

# DISCOURSE ON GENDER, SOCIETY AND SEXUALITY IN THE “TURKISH EMBASSY LETTERS”

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## ABSTRACT

*“Turkish Embassy Letters” by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu is an example of traveller’s writing so popular in the XVIII century Britain. Lady Mary is a wife of the Britain’s Ambassador Wortley who was sent to solve some problems between European countries and Turkey who was at war with half of Europe.*

*While the diplomat made attempts in succeeding his political mission, his wife wrote traveler’s reports, communicating with a lot of people met in the journey. These reports became so popular that were edited and published many times. The popularity of Lady Mary’s “Letters” is explained by specific approaches of the author to the problems of society, gender and sexuality both in Europe and Turkey, by emphasizing the differences and similarities, psychology and mode of life, cultural and historical background of the eastern and western people. As a woman of beauty and erudition, and representative of high class society, Lady Mary had access to the houses and women’s circles of the Turkish women, to their secrets and experience. She has seen the depths of the society unseen by the previous travelers. She appraised this society with its luxury, moral values and attitude to women providing their rights, education, property and freedom. Comparing attitudes to these issues in eastern and western societies, she chooses the eastern mode of life.*

**Keywords:** *traveler’s writings, woman’s narrative, persons of Distinction, phallocratic society, status of women, relativity of values*

## LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU’NUN “TÜRKİYE BÜYÜKELÇİLİĞİNDEN MEKTUPLAR” ESERİNDE GENDER, TOPLUM VE CİNSEL KİMLİK (SEKSÜALİTE) KONUSUNDA SÖYLEV/ DİSKUR

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### ÖZET

*Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’nun “Türkiye Büyükelçiliğinden Mektuplar”ı XVIII. yüzyıl Britanyasında büyük ün kazanmış gezi yazılarından örneklerdir. Lady Mary’nin eşi büyükelçi Wortley Montagu’nun siyasi misyonu Avrupa’nın yarısı ile savaş halinde olan Türkiye’nin Avrupa ülkeleriyle yaşadığı sorunları çözmekti.*

*Siyasi misyonun başarıyla sonuçlanması için yoğun çalışan büyükelçinin eşi de o zaman gezgin raporlarını yazar, gezi zamanı rastladığı bütün insanlarla ilişki kurardı. Bu mektuplar o kadar ün kazandı ki, defalarca basıldı.*

*Lady Mary’nin “Türkiye Büyükelçiliğinden Mektuplar”ının tanınması Avrupa’da ve Türkiye’de toplum, gender ve cinsel kimlik sorunlarını, onların farklılıkları ve benzerliklerinin vurgulanmasını, psikolojisi ve yaşam tarzı, batı ve doğu insanların medeni ve tarihi temeline özel yaklaşımları ile yorumlanır.*

*Lady Mary'nin güzelliği ve zekası, sosyetik sınıfa mensup olması onun yüksek sosyete kadınlarının evlerine ve toplumuna girebilmesini sağladı, onların sırlarına ve tecrübelerine anahtar rolü oynardı.*

*Hanım Montagu Türkiye toplumunu benimsemiş, ondan önceki seyyahların görmediklerini gözlemlemiştir. O, serveti, manevi değerleri ve kadınların hak, eğitim, mülkiyet ve özgürlüklerini sağlayan toplumu yüksek değerlendirmiştir. Doğu ve batı toplumunda bu konulara olan ilgiyi karşılaştıran yazar, doğu toplumunu üstün tutmuştur.*

**Anahtar kelimeler.** *Gezi yazıları, kadın tahkiyesi, yüksek sosyete insanları, fallokratik toplum, kadının statüsü, değerlerin göreliliği.*

The discourse on gender, society and sexuality in any literary work challenges the researcher to turn back to the historical background, cultural and national values embodied in this work. Study of the “Turkish Embassy Letters” by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu requires simultaneous revealing the personal characteristics of the author of these Letters and the important factors that stimulated creation of this work.

In that historical 1716, Turkey was at war with the Venetian Republic: Austria was committed by treaty to come to the aid of Venice. England needed to prevent Austria from becoming embroiled, as its support was required to offset Spanish power in the Mediterranean. Ambassador Wortley was given a task of proposing England as a mediator in these affairs. It required the Montagus to travel through Holland to Austria, and then set off across the plains of Hungary. They reached Buda, met by Turkish guard of 130 as escort to Belgrade, and got the willingness of the Turkish sultan Ahmed III to mediate the English. The Montagus reached Adrianople, where the Sultan ordered to transfer the court. Meanwhile Wortley negotiated with the Grand Vizier and obtained the terms of truce: the Turks would stop the fighting if the Temeshwar were restored to them. But these terms sent to Vienna, were considered absurd there; Wortley was directed to urge the Turks to sign a truce, not plead on Turkey's behalf. The diplomat failed; therefore, he was removed from his post for incompetence.

While the British diplomat was making hard attempts to succeed this historical mission, his wife Lady Mary Wortley Montagu enjoyed cultural values of the Ottoman Empire, that finally challenged her to create a set of a traveler's writings under a common title “Turkish Embassy Letters”. The popularity of this work laid both in the interest to the historical events described by the author, and the cultural bias the narrative preserved. The “Turkish Letters” have been repeatedly published in different introductions and editions<sup>1</sup>. Essays and literary works by Lady Mary, reflecting her attitude to social problems of the British society, such as, place of woman in the society and family, education of girls, mercenary marriages, and finally, reports of her travelling to the East, attracted great attention both of her contemporaries, and the researchers of her creativity.

Lady Mary, who “retained her romantic spirit under the lacquered veneer of the society lady and wit”, was charmed by the prospect of travel in the East [Letters, 2004, p.XX]. Such a long journey from the heart of Europe to the Ottoman court afforded her a possibility “to observe the court of Vienna and compare it with the English court, to appreciate the clean-

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<sup>1</sup> *The Genuine Copy of a Letter written from Constantinople by an English Lady...to a Venetian Nobleman.* London: J.Roberts and A.Dodd, 1719; *Letters of th Right Honourable Lady M[ar]y W[ortle]y M[ontag]e, written during her travels in Europe, Asia and Africa to persons of distinction* (with a preface by Mary Astell). London: T.Becket and P.A.de Hondt, 1763; *Original Letters from the Right Honourable Lady Mary Wortley Montagu to Sir James and Lady Frances Stewart...* ed. John Dunlop. Greenock: Robert Donaldson, 1818; *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, ed. Robert Halsband. 3 vols. Oxford: Clarenton Press, 1965-7

liness and orderliness of the Dutch towns, to see the lands, devastated by the war between Turkey and Austria, and to enjoy the views of Constantinople from a palace in Pera, on a hill overlooking the Golden Horn". Everything amused her, especially the voyage across the Aegean Sea, and their visits to the ruins of Troy and Carthage which she could connect with her early readings of Latin classics. From the port of Leghorn they proceeded to Paris overland, via the Alpine passes, and then to Galais and the English Channel [Letters, 2004].

"Turkish Embassy Letters" by Lady Mary Montagu possess that vivacity that stays as long fresh as the mosaics of the ancient monuments she saw while travelling [Desai, 2004]. It is possible to make out some significant details that served to the popularity of this work. Firstly, the narrative is based on the letters, and particularly on the letters written by a woman. Reading personal information from diaries and/ or letters is always associated with peeping someone's secrets and/ or invasion into privacy. Usually letters contain private thoughts, ideas, opinions, sensual reflections, gossip, especially if they belong to women. The title of the work contains double mystery, as these are letters written from Embassy or by Embassy representative from Turkey, an oriental country, which was at war with a half of Europe. So many secrets and attraction has been hidden only in the title!

Next point to be marked is that the narrator is a woman. This makes it evident that attention will be directed to details, she will be able to have an access to women's apartments, to discuss various topics so close to women, interesting to the readers who are eager to learn something new about "barbarous infidels" living in the exotic lands.

As a representative of high quality, Lady Mary was presented a chance to communicate with people of distinction, Emperor's court in European countries and Turkish court. Therefore, from the title page it is stated that the Letters are addressed to "Persons of Distinction, Men of Letters". The Letters reveal a great anxiety to stress that the society she moved in was "of the first quality", the houses she visited belonged to "people of quality", and even the nuns she met were "all of quality". She marked several times, that all the previous travelers could not to come in touch with such society and therefore estimate its superior civilization, whose customs, attributes of culture and art were so highly praised by her.

As a society person and a wit woman, she had erudition to be respected for, and a gift to compare the seen and heard. She tended to compare everything seen with all left behind in England. Her opinions concerned morals, fashion, architecture, and society in the whole. For example, while travelling in Europe, she was shocked by Viennese housing, where the apartments of the nobility were "divided but by a partition from that of a tailor or a shoemaker", and "the great stairs...[were] as common and dirty as the streets" [Vienna, 8.IX.1716]; she felt disgust by Austrian women's fashion – "monstrous, and contrary to all reason and commonsense" [Vienna, 14.IX.1716], and extraordinary Hanoverian morality since "ladies being much more respected in regard to the rank of their lovers, than that of their husbands"[Vienna, 20.IX.1716]. Travelling "in these poppish countries" and observing "profusion of pearls, diamonds and rubies bestowed on the adornment of rotten teeth (power), and dirty rags (relics)" made her deride (ridicule) religious superstition and human gullibility [Vienna, 14.IX.1716].

Full of admiration, her first experience of a non-European, non-Christian civilization was Turkey. Concerning other travelers' reports and publications, Lady Mary shows their inaccuracy in depicting Turkey, and declares that they are "removed from truth" and "full of absurdities". She is convinced that no one of previous travelers could give reliable account of women, as have never seen them; or could "talk wisely of the genius of men, into whose company they are never admitted, and describe mosques which they dare not peep into". The author assures that "the Turks are very proud and will converse with a stranger they are not assured is considerable in his own country" [Belgrade Village, 17 June 1717].

Lady Mary was amused by splendid views of Golden Horn from her palace in Pera, the gardens by the river in Adrianople, and the noble architecture of Constantinople. She found more to please in Santa Sophia than in St. Pauls, and also in Turkish dress and furnishings [Adrianople, 1.IV.1717]. But more than the monuments of history and attributes of culture, Lady Mary was attracted by the Turkish people and their way of life. She wrote in her letter that “the ruins of Justinian church were little more than a heap of stones” (Halsband, 1956, p.128), and she took “more pleasure on looking on Fatima than on the finest piece of sculpture” [Adrianople, 18.IV.1717].

Turkish women in the Letters deserved most heartfelt praise of Mary Montagu. Being repeatedly hosted in their houses, she found the lives of their women not confined in any unpleasant way; their behavior – relaxed and natural. Their apartments were beautifully furnished and surrounded by gardens and fountains, where they sat listening or playing music and seemed to lack nothing. “The houses of the great Turkish ladies are kept clean with as much nicety as those in Holland” [Pera, Constantinople, 10 March, 1718].

The status accorded to Turkish women impressed her most of all: ‘the very Divan pays respect to them, and the Grand Signor himself, when a pasha is executed, never violates the privileges of the harem’. The fact that they ‘are the queens of their own slaves, at whom the had no permission to look at’; or they possess their own money, in some cases, much more than their husbands’, and nevertheless, their husbands have to provide them with the richest garments and jewels, wholly contradicted the social status of the English women in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

As in the attitudes to many social problems in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain, the status of the English women was ambivalent in all spheres of life. The eighteenth century inherited an unfavorable amalgam of attitudes about women: the puritan reformers, and religious fundamentalists encouraged submissiveness in women, passivity, and dependence on men, limited education, a general containment and restriction of the “weaker vessel” [Wollstonecraft, 1992, p.7]. Depending on class differences, the aristocratic woman led a non-productive life, divorced from the working routine of the community. The first English feminist writer, educationalist Mary Wollstonecraft wrote of the indolent, luxurious life of the aristocratic women: “You cannot conceive the dissipated lives the women of quality lead. Five hours do many, I assure you, spend in dressing – without making preparations to bed, washing with Milk of Roses, and etc. And their conversation was only of matrimony and dress” [Kegan Paul, William Godwin, p.187]. Miriam Brody, the researcher of M. Wollstonecraft’s works, in her recent writing continued this quotation of Wollstonecraft’s in the same style: “What use could these ladies be?- she asks. They were indifferent to the intellectual and moral development of their own children; they cared little for administering to the needs of the suffering poor who existed in appalling conditions around them” [Brody Miriam, *Feminist Interpretations on M. Wollstonecraft*. Ed. Maria Falco, 1996].

In spite of the indolent life if the aristocracy, the wife of the farmer, small shopkeeper or tradesman, actively participated in the productive work of the society, though the women didn’t have an active share in their husbands’ work and seldom had capital enough [Wollstonecraft, p.29]. This concept of the woman’s role dramatically called as the “civil death” of women was described by the distinguished professor of Law at Oxford William Blackstone and written into the “Commentaries on the English Constitution” (1758). “By marriage, - interprets Blackstone, - the husband and wife are one person in law; that’s the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband, under whose wing, protection and cover she performs everything” [Commentaries on the Laws of England. New York, 1847, I, 279-280].

A married woman in Britain, to the contrary of social laws in Turkey, could legally hold no property in her own right, not for that matter claim any rights over her children. Families had got round these laws for many years; still the woman's dependence on the economic productivity of her husband was becoming more and more manifested in the 18<sup>th</sup> century [Commentaries on the Laws of England. New York, 1847, I, 280].

Living in the European country full of restrictions and prejudice, Lady Mary could not help, but passionately expressed her attitude to the Turkish women "as the only free people in the Empire" [Adrianople, 1.IV.1717]. Even the custom of wearing the veil, to her opinion, gave them greater freedom in the society allowing to walk out in the streets without fear of being molested or recognized, particularly, while carrying out secret assignments. She didn't fetishize the veil of the Turkish women as an indicator of Muslim tradition and/or attribute of women's inferiority in the East, as do modern Western feminists in order to excite a passion for reform. She had several reasons to make such conclusion. Firstly, she was living in the age when she was not able to establish colonial power over such a powerful state as the Ottoman Empire. Secondly, in Turkey she was free to give full reign to the romanticism and sensuality in which she reveled, and she didn't suffer from any threat to her self-confidence. She found herself similar to the ladies of *zenana* and they didn't seem alien to her. She realized that being evidently excluded from political and social life of the court, they wielded power and influence of the kind she herself had known. In the letter to Abbey Conti (February 1718), she contributes to better understanding of Islamic views concerning the attitude to women: "As women are not capable to manage affairs of state, nor to support the fatigues of war, God has not ordered them to govern or reform the world but he was entrusted them with an office which is not less honorable, even that of multiplying the human race". So the main mission of women – motherhood - she considered equal to governing the world, and was fully excited on learning that 'Mahommed requires of women not to live in such a manner as to become useless to the world, but to employ themselves as much as possible in making little *musulmans*'. The notion of motherhood is so important in the religion that any woman who dies unmarried is looked upon "to die in a state of reprobation" and as "a useless creature" [Constantinople, 29 May 1717]. Reflecting this difference in conceptions of being close to God: as a virgin (in Christianity) or a married woman (in Islam), the author hesitates in conclusion and leaves the determination of objectivity to theology.

Superiority of Lady Mary as a Western traveler and writer was that she could naturally and instinctively accept the relativity of cultural and moral values. And realizing them, she ended her stay in Constantinople by praising its pursuit of "present pleasure" above that of knowledge or worldly achievement. "I allow you to laugh at me, - she ends a letter, - for the sensual declaration in saying that I had rather be a rich effendi with all his ignorance, than Sir Isaac Newton with all his knowledge" [Constantinople, 19.V.1718]. That change of her attitude to life appeared not only as a result of the Eastern atmosphere of luxury, freedom and entertainments which she would adopt from this visit. "Pursuit of happiness" and enjoyment was traditional for the 18<sup>th</sup> century aristocratic morals and sexuality norms in Britain; this mode of behavior would follow her later on returning back to Britain, where she, leaving her children, losing interest to the failed husband, would travel to Italy and stay there continuously.

The pursuit of pleasure, leading to happiness, became seen in Enlightenment writers from Locke and Addison to Chesterfield and Bentham, as the behavior dictated by Nature to man. "Pleasure is now, and ought to be your business," – Chesterfield told his son<sup>2</sup>. These

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<sup>2</sup> *The Letters of the Earl of Chesterfield to His Son*, 2 vols., ed. C.Strachey. London, 1932,II, p.133; *Embassy to Constantinople: The Travels of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, introduced by Dervla Murphy, ed. And compiled

naturalistic and hedonistic assumptions – that Nature had made men follow pleasure, that sex was pleasurable, and that it was natural to follow one’s sexual urges – underpinned much Enlightenment thought about sexuality<sup>3</sup>. D.King-Hele stressed that “sexuality pervaded the Universe” and “the strength of sexual desires was always threatening to overstock the environment”<sup>4</sup>. In Enlightenment society of Britain where attitude to sexuality was varied, “courtly aristocracy, whose lives were artificial, dissipated and useless, contrasted themselves to the common people, whom they regarded as leading lives dominated by custom and superstition, little better than animals.”<sup>5</sup> At the dawn of the Enlightenment those two strata were leading very distinct sexual lives, both of which were unacceptable to Enlightenment opinion.

On the one hand, the sexual lives of the mass of the population were dramatically circumscribed. First, religion and 17-th century Puritan concepts particularly, associated sensuality with the Fall and with the sin<sup>6</sup>. Second, they were circumscribed by a family, domestic and village economy in which prudence sternly dictated the regulation of family size. Family disgrace, community shame and the Church courts punished those who stepped out of line.<sup>7</sup>

At the other end of the society there was the Restoration court. Sexual libertinism was common in royal circles.<sup>8</sup> But much Restoration eroticism was obscenity, as in their actions was a self-conscious desire to shock (and solid gentry and burgher opinion were indeed revolted by court morals).

Seen less as a sin or vice, and more as a part of the economy of Nature, sexuality figured largely in eighteenth century discussion as an object for natural science. Travelers’ reports and the emergence of anthropology familiarized the English with the polygamous societies of the South Seas. For many Englishmen this image of society without sexual possessiveness, guilt or jealousy was attractive: particularly, for men the prospect of legitimately enjoying several wives. Predictably, men would not allow the same freedom to women<sup>9</sup>.

Short review on discussions about the sexuality in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain confirms Lady Mary’s background and vision of this question. Her marking out the freedom of the Turkish women was not by chance: they lived in zenana, but in spite of Western conceptions of inferiority of eastern women they “were the freest people in the Empire”. Mary Montagu’s own revision of views on “pursuit of happiness” was expectable for a woman who felt never

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by Christopher Pick. London: Century, 1988; *Mary Wortley Montagu, Letters*, introduced by Clare Brant. London: Everyman, 1992; *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: Turkish Embassy Letters*, introduced by Anita Desai, ed. and annotated by Malcolm Jack. London: Virago, 1994 [reprnt.] 2004

<sup>3</sup> On the rise of hedonism in European Enlightenment see: F.E. & F.P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1979, ch.XXII.

<sup>4</sup> D.King-Hele, *Doctor of Revolution*, 1977, 242f

<sup>5</sup> *Sexuality in 18-th century Britain*, ed. Paul-Gabriel Bouge. Manchester University Press, Barnes & Noble Books, Totowa, New Jersey, USA, 1982, 2

<sup>6</sup> For recent discussion see: L. Stone, “*Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800*”, London, 1976, ch.xii; Roger Thompson, “*Unfit for Modest Ears*”, London, 1980, 214; F.Bottomley, “*Attitudes to the Body in Western Christendom*”, London, 1979

<sup>7</sup> Community control of individual sexual behavior has been stressed by Peter Laslett in *The World We have Lost*, London, 1965 and in the work edited by Laslett, Karla Oosterveen and Richard M.Smith, *Bastardy and Comparative History*, London, 1980

<sup>8</sup> I. Bloch, *A History of English Sexual Morals*, transl. by W.H.Fostern. London, 1958, ch.viii

<sup>9</sup> *Boswell in Holland 1763-1764*, ed. By F.Pottle. London, 1952, 279

happy in her real life. Her marriage with Wortley Montagu showed that her expectations of love were neglected, and the passion had existed only in her imagination.

Psychologists insist that lost causes and unfulfilled dreams in marriage usually are the reflections of the lost childhood. We argue that her unhappy girlhood and marriage did clearly affect her sensuality, led her to somewhat aggressive manner of behavior, which was expressed in her satirical essays and epigrams, independent and truthful way of thinking. Lady Mary wasn't an ordinary woman, but it seems that all her life she bore the scars of dramatic events of her childhood and unlucky marriage. Mary described the events in an autobiographical novel: "The death of a noble Mother, whose virtue and good sense might have supported and instructed her youth, which was left to a young Father who, tho' naturally an honest man, was abandoned to his pleasures, and (like most of his quality) did not think himself obliged to be very attentive to his child's education" [Paston, pp.4ff]. In fact, the Father handed his 3 daughters and a son to his mother. Mary spent 8 years of her life with the grandmother, who at her death appeared to leave a fortune of great sum of money to all her grandchildren, except Lady Mary. It was an omission which had no explanation, but the feeling of ill-will borne in Mary's heart clearly accompanied her all the life. Probably, this laid her disgust for many social pains in her life, one of them that of mercenary marriages: when one of her suitors tried to find out the size of her dowry, she replied: "People in my way are sold like slaves; and I cannot tell what price my master will put on me" [Halsband Robert. *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956, p.16].

Many years later in her essay "On the Mischief of Giving Fortunes with Women in Marriage" she advised the abolition of dowries since it led to men choosing wives for their dowries rather than their qualities, and doomed such marriages to disaster [Essay on the Mischief of Giving Fortunes with Women in Marriage, published anonymously in "Miscellanea". 2 vols. London: Edmund Curll, 1726]. She was completely against mercenary marriages that were arranging everywhere in Britain and were dealt with planning marriages due to pedigree. So in her next essay on "Feminism", published in a journal called "Common sense", she proposed Ladies to be "Virtues of Choice, and not Beauties by Accident" [24.1.1738. "and pay those Authors with Scorn and Contempt, who, with a Sneer of Affected Admiration would throw you below the Dignity of the Human species"[Letts, X].

That call to British women in the style of her contemporary Mary Wollstonecraft had to challenge to bring them out in self-respect and self-confidence, the qualities, lack of which the British women were living with. So, in Turkish Letters Lady Mary comparing alien values with her own ones, showed a rare ability to see herself through others' vision. Her visit to the Turkish bath, described in one of her letters, might be considered a symbolic one for revealing the constrained position of British woman in her country. Supposing she must be hot and uncomfortable in the bath, the Turkish women urged her to undress, and when she loosened her bodice, looked at her with *pity and horror*. "They believed, - concludes Lady Mary, - that I was *locked up in that machine*, and that it was *not in my power* to open it, which contrivance they attributed to *my husband*" [Adrianople, 1.IV.1717].

The words I have marked in this sentence, completely contradict the views of contemporary western politics, writers and physiologists, who constantly mark out the fettered position of the eastern women, their inferior status in the eastern culture and society. Even this sole expression of Mary Montagu resists the gendered (Orientalist) discourse of the western ideology, and destroys the race and gender stereotypes of it. An eastern woman denotes the western woman her chains, and the latter admits her own weakness and being locked up by the machine of religion, patriarchal ideology and society. Existing in a phallographic western society the woman didn't have any power to change anything, to unlock the chains, contrived

by the man (husband). We repeatedly witness Lady Mary's truthful description of the attitudes to women in the East and the West, which revealed the preconceived approach of western ideology. In the letter to Abbe Conti (February, 1718) she tries to assure him that all the notions about the East, and attitude to the eastern women are "certainly false". She refuses the stereotypes on Islamic views on women, and affirms that "Mohammed was too much a gentleman and loved the fair sex too well to use them so barbarously. On the contrary, he promises a very fine paradise to them, separately from that of their husbands".

But she was not alone in this faith. For comparison we appeal to the play of the American writer Suzanna Rowson, who exhibits a similar tension towards the attitude to women in the 18<sup>th</sup> century American society. Having troubles justly describe hard position of American women in the society she uses the Oriental setting for her play to break free of conventions at home. Women's sexuality, for example, was a taboo subject in the United States, mostly because of a clerical shift that contributed to the desexualized representation of women there [Malini, 65]. A major aspect of S.Rowson's drama is to reveal the roles of women in the western society:

*Women were born for universal sway,  
Men to adore, be silent, and obey.  
...To raise the fall'n – to pity and forgive,  
This is our noblest, pursuing nature's gentle plan,  
We hold in silken chains – the lordly tyrant man (p.73)*

It is true, that Suzanna Rowson was a representative of middle class women in the US, and the contents of this class relations is not alike the environment of high quality people. But it is evident that the tensions and ambivalences in the works of both authors reflect the conflicting discourses on conceptions of womanhood in the eighteenth century.

Lady Mary might be considered the only traveler and narrator of that period, who could courageously admitted prejudicial attitude to the oriental culture. Discussing customs and traditions in the Ottoman Empire, she remembers her talks and acquaintances with various people in this country. The author contributes to destroying the stereotypes saying: "these people are not so unpolished as we represent them. 'Tis true their magnificence if different taste from ours, and perhaps of a better. I am almost of opinion, - she writes, - they have a right notion of life" [Constantinople, 19 May 1718]. Thus, in her letters she shares her views on manners, level of social, cultural and political development, customs and traditions in Turkey. She assures Abbey Conti: "I can truly inform you, sir, that the Turks are not so ignorant as we fancy them to be in matters of politics or philosophy, or even of gallantry, ...the sciences flourish amongst them....The *effendis* (the learned) do very well deserve this name" [February 1718]. Enjoying the eastern music and poetry, she believes that she "is certainly infected by the poetical air she has passed through" [Tunis, 31 July 1718].

Along with her veracious stories on beauties of the Turkish culture, women and customs, in some cases she honestly confesses that can tell nothing. It is clear that a wife of an ambassador to any alien country is not able to reveal everything she sees in the visited country: there are reasons of political, diplomatic, and cultural character, and surely problems of their own safety. Therefore, some hesitation is felt in procuring new account on "the civil and spiritual government, of the viziers, the Berglerbeys, the officers of the seraglio" in the letter to her closest friend and addressee Abbey Conti. She marks that any traveler is free to present



his remarks in his own way, as “it is easy to procure lists of and may be depended on other stories...since I can tell you nothing new I will tell you nothing” [Pera, Constantinople, 19 May 1718].

“Turkish Embassy Letters” by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, a work of a woman who with her husband traveled on ambassadorial mission to the Ottoman Empire and passed along some European countries to Turkey in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. We supported the discourse on Orientalisms in this work, and the problems on gender, class relations and sexuality. In this order we made attempts to attract to the analysis works of Lady Mary, and her contemporaries – English feminist- writer and educator Mary Wollstonecraft, American novelist Suzanna Rowson, and works of the researchers of gender and social problems both in Old England and the USA. In the end of our discourse we conclude that :

1. The 18<sup>th</sup> century in Britain was characterized by puritan reforms leading to submissiveness and passivity in women, dependence on men, limited education and ambivalence of approaches in all spheres of life, especially in the attitudes to women of different classes. Age of Reason in Europe many researchers called the Age of Savagery, and marked the changes in morals, consciousness and behaviour.

2. The East-West relations were dense and ambivalent. On one hand, the Ottoman Empire with its magnificent military power and Europe in devastation; on the other hand, fear, public disgust and stereotypes concerning the Turks, and Turkey with its riches, pursuit of pleasure. Along with it, Europe is willing to have peace treaty with Turkey and to enlarge trade with the country.

3. Among a great number of travelers and letters Lady Mary, the sole writer and traveler in the 18<sup>th</sup> century who made a visit to the East, appraising its beauties, social life and culture, achievements in politics or philosophy, or even of gallantry, flourishing the sciences, music and poetry. As a woman of beauty, wit, and high distinction, she had permission to their homes and souls, access to secrets: she observed them from within, saw her herself through their views, and evaluated the relativity and universality of moral and cultural values.

4. As a representative of high class, she could observe primarily the life, customs, and morals of only people of distinction, excluding middle and lower people. She even didn't make any attempts to learn them too, eliminating them from social, political and public life of the country. Therefore, belonging to high quality class is basic and significant in the discourse on gender and sexuality in “Turkish Embassy Letters” by Lady Mary Montagu.

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