absence of such qualifications, it is impossible to know. A formal corollary to this absence of positives appears in lines 101–4: the four consecutive uses of "No," while conveying the urgency of the speaker's disavowal of vice, also do not name any particular virtue that might effectively take its place. If the body of the poem offered any possible models of virtue, they are now forgotten. Nature is absent; no springs or mountains soothe the speaker with the fantasy of a world unsoiled by humankind. Gone as well are any traces of a heroic and tragic past stretching back to classical antiquity and thus linking pastoral England to an ancient version of itself.

Yet there is another dimension to the dialectical unfolding of pastoral verse; as the poem nears the end, we may read the erasure of imperial history as in fact the speaker's absorption of it into a new political voice strengthened by an awareness of its imperial past. This dynamic becomes visible if we recall how the speaker identifies imperial Rome with imperial England. In her memorial to Constantinople's Christian past—"How art thou falln, Imperial City, low!" (56)—she generates one of the poem's more telling contradictions: her attachment to the imperial heritage that England claims for itself exists in tension with her emphatic rejection of English politics. Laying claim to England's imperial identity is, after all, a political gesture. But the final stanza transforms Montagu's retreat from English politics; rather than contradicting her earlier reverence for Western empires, the lines affirm her readiness to engage the present historical moment instead of dwelling on an idealized past. Her silence with regard to Constantinople does not necessarily signify her indifference to it; rather, it may be that contemplating Con-

stantinople has given her the resolve to defy political convention in her poetry. In other words, an apparent retreat from politics and from empire paradoxically generates a different political voice, one whose strength hinges on its female virtue. To contextualize what the city gives her, we might call it perspective. She arrives at this sense of control, and of renewed political conviction, through the process of bringing England and Constantinople together in one landscape.

The difficulty of producing mutually consistent explanations for the poem's manifold contradictions suggests that these are its definitive feature. Michael McKeon's materialist interpretation of English pastoral invites us to read such heuristic feedback loops as evidence of the genre's infinite flexibility. Referring to expansion in the genre's geographical scope, he coins the term "macro-pastoral" and argues that England's foreign encounters generate new iterations of the pastoral dialectic: "'The East' was, in short, a way in which the English regulated their contradictory sense of national and imperial identity, and it bespoke in turn the contradictions of domestic, 'pastoral' experience."[18] By this logic, certain masculinized renditions of English pastoral forge a path to dignified masculinity via retreat to one's country house (for example). But Montagu's Easternized intervention in the genre renders the image of men in rural landscapes as frivolous rather than commendable (hence, "artfully . . . in a forc'd Cascade").

Thus, "Constantinople" demonstrates how taking the pastoral abroad effects a change in the genre's domestic principles, as seen in the poem's final negotiation of politics and gender. The last five lines collapse partisanship and male power in a way that makes it possible for Montagu to challenge English masculinity, and this in turn occurs against the backdrop of an Ottoman military spectacle. The contrast between English fountain builders, knaves, and coxcombs on one side, and Ottoman Sultans and Viziers on the other, feminizes the English gentleman. Building upon her previous list of troublesome men (101–4), the conclusion strengthens the woman's political voice by including partisan conflict in her list of grievances:

> Impertinence with all her tattling train,
> Fair sounding Flattery's delicious bane,
> Censorious Folly, noisy Party rage,
> The thousand Tongues with which she must engage
> Who dare have Virtue in a vicious Age.
>
> (107–11)

18. Michael McKeon, "The Pastoral Revolution," in *Refiguring Revolutions: Aesthetics and Politics from the English Revolution to the Romantic Revolution,* ed. Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 288.

To associate politics with "Impertinence," "tattling," and "Flattery" belittles it; any sense of purpose or impact is evacuated in these images of man's pettiness and folly. I choose the term "man" deliberately, for the speaker's recollection of home includes few female figures. "Impertinence" may be feminized by "her tattling train," yet the preponderance of male types (the knave, the coxcomb) outweighs the indictment of women who participate in poisonous gossip. In this sense, the contiguity of male adversaries and "noisy Party rage" shifts the responsibility for political treachery onto men. "Fair sounding Flattery" and "Censorious Folly" emerge as male attributes in a scenario where female virtue is under assault. Montagu imagines men who use sexual ploys to trick women into ruining themselves, and in the dizzying accumulation of such traps, it appears that men lay them as part of a larger political culture in which seduction is one rule of the game.

Male artifice becomes visible not only in the way the final stanza echoes the phallic "artfully Leaden Pipes" of stanza 1, but also in the resonance with male pageantry as seen in the procession. Though valued differently, "tawdry Splendor" and the Vizier's steed's "Bridle rich with gems" are akin in their staging of male vanity. Montagu's last lines may not dwell directly on her Eastern experience, but the poem's construction of artifice suggests that dazzling military pomp is not exactly masculine. Her rhetoric makes it possible to see this "othered" artifice as amplifying her denigration of English masculinity. In effect, effeminate military pomp is not an oxymoron but the trace of how the East has infiltrated her discourse. "Constantinople" renders Eastern otherness as a rhetorical tool in what emerges, in the end, as the poem's overriding interest in the moral purification of England. The pastoral imperative has thus enabled Montagu to appropriate "nature" in a political intervention that turns woman's moral superiority into a model for the improvement of English politics; that she casts an imperial gaze in order to do so suggests that her commitment to female virtue supercedes her interest in Ottoman culture. It also suggests that the English pastoral mode is well equipped to render landscapes that evoke Western notions of femininity; ultimately, however, the form resists images of the East that are unencumbered by European notions of the ideal landscape.

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